

Praise in Our Plight

1 Peter: Hope Away from Home

1 Peter 1:1-12

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Homesick

Have you ever felt homesick? I'm sure everyone here has. We experience homesickness at first as children. Maybe the first time you spent the night at your grandparents' house. Or the first time you went away to summer camp. Or even when you went away to college. I remember when I went to seminary as a thirty-two-year-old adult. I was so homesick. I missed my family and my church family. So, Sundays were the worst. I think I cried every Sunday I was at seminary.

We can also experience spiritual homesickness. Just last week, Maggie and I went to our first rosary service. It was for our next-door neighbor's father who recently died. I felt so out of place with all those Hail Mary's and Our Fathers. It seemed so weird to me. And I'm sure we looked weird just sitting there, not kneeling or saying the words. We were a strange couple in what seemed a strange place. It made me long for home, for an evangelical memorial service filled with hope.

And our experience is nothing compared to what happens when a Roman Catholic or a Muslim experience when they convert to evangelical Christianity. These conversions can result in serious social ostracism. Many have literally been disowned by their family or community. Some of them have even been disinherited.

This morning we begin a new series in 1 Peter. Peter was writing to Christians who were living in a pagan world. And they were no longer participating in paganism. So, they were ostracized from the broader society. They weren't likely being physically persecuted, but they were being socially persecuted. They were slandered (2:12; 3:16). They were reviled (2:23; 3:9). Insulted (3:16). And reproached (4:14).

How do we live as Christians in a society that is not our home? How can we have hope when we're feeling homesick for heaven? These are the questions we're going to cover over the next two months. And they are important for us. Even though we live in relative ease as Christians in American society. If we're trying to bear witness at all for Christ, we will face trials of various kinds; we will be opposed from time to time. And I believe with the way our culture is going, we're going to feel increasingly out of place, even homesick, like a stranger in a strange land.

1 Peter 1:1-12¹

¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ²according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable,

¹ Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® unless otherwise noted.

undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

¹⁰Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, ¹¹inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. ¹²It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

This is the Word of the Lord.

This passage is divided into two main sections. The first section is found in the greeting (vv. 1-2). The second is the introduction to the whole book (vv. 3-12). The greeting introduces the problem Peter's readers were facing. The introduction gives them a surprising solution to their problem. All of it points to a new way of seeing their situation so that they can faithfully live with hope away from home.

THE GREETING (1-2)

Let's begin with the greeting in verses 1-2. This is what we learn about our problem. Our plight and our privilege are all a part of God's plan.

Peter's writing to Christians dispersed throughout Asia Minor, or modern-day Turkey. And he calls his readers "elect exiles." This is not a throw-away phrase. It's critical to our understanding of the whole book. One pastor says these words are like the floor joists of the whole letter. They undergird and support all he has to say.² I want to unpack both words so we can get a sense of the situation of this letter.

Exiles

Let's begin with the word exile. Why does Peter use this word? Peter's writing to a largely Gentile audience, but he addresses them with words originally applied to ancient Israel. He's linking these Gentile Christians with the people of God throughout history. Israel spent a lot of time away from home. Hundreds of years in Egypt. And later in Babylon (cf. 5:13). And now, these first-century Christians are also experiencing life away from home. And it's creating tension. They don't fit in and they're being mistreated.

It's like being an immigrant or a resident alien. Immigrants are different from the society they live in. They often have a different ethnicity than the dominant culture. They have a different way of talking and different ways of doing life. And so, if you're an immigrant, people in the dominant culture may look at you with suspicion. They may think you're weird. They may not trust you. And they may even treat you unfairly or speak poorly of you.

² David R. Helm, *1 & 2 Peter and Jude: Sharing Christ's Sufferings*. Preaching the Word

But this is all metaphor. Peter's not literally talking about living in a foreign country. He's not talking about being away from the land of Israel. No, he's talking about being away from our home in heaven.

When we are born it sets a certain course for our lives. Our birth establishes our ethnic identity, our national citizenship, our class, and much of our potential in life. But when we are born again (v. 3) or given new birth by the Spirit, we receive a new identity, a new citizenship, and a new way of relating to society.³ We become children of God, citizens of heaven.

And our new citizenship makes us like ex-pats living in a foreign country, even though we haven't moved! People look at us differently. They may even talk bad about us. They may persecute us because we belong to Jesus. Our exile is our plight.

Elect

But Peter doesn't simply call these Christians exiles. He calls them elect exiles. If their exile is their plight, their election is their privilege. And this privilege is meant to give perspective in our plight. The doctrine of election has stirred up so much controversy over the centuries. But it's not meant to. Many people are confused by election. They want to know why God elects some and not others. They want to know who are the elect. But these questions miss the point.

