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The Kingdom and Culture
Forerunner Church

Good morning, everyone. It's good to be with you. We're gonna be looking at Jeremiah 29 this morning. Just a minute of review from last week. We talked about the ecclesia, about how the meaning of the word 'church' in the New Testament is ecclesia. Jesus is the first One to use that term in the Bible. And that term relates to an assembly of people that are called out. And we know that as believers, as Christians, we're called out of the world, out of the ways of the world, out of the value system of the world. There's also a measure of authority that goes along with that term as well, because often the ecclesia was a term that was used for an assembly of people to get together to discuss and debate and to come to conclusions about what they ought to do next. The ecclesia was a gathering. It's a Greek term for gathering together to discuss various topics, issues, and argue and work through things. And that's what Jesus is actually contrasting when He talks about His church and the gates of hell. The gates of hell, when Jesus speaks of in Matthew 16, the gates of hell, that's the place where leaders would gather together, also in ancient cities to scheme or plan together. So, what Jesus is doing is He's contrasting. He's saying, "You are My ecclesia, you are My gathering called out of the world to come together and to further My kingdom and My name in the world, and then the schemes of the devil, his gathering, will not prevail against you."

And so, we see in Matthew 16, our identity as being called out of the world and also our authority that will prevail over the schemes or the plans of the evil one. We're in a time now where our nation is becoming more and more influenced by the schemes of the evil one. We're seeing it written into our legislation. We're seeing it written into cultural norms and societal norms. Essentially, the way that the worldly culture will do money, sex, and power, will more and more in an increasing way, stand against the value of Christ Himself. And that puts us, the church, the ecclesia, into a dilemma. As more and more the culture around us is influenced in an anti-God way or an anti-Christ way, how do we, as the church, how do we respond in authority that Christ has given us in light of these increasing pressures around us? And that's why today, we're going to look at Jeremiah 29.

Jeremiah 29. You can look there in your Bible. I'm gonna read from verse four to nine, and then we'll pray. "Thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel, to all of the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Build houses and live in them. Plant gardens. Eat their produce. Take wives. Become the fathers of sons and daughters. Take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands that they may bear sons and daughters and multiply there and not decrease. Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile and pray to the Lord on its behalf. For on its welfare, you will also have welfare. For thus says the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel. Do not let your prophets who are in your midst and your diviners deceive you, and do not listen to the dreams which they dream, for they prophesy falsely to you in My name. I have not sent them, declares the Lord."

Let's take a moment and pray. Father, we thank You for Your Word. And Father, we ask all the more that the understanding of the authority that You have given to us as Your people would

increase. I ask You, Lord, for confidence to arise in the heart of this people of this family, that You would build us up in the holy faith. That as pressures mount and surround us and pressures face us both individually and corporately, Lord, that Your people would be filled with confident love, overcomers in that day. That we would not shrink back. That though we are hard pressed on every side, we would not despair, we would not give in. Lord, that we would walk confident in You, confident in Your leadership, confident in Your power, confident, Lord, in Your justice and in Your righteousness, knowing, Lord, that Your righteousness will prevail. You will prevail in every area. We love You, Lord. In Your name, amen.

So, what's happening here in this passage is that Jeremiah, the prophet, is sending a letter to the exiles that have been taken into captivity in Babylon. The Babylonian empire came to Israel, and they destroyed the temple, and they carried off all of the temple riches and all the instruments of worship and those type things. And they carried many of the Hebrew people, the Israelite people, into exile, and made them captives in Babylon, where they would spend, we know from history and scripture, they would spend seventy years there. And what happened in the destruction of Jerusalem and the obliteration in many ways of the Jewish infrastructure that was there, really began to cut the legs out from the identity of the Jewish people, the Jewish society, and worship and government, and everything was centralized around the temple.

And so, for the temple to be destroyed, that was one of the centerpieces of the hinge pin of almost all of the Jewish life at that time. So, you can imagine the emotional, spiritual devastation that these people are now facing as they're marched 600 miles from Jerusalem and Israel all the way into Babylon, modern day Iraq.

