

Title: Home Improvement  
 Text: 1 Peter 2.1-10  
 Theme: How then shall we live in this present age?  
 Series: Exodus conclusion  
 Prop Stmt We live now as a reflection of the temple life to come

The sermon this morning has two introductions. That means that the runway is long, but the plane will get off the ground and the view will be worth the wait.

Have you read Ezekiel lately? Seriously, I know that it is one of the longer books of the OT and about 75% of it is warnings of God's judgment, but like the joy in the birth of a baby, the labor is more than worth it. I read Ezekiel this week with a renewed appreciation because of our study in Exodus. We learned that Exodus was not only the story of the rescue and redemption of the children of Israel from Egypt, but Exodus was about the covenant that God was making with his people in order to live with them. The covenant established the terms by which God could once again dwell in the midst of his people and put his glory on display through them and the Tabernacle was the place where God's glory was concentrated. But God's plan went far beyond a tabernacle and far beyond the children of Israel. What God did with Israel was a model of his plan for the people of this world. (Someone told me that I was a model preacher, which I took to be an encouragement until I looked up "model" in the dictionary which told me that a model was: "a cheap imitation of the real thing".) When I say that Israel was a model of his plan, I don't mean a cheap imitation, but simply a scaled down version of his ultimate plan. I have attempted to show you that God's plan was not simply to rescue Israel from bondage in Egypt, but to rescue people from every tribe, nation and language from bondage in sin. God's plan is not to simply occupy a tent or a temple, but to make the entire earth his sanctuary and fill it with his people and with his glory and live in a perfect harmonious joy forever and ever. So, the story of the Bible as it relates to these intersecting themes looks something like this:

People: Adam/Eve	Israel (people)	Church	Eternal people of God
Land: Eden	Israel (land)	World	Eternal temple of God

It is fascinating to see how all of the pieces fit together. The implications of this are enormous. But we tend to lose sight of the bigger picture both in our study of the Scriptures and in life itself. Exodus tells us about the establishment of the people of God. We learned about how stubborn, unbelieving, rebellious and fickle they are. We learned how powerful, majestic, awesome, holy, and Merciful God is even as we saw how God was preparing them to go into and live in their land. But, the end-game was never for Israel to be the only people of God. They were to be the model, that is, the example of what God wanted to do with people from all over the world. Their tabernacle/temple was to be an example of what God wanted to do with the earth. So, when you read Ezekiel's prophecy you will notice that he begins with and ends with a discussion about the Temple. Ezekiel was a prophet who lived during the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of the Jews to Babylon. The Tabernacle in Exodus was the dwelling place of God's glory. The

Temple in Jerusalem replaced the Tabernacle. So, when Jerusalem is destroyed and the Temple is burned, what happens to the plan of God? That is why Ezekiel is such an important book to understand. Toward the beginning of his prophecy, Ezekiel describes how the glory of God departs from the Temple. And then for the next 35 chapters or so, his book is full of warnings of God's judgment. And then we come to chapter 37. Keep in mind that Israel as a nation is no more. Judah as the southern kingdom is no more. But God's plan is not done. Chapter 37 is Ezekiel's vision of the Valley of Dry Bones. Ezekiel is the middle of the killing fields as it were. God tells him to preach to bones. And as he preaches the Word of God, life comes upon the dead and God raises them up to form a mighty army. And then, beginning in chapter 40-48, God gives Ezekiel a vision of the new Temple. The new Temple is so much greater than anything that he had ever seen built by Solomon. In fact the language is so magnificent that there has been a great deal of debate about whether the Temple that Ezekiel describes is a literal Temple or simply symbolic of something else.

Now, I don't want to lose you. So, hang in here with me because I believe that this explanation will be worth the point and the application.

When you read the last two chapters of the Bible, you cannot help but see the amazing similarity to Ezekiel's vision.

<u>Ezekiel</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Revelation</u>
43.7	God's tabernacling	21.3
40.1-2; 43.5	Commission formula	21.10
43.2	God's glory	21.11
48.31-34	12 city gates at 4 points of the compass	21.12-13
40.3-5	Measuring the temple-city	21.15
45.1-5	4-cornered shape of the city	21.16
43.2, 5	Illuminating glory of God	21.23
47.1-9	Living waters flowing from temple	22.1-2a
47.12	A tree with fruit and leaves for healing on either side of a river	22.2b