The point of election here is to encourage those who are living in exile. It's so we can know that our salvation is grounded in the sovereign grace and powerful work of God. God's plan will not fail! Verse 2 tells us the elect are those saved by the triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Our salvation isn't some accident. It's according to the Father's foreknowledge. Our salvation isn't a work of man. We have been sanctified, or set apart, from the world by the Holy Spirit. And by the blood of Jesus Christ, we become a part of the new covenant people of God.

In the Old Testament, Moses initiated the covenant by sprinkling blood on the people. Then Israel promised they would obey God. And if they obeyed God they would have security in the Promised Land. But as we know, they didn't obey God. And so they were banished from the Land. But in the new covenant, Jesus gives his own blood to pay for our sins. And we're given the Holy Spirit so we can obey God.

And obedience is the purpose of our salvation. We're living in a world that opposes our faith. And there's much temptation to shrink back from faithfully following Jesus. But if the triune God has saved us then we have a secure inheritance. And this secure salvation should fuel our service to Christ. It should fuel our witness in this world.

The doctrine of election is meant to encourage those living in exile. The suffering we experience in this life doesn't happen apart from God's sovereign and eternal will. He's with us in it all. He ordained for it all to happen. And he will bring us safely home. The elect are citizens of heaven. We don't belong to this world, but we do belong to God. Yes, we live in the plight of our exile. But it's a privileged plight. We are elect exiles.

So how should we respond to this truth? The next section gives a surprising solution to our plight.

³ Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*. Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament

THE INTRODUCTION (3-12)

Peter's made it clear that the purpose of our election is obedience to Christ. We're to live as faithful members of the new covenant in our exile. But Peter doesn't dive into a section on obedience. That's next week. No, the initial solution to our plight isn't work, it's worship. It isn't obedience, it's praise. Look at verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." In other words God's worthy of praise.

Worship and Witness

We're called to faithful witness in this world. And as we've seen in our series on evangelism, the biggest obstacle to our witness in this world is fear of man. We're afraid of what people will think of us or what they'll do to us. How do we get over these obstacles, so we can be faithful in our witness? The first step isn't a course on evangelism or apologetics. No, instead, the first step is a course on worship. If we want to get over the fear of man, we have to learn to fear God. In his book on evangelism, Will Metzger says, "Powerful worship will energize your witness."

Imagine for a moment a great space shuttle docked at Cape Canaveral. On the sides of that shuttle are two massive fuel tanks. A lot of fuel is needed to break free from the downward pull of gravity. In the same way, a lot of fuel is needed to break free from the gravitational pull of our culture away from Christ. What will enable our witness in this world? "It's the white-hot, flaming fuel of worship that will blast you out of your lethargy [to witness]."

We need to see God for who he is, and see who we are as a result of what he's done for us, and then to worship him. If we even want to begin to learn how to live as a witness for Christ, as elect exiles, we have to learn how to worship.

So, this passage begins with praise to God for our salvation. In the verses that follow, we see that this salvation is from the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It gives us three reasons and three ways we should praise triune God. And the three reasons are grounded in our past, present, and future salvation.

Hope in our Future Inheritance

Let's begin with our future salvation. Praise the Father with hope in our future inheritance. Peter says we are to praise the Father because he's caused us to be born again. And this rebirth has three future results. First, we're born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus (v. 3). Second, to an inheritance that's imperishable, undefiled, and unfading (v. 4). And third, for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (v. 5).⁴

Even though we're living our lives away from home, we have hope for our eternal home. This hope is not some empty dream. It's not thinking positive. It's not wishful thinking. The hope we have is grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If we're born again, if we belong to Jesus, then we will experience the resurrection in the same way that Jesus did. Suffering now. Resurrection later.

⁴ Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*. Hermeneia commentary series. Achtemeier sees "for a salvation" as a third result of our rebirth. It's the third *eis* clause in this section.

So much of what the world places their hope in is fleeting. People, power, possessions, pleasure. All of these things will one day pass away. But we have an inheritance that's imperishable. It won't pass away. It's undefiled. It won't be polluted. It's unfading. It will never lose its glory. And God himself is keeping this inheritance in heaven secure for us.

One day, we will be saved from all the garbage of our exilic existence. Just think of it! A world with no school shootings. No divorce. No bankruptcies. No ISIS. No impeachment trials. No arthritis or cancer. All kept in heaven for you!

So, we can have hope away from home, knowing our future home in heaven is secure. Do you see how important this perspective is for us if we want to live as faithful witnesses in this world.