And here they found themselves in captivity. And the prevailing culture of Babylon was very very different than the prevailing culture that was in Israel. The prevailing culture in Babylon was a multi-deistic, pagan, idol-worshipping, immoral culture, and now these Israelites found themselves as captives surrounded by this culture. And when the Lord is telling Jeremiah to write this, the Lord had an intent and a plan in place in regards to the people of Babylon. And what I mean by that is, even though the Israelites were sent there because they were under judgement from God, there was a bigger storyline, actually a positive storyline that was also being written at the same time. Babylon was the world power. And if Babylon had within its communities, within its neighborhoods, and within its cities, a powerful witness and a people that knew their God, that witness would be exported across the known world at the time.

And so, here they are in this pagan culture, this profane culture, and if you're like me, if I imagine myself in this story, which is very hard to do because I'm very not in this time of history, but if I had to imagine myself in this time of history, I would imagine that my response would be, undermine the leadership of the Babylonians at every turn. Try and escape from prison. Make them really, really regret making you a captive. I mean, just make their life miserable. Do everything you can. Dig holes under fences, burn things down, be stubborn and rebellious, and all these things. And when we read the message of what Jeremiah is writing to the people, we see something actually very different. And what we begin to see is we begin to see the Lord's call that even though the people were living as exiles in a pagan, anti-God culture, they were called to prosper and to thrive and to be a witness as they interacted in Babylonian society. The Lord was saying, "I want you to actually interact with the culture, be in the culture because that's

where you are, but I don't want you to absorb the cultural values that you're surrounded by. I don't want you to think the way that the Babylonians think, but I do want you to understand the way they think. I don't want you to do money and finances the way the Babylonians do, but I want you to understand the way they do money and finances. I don't want you to do sexuality and your sexual expression in the way this pagan culture does, but I want you to understand it so that when you open your mouth and you interact with the Babylonians, they don't see you, people in captivity, they see Me, the God of Israel."

And the Lord, in a similar way, has placed us, has placed you and I to various degrees inside of a culture and society that is very anti-God. And there are brothers and sisters all across the earth that are in extreme cases of this, where everything in the culture is working against the knowledge of God and the beauty of Jesus, and they find themselves in many of these similar situations. Notice that in verse seven, Jeremiah the prophet emphasizes that the people were sent to Babylon. They were sent there. And we know that there are circumstances relating to judgement that caused them to be sent there, but when we begin to look at these principles in the New Testament, in 1st Peter, that we will in just a minute, we begin to understand that God sends His people into the sphere that they're in on purpose. You and I and the person next to you and those tuning in via the webstream have been sent by God into the area in which they now find themselves.

I would actually argue that most people, most Christians, wherever they are is where God has sent them. He's a really good Leader. He knows what He's doing. It doesn't always make sense to us, and of course there are exceptions to this of oppression and injustice and that type of thing. But by enlarge wherever you are, as a believer, is where God has you. He has sent you there. And our role as Christians, as bearers of the image of God and the person of Christ is not to just live defensively, put up walls, close the blinds, and hide out in hope that Jesus comes back sometime soon. The Scripture refers to us as those who are sent by God. Jesus, in Matthew 10 says, "I have sent you out as sheep among wolves. I'm actually sending you on purpose, and where you are is where God has you."

We sing the song all the time, "Put me anywhere, put Your glory in me. I'll serve anywhere, just let me see Your beauty." You know that chorus that we sing. Put me anywhere. Well, the truth is, by enlarge, the Lord has put you exactly where you're supposed to be. It doesn't look the way, often, that you want it to look. It doesn't feel the way that you would like to, but our God is a sending God. He sent His son. He sent His apostles. He sends a witness and He's sent you and I to our various spheres of influence.

Jeremiah's message to the exiles, he tells them to build houses and plant gardens, and take wives, and grow their families, and engage in the agricultural business system of the day. He uses this term 'exiles'. It's the same term that Peter uses in the New Testament to describe Christians. He says, "You're exiles. You're neither of this world and you're not supposed to not engage with this world at all." In other words, when a person is in exile or a resident alien, a stranger in the land, which is the term that Peter uses, a resident alien or an exile, it means that they retain their cultural distinctives and values even though they live in a different culture that has distinctive values. You're on your way to another place. You're a sojourner. You're a pilgrim. You're on your way to heaven. You're on your way to the presence of the Lord, the New

Jerusalem, actually heaven on earth forever. That's who you are and where you're going, but in the meantime, you are an exile. You find yourself in a different culture than the culture of heaven, the kingdom of God.

