

“Living the Resurrection”, A Strange Land
Part 2
1 Peter 2:9-12
5.19.19



Reflection Questions for Personal Use or in a Group Context... (please consider the teaching notes prior to consideration of the reflection questions)

This teaching is a continuation of last week’s consideration. You are encouraged the first part of the teaching and consider the notes for discussion.

“Where are places/relationships in your life where you feel you are isolating from a culture God longs to love through you?”

“Where are places in your life where assimilation seems to be weakening your witness?”

“Where are you able to confidently say, ‘Imitate my life’?” (e.g. Model your marriage after mine. Adopt the same work-ethic I have. Maintain the same sexual practices. Set up your budget in a similar fashion. Utilize tech in a similar, healthy fashion, as myself. Treat your unbelieving friends the way I do.)

Teaching Notes...

“What the gospel needs most is saints who have taken up the way of the cross and in whose lives the gospel is visible, palpable, and true. It needs disciples who follow Jesus, with or without the support of their culture, and for whom the power of the gospel is demonstrated not through winning, but through obedience.”

Bryan Stone

We are living in a unique cultural-moment in history in which we are being asked to re-imagine what it means to establish a faithful presence of Jesus in the world. You should be feeling the tension.

I would concur with the evaluation of many church historians and theologians who would suggest that we are in a ‘post-Christian’ culture; not that the culture is void of people attempting to “live Christianly”, but that it is becoming increasingly more

commonplace for people to explain and function within their world with a **“God-void”** (not God as some ethereal, ambiguous concept/energy, but as the world’s true, Creator God, made known to us most fully in the person of Jesus, the Christ).

While I do believe that we are called to be a “prophetic people” (speaking on behalf of God), the prophets never felt their role exempted themselves nor God’s own people from the very calls for repentance being proposed to the people, at large. So, as followers of Jesus, we don’t get the luxury of launching accusations at a culture we refuse to lovingly engage with a different vision.

The parallel that we have offered (the concept not originating with me) is that if you are a sincere Christ-follower in the present culture, you resonate with the tension of being a people living in **‘exile’**.

Exile, was a geo-political reality (586 B.C., Babylon), but it is also an apt descriptor for your present spiritual journey. **“Babylon”**- has served as an archetype of a (way of speaking about) culture being informed and formed independent of the biblical narrative.

It’s the feelings of being ‘displaced’ or like a ‘stranger in a strange land’. Peter employs the metaphor of **‘exile’** to encourage a group of people who are learning to live “Christianly” in a culture where the dominate values run head-on into the values of the Kingdom--- the way and ways of Jesus.

Peter says, *“Given the nature of our present context, how do we remain actively present and involved, yet decidedly unwilling to adopt its values/ethics, as our own? How do we live as ‘aliens’ without alienating ourselves?”*

Our usefulness in our “calling” can only be realized in our difference: not a difference that distances us from the world, but one that certainly distinguishes us.

Neither “isolation” or “assimilation” seem to be faithful responses.

What I believe we see happening [I hear happening in conversation] is not an ‘abandonment of faith’, but a discontentment with faith--- as it has been portrayed and offered.

I’m convinced that the “faith” that is most often rejected by the culture is a faith that offers no contrasting beauty. I think people are disillusioned with a faith that offers no clear challenge to the present dysfunctionality and offers no recognizable and reproducible vision for something better... more glorious. “Nominal” (in name only).

What I find interesting about both Jesus' and John's appeal for "repentance" (in light of the Kingdom) is that far from being repulsive and polarizing, the message attracted people (Matthew 3:5). The people were ready for a change. They realized that the faith being offered them could not carry the weight of transformation.

Often, people find their way into the church (into relationships with other Christ-followers), whose choices have devastated them and caused them untold pain, and the best we can offer is a regimen of religious activity (God-hobbies) and behavioral modification, but does nothing to address the deep, heart brokenness and the tireless self-effort directed at experiencing "life".

We have attempted to offer them meaning without the Story. Social justice without personal transformation. Life without death (to self). Self-expression (personal re-invention) without repentance. Hope without conversion.

There are so many opportunities and promises before us, that we can no longer identify the "end of ourselves". It's kind of a 'gig spirituality'. There's 'goat yoga' or a 'spin class' or the culinary school.

You don't get the Kingdom without orthodoxy (right belief), orthopraxy (right practices), surrender of the will, and submission to the King. You can't have Christianity without Jesus.

The gospel will never be socially-acceptable.

The inherent offense of the gospel excuses you from that role.

"offensive"- lit. *impediment; something which trips you up; scandalous* (1 Corinthians 1:18; Romans 1:16; 1 Peter 2:8)

"Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ, will be persecuted..."

2 Timothy 3:12

"If they hated me, they will hate you..." John 15:18

"What sorrow awaits you who are praised by the crowds, for their ancestors also praised false prophets." Luke 6:26

The gospel will always have 'hard edges' to it. We can always discern new ways to offer the gospel to our culture, but not in ways which "photo-shops" the offense.

It always confronts our stubborn determination to set our own agenda and trajectory for life--- absent of God. It doesn't just say that we've made a few mistakes, here and there, but that, left to ourselves, our thought processes are so 'skewed', we will inevitably make determinations that are self-destructive and we will remain perpetually confused (Romans 1).

Authentic followers of Jesus will always seem a “remnant” community. Not the tattered scraps/leftovers, but a **“faithful minority presence”**, whose influence is disproportionate to its ‘polling numbers’ (Who believe that the kingdom works its way into the culture like yeast into dough; like mustard seeds, Matthew 13).

Fortunately, “isolation” or “assimilation” are not our only alternatives. We can adapt. We can commit to lovingly and respectfully embodying our values and ethics. We can listen restoratively. We can disagree tolerantly. We can model something different... something better. We can establish a “faithful presence”.

Our mission, then, is neither to critique the culture nor mimic it, but to transform it (help it to become what it was meant to be) as we work among and alongside those with conflicting values and views.

Sometimes that means we are able to celebrate and participate in a variety of cultural practices. We can adapt without adopting cultural values.

At other times, we will be called upon to respectfully and humbly demonstrate “risky non-compliance”.

BELONG- without an invitation to participate in a Christ-centered community, before I believe, our evangelism lacks incentive.

BELIEVE- without participation in a Christ-centered community which is modeling alternative values and practices, our gatherings lack credibility.

“Follow me (imitate me) as I follow (imitate) Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1)

While I realize the in-completeness which will inevitably characterize our lives (Philippians 3:12-13), at some point, we must be able to offer those desperate to believe with an identifiable and reproducible portrayal of the Jesus-Life.

BLESS- without being able to worship in Christ-centered community, we are unable to sustain hope and faith (lose heart and become disillusioned by the message of the Kingdom come and coming).