In *The Return of the King*, Pippin comes into the service of Lord Denethor, the steward of Gondor. And Lord Denethor asks Pippin what he can do for him. Specifically, can he sing? Pippin responds, that yes he can sing, but the only songs he knows are the songs of the Shire. And he didn't think the songs of the Shire seemed very appropriate in the shadow of Mordor. Of course, our Denethor disagrees. He says, "And why should such songs be unfit for my halls, or for such hours as these? We who have lived long under the Shadow may surely listen to echoes from a land untroubled by it? Then we may feel that our vigil was not fruitless..."⁵

The best thing for us, who live under the Shadow of the world, is to listen to the echoes of a world untroubled by it. We need to sing the song of praise to our God. A song about our hope in our future home, 'untroubled' and kept for us.

Joy in our Present Trials

Secondly, we should praise the Son with joy in our present trials. Verses 6-9 are bracketed with rejoicing. But it's not a Pollyanna kind of rejoicing that's blind to the realities of our life as Christians. John Calvin says that Christians are not like logs of wood with no human feelings. We're affected with real sorrow, fear, and by real danger. But because of our faith, our sorrow is mitigated by joy!⁶

So why can Christians have joy in the midst of suffering for Jesus? There are at least two reasons. For one, trials are temporary. Verse 6 says they are necessary, but only for a little while. Eventually, as verse 7 says, they will "be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (v. 7). In other words, short term pain, long term gain. Just like Jesus. It's hard to see this long-term perspective. But in verse 8, Peter says that's the nature of faith. It's believing in things we can't see with our eyes. But we see with faith. That's why we can rejoice.

The second reason we can rejoice is because our trials test or prove the genuineness of our faith. Remember, Peter's not talking about general suffering in this passage. He's talking about suffering for Jesus. Being ostracized or alienated, being slandered or hated, because you're a Christian. But here's the strange encouragement: if you're actually suffering because you're a Christian, and you hold up under that suffering, it proves you're a Christian! Even gold is tested by fire. And our faith is more precious than gold. So, it only makes sense that our faith would be tested by affliction. And when the heat's turned up, if our faith is genuine, it will survive.

⁵ J.R.R. Tolkien, *Return of the King*, p. 80

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*

Remember the hymn we sang earlier? “When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my grace all sufficient shall be thy supply. The flames shall not hurt thee; I only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.”

It’s important to remember that our trials are not God’s way of doing us harm. They’re meant for our good. The word for trial comes from the word tribulum. It’s where we get our word tribulation. A tribulum was an ancient implement used to thresh grain. It was a cart pulled by oxen that had rollers on the bottom of it. Those rollers had stone and iron in them that ground up the sheaves to separate the husks from the grain.

My friend Dave Helm says it this way. “Do you ever feel as if you are under the inescapable weight and force of the tribulum? If so, Peter wants to remind you that no thresher ever operated his tribulum for the purpose of tearing up his sheaves. The thresher’s intentions were far more elevated than that. The farmer only wanted to cull out the precious grain. And as it is with the ancient farmer, so it is with God.”⁷

God’s tribulum and our trials are for our good. Remember what James says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (1:2-4).

Confidence in Past Predictions

Let’s look finally at the third reason to praise God. Praise the Spirit with confidence in past predictions. Throughout chapter 1, Peter’s been talking about our salvation. A salvation that gives hope for the future and joy in our present trials. Now in verses 10-12, he turns to talk about how this salvation was predicted in the past.

The prophets of old prophesied about Christ’s sufferings and his subsequent glories. They spoke of a suffering Messiah who would be vindicated. But they didn’t understand what all of this meant or when it would happen. So, they studied and prayed, asking God about when all of these things would happen (cf. Dan. 12:6-13; Hab. 2:1-4). But the only thing that was revealed to them was that their words were meant for a future generation. They were meant for the people Peter was preaching to. And they were meant for us! They were meant for all who hear the gospel and believe in Jesus.⁸

As Calvin says, the prophets were setting the table. We’re eating the food laid on it!

Why does Peter include these verses in our passage this morning? I think it’s because he wants us to have confidence that our situation is not a fluke. The things that happened to Christ were predicted by the prophets who were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Christ’s death and resurrection were according to God’s plan. Their salvation was according to plan. It was predicted in the past and secure in the future. So, they could have confidence in the present time.

Prophets were searching out the meaning of all of this. Angels long to look into these things. But those of us who have heard the gospel preached to us have seen the fulfillment of it all. We have a privileged position within salvation history.

⁷ Helm

⁸ Jobes

Even though now is a time of grief and trial, it is also a time of great privilege. We should have confidence that the God who fulfilled the predictions of the prophets in Christ's coming, will also fulfill the promise of our future salvation.

Conclusion

Friends, this world is not our home. And so, we shouldn't be surprised when we face trials of various kinds. But we do have a home. And that inheritance is ready for us, if we believe in Jesus and trust in his promises.