And Peter begins to strengthen and encourage us to understand that, to have that mindset. Because the struggle of many Christians is, "Do I open my heart and receive the values of the system and everything that's going on around me? Do I open my heart and receive those? Or do I go over here somewhere, put up walls, and just live in my own little self-made monastery? No one's allowed in or out, and we just kinda stay here, and we just kinda hold on."

I remember this mindset gripping me as a young man. And I went through life not seeing myself as being sent of God, but rather just trying not to be influenced by all the negative things in the world. Many grow up with an experience and understanding of Christianity that Christianity is about no to everything. Don't do this, don't do that, don't go here, don't be friends with them, don't drink this, don't eat this, don't watch this. No, no, no, no, no, no, no. And there's a huge void that I see in regard to - what are we made for, then? Are we living a religion of omission? Where everything that we do is just about not doing certain things. I want to tell you, that message is burning young people out. That whole paradigm is burning people out. Now, I'm not saying we throw holiness out the window. I'm saying holiness has a purpose. Holiness has something that you're moving towards. You're not just stagnant. You're not just trying to avert your eyes from everything wicked, and just kind of hold on to the end of your life. You have been sent by God into your sphere, into your school, into your home, into your job, into the ministry. You've been sent there by God. And you're to do something. You have a purpose and there's a reason. And God has sent you here to this room today. You're here. You're a part of the family or you're joining the family, or whatever it is, but God has given you a purpose, and the body, the corporate body, we need you to walk in that purpose that God has in your life. Because you influence your sphere in a way that your friend can't, in a way that your spouse can't, in a way that your friendship group leader can't, in a way that your pastor can't, in a way your manager... you are the only one that can influence your sphere, your family etc, as you. No one else can do that for you. And God is saying, "I've sent you into that area. You're sent, and you have a mission." And we have to discover, "What is that mission, Lord?" And then get the resource. "I want to walk out that mission and then stay faithful in that mission," etc etc.

He tells them in verse five of Jeremiah, tells them to build houses. What a strange idea to do in captivity. You're living in a prison camp, in a foreign land. The prophet sends the letter. "Okay, guys. This is the next plan. This is what we're gonna do. Your homes back in Israel have been destroyed. The temple is gone. The people are scattered. Alright, here's the plan, go buy and build a house." "What are you talking about?" "Yeah, go buy real estate. I want you to plant yourself in the land," and part of the story was because they would be there for seventy years, God didn't want them to burn out and die out in the midst of their correction. Because there was a day coming where they would be released, and they were to go with strength back to build the temple again and rebuild the national infrastructure of Israel again. He's going, "I don't want you to burn out and die out."

But this begs the question for you and for me. In our sphere, are we going, "I'm going to build a house. I'm going to plant myself where I am." We live in such a transient generation of people

coming and going and here or there. And there's part of that that's good. I mean, we're apart, you know, Forerunner Church is a part of IHOPKC, and we're a mission's base so there's lots of coming and going. And there are many that come here, that the Lord has sent here but they don't do this. They don't go, "I'm going to build a house. I'm going to establish myself. I'm going to join my name to the name of this people. I'm gonna join families. I'm gonna be a person of strength and a family that's planted here. I'm gonna go all the way in." And some live on the fringes. They live on the cusp, and they're just kind of waiting, "Am I a part of am I not?" I'm not talking about literally buying real estate. You know, let's do that, sure, but I'm talking about a heart posture. Do you join yourself and see it as a home? Do you see it as a home?

You know, my wife and I, right after we got married, we moved to South Carolina, and we did a small house of prayer there for four years, and so the nearest large city, it's like right on the boarder of North Carolina is Charlotte. And I remember just in that first year. You know, I had grown up here praying for Kansas City. I remember praying for Kansas City all the time. You go to the prayer room now, you can't be there for very long without hearing someone pray for Kansas City. And I didn't realize how engrained that had become in me. And by praying for the city, it had become my home. And so, when we moved to Charlotte, suddenly we're praying for a different city, and I remember feeling disrupted about that. I was like, "What? We're praying for Charlotte?" It was like, I accidentally say Kansas City sometimes. "Yeah, Lord, bless them too." But when we moved there, in our minds, we were like, "This is where the Lord has sent us. This is home now. And we began to pray for Charlotte, North Carolina, like I did with the same passion, the same desire, and the same longevity that we had for Kansas City. And I remember in that short amount of time, Charlotte felt like home. We built a house there. We said, "There is no plan B. And if plan B is out there, God is gonna direct us to plan B, but plan A, right now, is we're responding to the Lord, build the house in Charlotte, give your life, build houses, have children, get married, da da da da. And that's what we did. Myself and the community that was there. We saw it as our own.