All that I am trying to do here is marshal more and more evidence to demonstrate to you that purpose for Israel's tabernacle/temple was to point to God's plan to one day fill his new creation with his presence. The tabernacle was a literal place that symbolized a

greater reality that was to come. The greater eternal reality is not a building but God himself who makes the new creation his Sanctuary! So, Ezekiel is writing to the children of Israel who were in exile and telling them, that they would be restored, but they need to think so much bigger than just their land and their temple. God's plan for his people goes way beyond that. They were thinking their land and God was thinking the world. They were thinking their sacrifices and God was thinking Christ. They were thinking their Temple and God was thinking the Eternal Kingdom. They were thinking their race and God was thinking the human race. Ezekiel's message is a major stretching of their vision. Their mission was to live in light of what God was doing. (end of 1<sup>st</sup> intro)

So, when you read the opening verses of 1 Peter, you read exilic language and yet a lot has happened between Ezekiel and 1 Peter. The exile that Peter speaks of (1.1) is different than the exile that Ezekiel was part of. Peter writes as a member of the New Covenant people of God. The New Covenant people of God are called the church. The church is a major step closer to God's final plan. We look back at what God has done to help us understand what he is going to do and we look back at what God wants his people to be to help us understand what we are to be as well. Since we have so much more revelation because we live after the King's 1<sup>st</sup> coming, we have a greater responsibility. The need for the Temple and the sacrificial system is gone by the time Peter writes because Christ has come. Christ fulfilled what the Temple sacrifices pointed to. He was God, in the flesh. Christ's mission was to provide the sacrifice so that God's plan to live with his people could be accomplished. So, the church (New Covenant people of God) live in view of what has already been accomplished through the life and death of Christ and we live in anticipation of what is going to happen when Christ returns. Peter is writing to answer the question of how we are supposed to live now in this present darkness. He writes to a Gentile audience and calls them exiles. That sounds like Ezekiel. But, they (we) are not exiled from the land of Israel, we are strangers on this earth because the entire planet is temporarily ruled by a hostile government. We suffer now. We face persecution now. We are strangers and aliens on this earth now. But now, is not forever. Live now, in view of what is to come. Well, what is to come? The eternal kingdom of our King/Savior Jesus Christ is coming. In his kingdom, there will be no deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander. In his kingdom, all of his people will be satisfied with him and by him. In his kingdom we will be perfectly dependent upon God because we will live in perfect relationship with him. And, in his kingdom, we will live as one race (v.9). (end of 2<sup>nd</sup> intro)

All of that was background. Now, I am going to preach the sermon.

The church is built on the temple that was, and is a preview of the eternal state that will be. Christ is the Chosen and Precious Cornerstone of it all. Just as God called a nation under the Old Covenant to represent him to the nations (that was not his end game), he has called the church to be a new race of people to represent him to all races. So, look with me at verse 9. Let's go through it carefully.

“But (in contrast with those who stumble over Christ because they were offended at his message and therefore reject him, [but] in contrast with those who disobey the word as

they were destined to do – yes, it really says that – v.8, which means some of you need to add some weights to your theological bench-press don't you? Ok, in contrast to those who reject and stumble, who disobey and who were destined for this, you are different! You (plural) are radically different! You are is the language of being. You are is the language of identity. You are different because you were chosen. You are a chosen race. So, in contrast to the rest of the people who find their identity in non-eternal things, you are part of an entirely different grouping because you were chosen by God to be part of this eternal people. Following that Peter goes on to further describe what the New Covenant people of God are. We are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession (that is, we are owned by and belong to God for the express purpose of putting him on display, that is making famous, the One who called, ordered, commanded us out of darkness in order to live in his marvelous light. In our remaining minutes I am going to camp out on that phrase, “chosen race.”

So, you exiles who are living on this earth as gypsies, without any permanent home – yet, you are a chosen race. Now, when we talk about race and issues of race, our sensitivities are put on edge. We know that this is a huge problem for this metro area but it is not unique to us. Peter is writing from a background of extreme racism. Peter is writing to a world of enormous cultural bias and major distinctions between slaves and owners. In his day it was politically correct to own slaves. It was politically correct as one race (Roman) to hate others, particularly Jews and it was politically correct as a Jew to hate Romans. To the believers in that setting he writes as a Jew to them (most of whom were Gentiles) that believers are a “chosen race.” This is a new race. This is not only a new people, but Peter is saying, now you really are a people. You are part of what God had intended all along.

Ok, if you peel back the layers of racism, what sin do you find at its base? The sin is pride. Racism is based on the godless notion that one race of people is inherently superior to another and therefore has the right to treat others as being worth less than others. To the church, to the exiled ethnicities who are in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, that is to the Jews and the Gentiles in all of those locations, you (plural) are a chosen race (singular). Out of many, one (e pluribus unum) our money reads. But the slogan on our money and the inscription on Ellis Island cannot change hearts and solve this problem that continues to plague this land.

