

ONE FROM THE HEART

Exile on Main Street

There's this love-hate relationship with cities in the Bible. God loves them, but humans seem to struggle.

Cities have always been a place of blessing and a source of corruption in the Bible.

Torn and Frayed

The Bible uses 'exile' language to talk about the people of God.

Let's look at the Old Testament...

God sends them into exile

- + The northern kingdom into captivity under the Assyrians
- + And the southern kingdom into exile with the Babylonians – for 70 years

Deuteronomy 4:27-31

Remember that the call for God's people hadn't changed: Genesis 12:1-3

At every opportunity, God is making the opportunity available to His people to be about His plan for them: bless the world! Show them what God is like!

Jeremiah 29:1-7 – Even at the darkest hour, when Jeremiah is prophesying into the exile...

All Down The Line

We get to the Gospels, and Jesus, where the exile actually ends.

BUT this exile language and emphasis stays as an undercurrent in the New Testament.

We have definitely 'come home' in Jesus: Ephesians 2:19

But in another, seemingly contradictory way, we also haven't made it home yet... In the Old Testament, they had come home to a place but not to God.

Since the New Testament, we have come home to God, but not yet to the place He has for us.

Hebrews 13:14

1 Peter 1:1-2

'Exiles' and 'sojourners' - evocative of pilgrims, of refugees, of resident aliens (people who aren't from the place they're living), of displaced people.

One perspective on translation of this word is that it is also used in biblical cultures for 'migrant workers' - the equivalent for us of something like FIFO workers for us.

I Just Want to See His Face

We are kingdom people.

1 Peter 2:9-12

This is the wrestle we sit in, and I think this is the part in us that we need to overcome: how we conduct ourselves in our 'exile', in our FIFO responsibilities, significantly impacts the city or community where God has put us.

Soul Survivor

There's a wrestle between absorption into the culture, and being totally separate from this culture.

We walk this fine line of being connected to but not formed by the culture where God has put us.

This *is* the wrestle of the now and the not yet.

Stop Breaking Down

We walk in the role of priests: to be the intermediary, connecting God to humanity and humanity to God.

Shine a Light

The kingdom has grown and advanced on the lives of generations who have lived in the now and the not yet.

Redemption always precedes the law (that is, expectation of behaviour).

You only have authority over what you love.

Response

This is why we gather practical things together to bless our community: it's both the act of service and radical generosity that are impacting to the people who we live alongside.

We can be those who speak the peace of the kingdom into our city: families, streets, neighbours.

We can be the people who meet needs: having eyes to see the need and then stepping in.

Not forgetting to close the Gospel gap: the good news of Jesus being spoken and received!

- + What are the crops that God is calling you to plant?
- + What are the relationships that God is calling you to cultivate?
- + Where do you need to adjust your relationship with the world? Are you a priest, or are you just another punter in the street?

I called this message 'Exile on Main Street' – after a Rolling Stones album – but it's the true picture of it – we are not where we are meant to be, we're not home, yet we're called to be present in the middle of the place that God has put us.

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways can we seek to transform the cities we live in so they reflect God's presence?
2. We live as "kingdom people" in a world that is not yet home. How does this tension shape your sense of identity and purpose in your daily life?
3. Where do you feel the tension between staying distinct as a Christian and engaging with culture? How can we navigate this in practical ways?

4. What are some specific ways you can seek the welfare of your local community or workplace while holding on to your Christian values?
5. Peter calls us a "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2:9), implying that we have a role as mediators between God and the world. How does this priestly role challenge or inspire you in your interactions with others?
6. In Jeremiah 29:5-7, God tells the exiles to settle and pray for Babylon's wellbeing. How might this apply to your context today, especially in areas where the surrounding culture opposes Christian values?
7. How can we practically love and serve our cities and communities, even when they feel like 'Babylon' to us?

Action Points:

- + Pray for Your City: Spend time this week praying specifically for our city and your local community, asking for God's blessing and for opportunities to contribute to its wellbeing. Consider praying with a group for specific needs in your local area.
- + Look for one person or family in your community who may need support (spiritually, emotionally, or practically). Find a way to serve or bless them this week, living out your role as a 'kingdom priest' where God has placed you.
- + Think about the relationships in your life that God might be calling you to cultivate intentionally—whether with neighbours, co-workers, or others in your community. This week, focus on deepening one or two of those relationships through meaningful conversations, acts of kindness, or shared meals.
- + As Jeremiah 29:7 encourages, take time this week to "speak peace" into your surroundings. Whether it's through prayer walks around your neighbourhood, writing a letter of encouragement to a local leader, or simply offering a positive word where there's negativity, actively bless your city with words and actions of peace.
- + Reflect on the resources you have—time, skills, finances—and how you can use them for the good of others. This week, practice radical generosity by offering something of yourself to someone in need, whether through contributing to the Christmas hampers, financial giving, offering your time, or using your talents to serve others.