And I want to encourage you if you're in that place of feeling that on the fence of, "Am I here or not?" If the Lord has called you to be here, and He's made it clear. Build a house. Build a house. Set your life into order. Set the infrastructure of your life into place and begin to give yourself wholeheartedly to whatever it is that God has called you to do and the way that you're engage in this spiritual family. Do it. And go all the way. Because the Lord might call you somewhere else. But if He does, just like for my wife and I, in four years, He called us back here in a profound way, in a way that we could not ignore. And if the Lord calls you somewhere else in two years or three years or five years, great. Then go do that assignment with all your heart. But do it in the transition knowing that you gave your all. You built your house where the Lord had called you to build it.

Number two, he says to plant gardens, to plant gardens. At the time, the main economy in the earth is buying, selling, and trading in regard to agriculture. What he's saying is, he's going, "Engage in the economy. I actually want you to engage in the business transactions that are going on in Babylon. Plant gardens, take that produce, go sell it to the Babylonian family, buy what they have, and in the exchange, they see you, My ambassador, My exile, and when they see you, they should see Me." And in a similar way, we're go engage in the economy. And in the natural sense, to actually increase wealth and resources. There is not something more spiritually

powerful or profound about not being able to pay our bills. Not being able to pay our bills does not earn a solute from the throne like, "Wow, you're really doing it. You're really suffering for Me." The Lord has not called us to natural poverty. He's called us to spiritual poverty. It's very different. And so, when He's going, "You're in exile," how do you engage in the culture? And you know, for us, it's like, sometimes we think, "Well, everything's just gonna burn anyway. It's all gonna burn, and Jesus is gonna come back." It's like, yeah, that's true, but if you're established financially, if you're established in your business or in your whatever it is that you're doing, if you're established, you can lead with strength. You can impact the lives of people around you. You can send missionaries to the mission field. You can fund projects for the poor. You can bless the needy and the homeless. You can bless friends and family members. You're settled with strength. And He goes, "I don't want you to see yourself just as a slave, just kind of bearing the burden and hobbling through life." He goes, "Yes, you're in exile, but plant a vineyard, engage in the economy, raise money and use it for My means."

Those that are in the workplace and business owners, you're at the tip of the spear of this. You're at the point of the spear. Those that interact with you, that see you, they can come away going, "I think I just met Jesus. The way that the person did money and handled my finances and honored me and they could have da da da da da da, but they handled me in this way, da da da da da." I mean, what a powerful witness. This body, this church body, we need you in your area. We need you in your sphere. We need you in your job. We need you not just in jobs, but we need you where God has called you to be. There are some in ministry that God is calling to the workplace because you're to be that exile. You're to be that one that engages in the economy and shines the light of Christ and tells people about Jesus and loves them. And there are some that are vice versa that are in the workplace that need to move into ministry, but it's not one or the other. It's where God has called us to be. You're to be His ambassador. You're to be the one that shows others what Christ is like.

The next point he says is to take wives and become the fathers of sons and daughters. That means get married and have a whole bunch of babies. You know, as best you can. There is spiritual application to this, but the point is this, raise up sons and daughters. Bind together with people. Make deep friendships and relationships and go together after the purposes of God in your community and where God has put you, and maybe that's apart of here, Forerunner Church. Be a part. Make deep relationships. Fall in love with each other. Go on dates. Say yes when people ask you to go on a date. It's not a marriage vow. Don't overthink it. Okay.