Only the gospel can do that. You can only fix the race issue at the foot of the cross. And this new race is not like any other race that this world has ever seen. Not only are we a race that is not based on the color of our skin, we are a priesthood that has no temple, and a nation that has no land. In fact, before you came to faith in Christ, you were not a people, even though you thought you were a people. You thought you were German, or Greek or English or African, or Latino or Asian, but in reality, you were part of a surface, ethnic, national people group, that is not an eternal people. But, when you came to faith in Christ, NOW you have truly become part of the people group of God. Being born into the family of God is a new birth. This new birth is your new identity that defines you deeper than anything else and this new birth defines you forever. This means that your new nationality in Christ, is more significant than any other designation you may have

had. This means that your new people in Christ are the people with whom you are going to live forever and ever and you are going to love it like you can't believe! But, notice what this new race is based on. Members of the chosen race are those who have received mercy. Whoa – that changes things doesn't it?

Racism is based on the godless assumption that my skin color is inherently superior to another. But, in order to become part of the chosen race, you have to be the recipient of God's mercy. That means that you have to recognize that you do not bring anything superior to the table at all. All that you bring is your need of mercy. All that you bring is your sin in need of forgiveness. All that you bring is your guilt in need of his righteousness. All that you bring is your sickness in need of healing. All that you bring is your weakness in need of his strength, and your emptiness in need of his supply and your failures in need of his sufficiency. Once again, Peter writes with echoes of Exodus. What did the children of Israel do to merit the intervention of God in their lives that resulted in them being rescued from Pharaoh's tyranny? Nothing! Was Israel in some way superior? No! Were they more gifted, more talented, more intelligent or innately a cut above the rest? No! They were slaves! They were powerless, stubborn, rebellious, fickle, thankless and desperate people who had no hope. And God, said, "I'll choose you." Like them, we have been chosen and we cannot take credit for it. We are the recipients of mercy and brothers and sisters, there is plenty of mercy to go around for all who will humble themselves and trust in Christ alone.

This city and the surrounding communities recognize that racism continues to plague the area. There are some good faith efforts being made to address it. However, this is a heart issue and only the gospel can change the heart. But, since the gospel can change the heart, we must live it out. Due to the increasing diversity of our area we have an opportunity to be a contemporary model of what the future people of God are going to look like. Are you up to it? When Jesus cleansed the temple, he said that his Father's house was to be a house of prayer for all nations. As I have demonstrated to you, we are the temple now. We are the people who are gathering in all nations at the foot of the cross. We are the people who are gathering in all generations at the foot of the cross. We are the people who are gathering in all socio-economic groups at the foot of the cross. The church is to be a reflection of all the people who come to the cross. Do you believe that? Are you up to it? This is a necessary and logical outworking of the gospel in the life of the church.

I expect cultural bias, sinful arrogance and ignorant discrimination in the world. But not in my house! I expect cutting words, disapproving glances and cold shoulders in the world, but not in my house! I expect preferential treatment, walking on egg-shell conversations, and assumptions of racism, but not in my house. In this house, we were all beggars who have been given bread that we did not deserve. In this house, we were all hopeless lepers who have been healed by the gospel of the great Physician. In this house we were all slaves who've had our chains broken by the great Redeemer. In this house we were all sinners who have received mercy from the Savior and counted righteous because of his death for us. In this house, no one has a right to be here except by the mercy and grace of God who sent his Son for us and for people from every tribe

and nation and language. And in this house, we are going to enjoy that mercy. In this house we are going to celebrate that triumph.

Are you up to it? Are you up to living out your identity in Christ? Are you willing to live as you are called?

Here is specifically what I am asking you to do:

- 1) Pray that God will be pleased to bring to our family many different ethnicities this year.

Please make this a specific and regular matter of prayer. This is not something that we can orchestrate or manipulate.

- 2) Be intentional in your relationship building.

Intentionally eat with and spend time with people who are not from your same background. Brothers and sisters, I say this for your joy. I like Italian food. I like spaghetti, lasagna, mastacholi, pizza and rigatoni. But I also like Chinese food and Polish sausage and French fries, and German Chocolate cake. If the joy of your food palate can be enhanced by ethnic variety, how much more can the joy of God's people be enhanced by a gospel-based, kingdom-intentional taste of the variety of eternity? Brothers and sisters, Sunday morning at Cornerstone should look like the United Nations, except that here we actually stand for something and get things done. The church is not to be color blind, it is to be color happy.

We know that we have really understood the gospel when we are humbled to our very core, and when we have let go of all rights and demands that are not based on Scripture. The holy and happy God of your worship and joy is calling us to be a reflection now of what he is doing.