Have kids. You know, my wife and I, before we had kids, actually, before we got married, I remember being in the car. We're driving down to the plaza to go on a date and she's like, "How many kids do you want to have?" I was like, "I don't know. Probably zero." And she was like, "What?" And I was like, "I mean, I think I'd make a bad parent. Do you know me?" And then I was like, "It's all gonna burn anyway, right? So, why even like have kids?" And she's like, "I want five." Guess how many we had? She's been right again, but... But the point is, the Lord has called us to be fruitful in the natural, in the spirit. He's called us to adopt. He's called us to raise up those, to disciple others into the Kingdom and wherever God has called you to be. You're to have and bear fruit. Bring it forth. Do your assignment to the fullest. You know, when we stand before the Lord at the end of our life, that we'd be just like these rung out rags going, "I gave every last drop before You. I don't want to die with all the strength and passion still inside of

me." I mean, if the Lord wills it, then yay, but my aim, my vision for my life is, I want to be completely just rung out. I want to pray every prayer that I was to pray. I want to sing every song that was to be sung. I want to write every book. I want to preach every message. I want to love every person as deeply as possible to stand before the Lord and go, "I poured it all out." That's the Mary of Bethany. I wasted it all on You. I did it all to the fullness of my capacity, to the fullness of my strength. I pulled others with me. I called forth the broken. And beloved, we're all called to this.

The next thing that He says is to seek the welfare, or some translations say the peace of the city. Seek the peace of the city that you're in. Now, that word 'peace' is the word shalom, which many of you have heard before, shalom. It means peace. But peace, when I say it or often hear it, I understand it to mean just emotional peace. You know, somebody's sick, one of the kids is sick, "Well, peace." You know, the finances are tough right now or whatever it is, "Okay, peace." So, it has to do with this emotional response to not be flustered. And that is true. We need the peace of Christ that Scripture tells us passes understanding in our circumstances, which is really powerful.

But the word 'shalom' is a more holistic peace, actually. The word 'shalom' means well-being, the Lord bringing well-being to all the different spheres in the earth. The shalom of God isn't just emotional. It's spiritual. It's financial. It has social ramifications and cultural ramifications. In other words, wherever the shalom of God comes, the Kingdom of God is present there.

So, where do we want the Kingdom of God? We want the kingdom of God in our relationships and our marriages, yes. We want the Kingdom of God to touch our finances. We want it to touch the secular. We want it to touch the military and the government and the educational system. We want it to touch, the peace of God everywhere. And so, Jeremiah's calling the people, "Seek the peace of everything that touches you or interacts with you. Don't rest until there's peace there."

See, what He's doing is, the Lord's calling us to be peace-makers, not peace-keepers. There's a difference between a peace-maker and a peace-keeper. A peace-maker actually carries a sword because they're actually going into a battle to make peace, not to just keep a treaty, not to just keep the peace, but to go make peace. Jesus talks about in Matthew 5, He talks about the peace makers. He goes, "The storm is raging around you. The battle is raging around you. The conflict is raging around you. There's conflict in your homes. There's conflict in your workplace. There's conflict, conflict, conflict." He goes, "Pick up your sword, the Word of God, go into the conflict, bring the shalom of God to that conflict." Is there conflict going on in the government? Is there conflict going on in society? Yes. The answer is yes. And the people of God that are exiles are not called to sit back with arms crossed, but they are sent ones. They are peace-makers. Go, make peace where there is confusion. Go, lift up your voice for injustice where the peace of God cannot rest upon a people. Go, make peace. Making peace is much different. It's a sent-one. It's a warrior.

You know, the Lord, He gave us in Ephesians 6, He goes, "I'm putting a sword in your hand, just so you know. I'm putting a sword in your hand." What are you supposed to do with that sword? You're supposed to go wage warfare and fight the good fight. You're supposed to employ that sword through prayer and love and proclamation and witness and speaking to others,

encouraging them. Make war against the storm. Make war against that which resists the Kingdom of God. Make war against it.

Paul tells us that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty in God. Do you feel mighty? Are you carrying mighty weapons? Mighty tools to wage warfare and bring things into subjection to the knowledge of God and the person of God. Go to your job going, "I'm here to pick a fight." Take that with a grain of salt. But you're not just here in a peaceful time. There is no peace until the Prince of Peace rules and reigns from Jerusalem. There is no peace. We're in the war. Arrows are flying. Demons are being sent. I mean, we're in the midst of the battle right now. Take up the sword. Go, make peace. Bring peace.

You know, Jesus, when He's on the boat and the storm is raging, the seas are tossing. What did He do? He got up, He rebukes the storm. He brings peace. He makes it. He brings shalom. He is the God of shalom, and we are the ambassadors, the children of shalom to bring shalom to every place that we find ourselves. Don't shrink back.

And also, this is just a side note, but something that's been on my heart. You know, in the clothing that is described in Ephesians 6, the armor of God. There's a breastplate, but there's not a backplate. I just keep hearing that, just throughout the last couple of weeks. The Lord's going, "I didn't give you a backplate." Which means that we have to go together. We have to get each other's back. My backplate is you and your backplate is the person next to you. We don't go to battle alone. No one goes to war alone. So, don't go alone. Don't go into the war alone. Go with someone and don't just go fight your own wars and get people to fight your wars. Join other wars and battles to bring peace. Go together. Get each other's back. Guard one another. Speak well of one another. Bring the peace of Christ to every sphere.

He says to pray to the Lord on its behalf. Verse seven, "Pray to the Lord on this city's behalf." He's telling these exiles, these captives, to pray for Babylon. He's not saying, "Pray and long for Jerusalem from where you've been taken." He says, "Pray for Babylon. You're in captivity, and you're enslaved right now. Pray for that city and seek its shalom." I mean, that is convicting to me. Because how many times am I looking at the problems of my city and my nation? I'm overwhelmed and I'm just like, "Lord, just do whatever You want. Just get it over with, whatever it is." The Lord goes, "No, no, no, no, no." He goes, "Come and seek me on behalf of your city." He goes, "If there's shalom in your city, you will have shalom." The Lord wants the people of God to prosper, to come forth, to bear fruit in the spirit and in the natural, to rise up, to not be crushed by the current age, but to be more than conquerors in this life.

Let's look at 1st Peter 2. 1st Peter 2. Peter begins to pick up on some of these things, and he begins to tell us how we ought to live and how we ought to engage in the culture. Because the big dilemma for many in the body is, do I even care about culture or is it just all gonna burn? So, should I just eject entirely and just do my own thing over here or should I go headlong into culture in the opposite way because I want to win the lost? And there's this tension that's wrestling back and forth. One group wants to build a fortress out in the wilderness somewhere. The other group wants to show up at everything and everywhere and everyone. And Peter gives us some really good insight here in this passage. I really want to encourage you if you're in this time of life where you're spending many of your hours throughout the week talking and engaging

with those that don't know Jesus. I mean, there is a fatigue and a weariness that comes with that, often. And these words are very pertinent for you. They're pertinent for all of us, but especially those that spend a lot of time in environments that are not very 'Christiany'.

Peter says this in verse 9, he says, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a people for God's own possession." That's how he describes you. Now, if we took those four elements, chosen, holy, priesthood, special treasure, what would you do? You'd go and build a temple with a lockbox somewhere and put yourself in it. That's how you would respond because I'm holy. I can't be around that which is unholy. I'm chosen. I can't be around that which is not chosen. I'm a priest. I don't do the civilian things of life. I can't do that. I'm a priest. And for many centuries and many different religions, those that feel that they're called at the deepest level, they go, "Okay, we're gonna go hide up on the temple somewhere on the mountain top. We're just gonna stay there and do our thing. And the Lord begins to, through Peter, begins to give us insight, look at this, in verse eleven. He says, "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers," meaning, as exiles in the hostile culture, he goes, "I'm writing to an audience." It's assumed you're in a hostile culture. He goes, "I'm writing you as strangers and aliens." He goes, "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul." Do you know what that means? That means, when you look out at the prevailing culture, don't adopt that mentality. Don't do money the way the world does money. Don't do sexuality the way that the world does sexuality. Don't do power the way that the world does power. He goes, "You're of Me. Do those things the way I do them. Let your heart overflow with joy and thanksgiving and praise. That though you're in the world, you don't become of the world." He says, "I want you to abstain from the fleshly lusts," in other words, the broken value system of Babylon. Don't do what they do and say what they say and think what they think.

Verse 12, he says, "Keep your behavior excellent among the gentiles." And gentiles is a term that's often used. It simply means those that do not know Christ. But I want to highlight the word 'among'. Look at that word. Among. You're called to be among. You are among. You are among them. Your neighborhoods, your workplace, your schools. You are among those that do not know Christ. And Peter's urging us, going, "You're going somewhere else. You're of another place. Don't adopt the culture. Be among those that do not know Him." Why? Because being among them and keeping your behavior excellent, not your words, not your intentions. Keeping your behavior excellent among them, what will happen? The thing, look at this in verse 12. This is so powerful. "The thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may, because of your deeds as they see them, glorify God." Let's just look at that one more time. "The thing that they slander you as evil." You know one of the main things the church gets slandered at from the world is that they're hypocrites. Is that we are hypocrites. We say one thing about the grace of God and the love of God and yet we relate to people not in the grace of God and not in the love of God.

See, he goes, "I want you, when you're among them, keep your behavior excellent. Not just your speech, but the way you conduct business, the way you do life, the way you exert your authority as overseers and managers and bosses and parents. Keep your behavior excellent. Why? Because when the unbeliever, when they see you, when they come into your house or they come into your board meeting or they come into your whatever, that they would see you and go, "Who are you? You're different. You're not like me. You don't say the things that I say. You're showing me

something different by your behavior, not just by your speech." And then when they begin to observe them. See that? The key to them glorifying God is the observation of what you do, not just hearing what you say. What you do speaks more volumes about who you are than what you say.

So, what is it you do? How do you carry yourself? How do you engage? How do you lead? How do you shepherd? How do you parent? How do you do finances? All of that is so that the unbeliever, when they come in contact with you, they go, "Woah, you're not from here. You're from Israel. You're one of those Israel guys, aren't you?" And you go, "Yeah." You know, Jesus said they will know, the world will know you're disciples by your love, by your love. A lot of people struggle with witnessing and evangelism. They say, "I'm afraid of doing the right thing or saying the right thing. And I'm not good at apologetics. And people could just run circles around me if they're, you know, whatever." Be Christ. Yes, preach the Gospel. Yes, give witness. I'm not trying to minimize that at all. I'm saying, the way that they will know you're Christ's disciple is by the way you love. The things that you do, your behavior among them.

We'll invite the worship team out. I want to invite you to stand. Just as we close, I'm gonna read this passage from John 17, just over this family, and then I want to invite those that would like to respond to the Lord to do it, and something just specific in that regard.

John 17:15-18. This is Jesus prior to the cross, praying this high priestly prayer in John 17. So powerful. And in verse 15, He says this. Listen to these words. He says, "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but that You would keep them from the evil one." What's implied there is Jesus is going, "If the whole Christian experience were just to get away and go away to heaven, then why wouldn't you just go there as soon as you became a believer? He goes, "My prayer isn't that You take them out of the world. My prayer is that You keep them while they're in the world from the evil one. That the evil one's value system would not become their value system," but that we would live with the value system of Christ.

And verse 16, He says, "They are not of the world." That means you and I, we, you, you are not of the world. Because Jesus was not of the world. If we said, "Well, is Jesus of the world?" We'd say no. But now say the same thing of yourself. Are you of the world? The answer is no. I'm not of the world. I'm of Him. His blood has transformed me. He's given a new Spirit inside of me. He's forgiven my sins. He's given me a new purpose. I have an eternal destiny in Him. I'm not of this world.

Verse 17, "Sanctify them in Your truth. Your Word is truth." And verse 18, listen to this. Jesus says, "As You, the Father, sent Me into the world, I have also sent them into the world." Them is you. That's who "them" is. Them is you. it's you and your children and your spouse or your grandmother. Whoever it is who calls on the name of the Lord. You have been sent into the world. You have a purpose and a mission to go into the world as holy, to go in as a priest, to go in as a special treasure, to go in as chosen of God so that the Gentiles see the excellencies of Christ. This isn't for the teachers or the pastors or just the leaders. Beloved, He goes, "I sent you into the world." And the world's trying to snuff you out, and it's trying to afflict you and oppress you and discourage you. You're getting hit in the back because you don't feel like there are comrades you can link arms with. And there is such an assignment of oppression against the

people of God in their assignments. The enemy wants nothing more than to keep you out of prayer and out of your assignment before God. But we have to remember, I am sent by God. I'm on a mission. You can wake up in the morning, and on your way to work, you know, drinking your coffee, driving to work and say aloud, "I am sent by God into my job." Moms wake up, "I am sent by God to disciple my children and raise them up." You're sent. You're sent of Him. It's not an accident. It's not just a victim of circumstance that we stumble into the Kingdom like, "Well, this is gonna be really hard until, you know, we go to be with the Lord." No. No, you're a priesthood. You're holy.

Let's pray. Father, I ask You for this community, Father, that You would give us a vision of our authority that we carry in You, the church, the sent ones. You're a sent one. You have a purpose and a truth burning inside of you.