

**The More Things Change, The More Jesus Stays the Same**  
**Identity: Who You Are in Christ**  
**1 Peter 1:1-12**

**December 29, 2019 – does it feel more like the end of a decade, or simply the space between Christmas and New Year? Your answer may depend more on whether you are a big picture person or a detail person, and it may not necessarily be aligned as you would expect.**

**So how was it with the fam? I bet you think your family is the only one with the weird dynamics that you encountered, or did not encounter, over this past week. Aren't you a silly one to think your family is the only one that is a little strange, if you know what I mean? If you have several unbelievers in your family, then you were almost certainly considered the ones who are strange.**

**While we are on the “personal-question” trail, we may as well go next level. How are you viewed in your family? Are you King Tut and Queen Bee, or are you Oliver Twist and Cinderella when we first meet them? Have you discovered, yet, that what others think of you can stay with you most all your life? As a brief aside, parents, be careful what you say about your children – you are forming their mental images of who they are even as you call them lazy or brilliant. Have high expectations and extend grace. Better yet, hold a golden crown over your child's head and encourage her to grow into it. That is pretty much what the Lord does for us.**

**Over the next four weeks on Sunday mornings, we will transition from 2019 to 2020 with a mini-series titled *The More Things Change, The More Jesus Stays the Same*. Here is the schedule:**

- 1. Identity: Who You Are in Christ – 1 Peter 1:1-12**
- 2. Responsibility: Be Holy as He is Holy – 1 Peter 1:13-25**

**3. Formation: Thinking, Speaking, and Living Biblically –  
Matthew 7:13-29**

**4. Mission: Faithfulness in Life and Witness – 1 Peter 3:8-22**

**As you can see, we will spend a lot of time in 1 Peter, which is one of my favorite books of the Bible. Wait – I say that about several books of the Bible! I suppose that is better than saying, “I don’t really like that book of the Bible all that much.” The key to enjoying Scripture is often slowing down – and, obeying what you learn, of course. The good news this week – and always – is that we do not have to live this life in our own strength, but in Jesus’ strength and the power of the Holy Spirit according to the Father’s plan.**

**Identity with Christ – that is our focus today, and our text is 1 Peter 1:1-12. We will read all 12 verses. I have a challenge for those of you between the third and fifth grades. Grades 3 through 5, are you ready? We have just finished the Season of Advent and we had a different theme each of the last four Sundays – hope, peace, joy, and love. As we read our text today – all 12 verses – I want you to count how many times you see those four words – hope, peace, joy, and love. I also want you to count rejoice since that is talking about joy. I will read the text, then after prayer, I will ask you how many times those four words are in our text. I will be reading from the ESV. It is our custom to stand as God’s Word is being read, so would you please rise for the reading of Scripture?**

**1 Peter 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,**

**To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according 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.**

**3 Blessed 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, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so 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. 8 Though 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, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.**

**10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. 12 It 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.**

**3rd through 5th graders, how many times did you see hope, peace, joy, and love? I counted six. Thank you for paying attention!  
Four thoughts from today's text, beginning with:**

**1. The breathtaking reality of our identity in Christ**

**The Apostle Peter may be my favorite NT character other than Jesus. Even though many consider Peter to be impulsive and brash**

**and unstable, for which there is some evidence, he is also humble and passionate, in the right ways, and full of joy in Christ. I think Peter is a great teacher, also, which is evident in the very first verses of the letter he wrote to several churches in what is modern-day Turkey.**

**You can sense Peter’s passion for Jesus and his deep desire to instruct his brothers and sisters in Christ. When Peter addresses his readers as an Apostle, he is doing so as one who is, as Thomas Schreiner says, an “authoritative messenger and interpreter of the gospel.” I will be teaching a class on the Gospels this Spring at South Wake Bible Institute and one of the first things we will study is how we cannot fully understand the four Gospels without the Apostles interpreting Jesus’ teachings and explaining the meaning of his Incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension in the Epistles. At the end of chapter 2 in 1 Peter, the Apostle does a wonderful job explaining the meaning of the cross. In these first two verses of chapter 1, he explains who we are as those who have been brought into covenant with God through Jesus’ blood.**

**Peter was writing to mostly Gentile congregations. He delivered an amazing word: all who follow Jesus – both Jews and Gentiles – are elect exiles of the Dispersion according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood. Even though it took three to four centuries for the Church to properly articulate a doctrine of the Trinity as a response to heresy about Jesus, the truth of the Trinity is all over Scripture, which Peter beautifully emphasizes in his letter. Do you see the way that each member of the Trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – is intimately involved in our salvation? This is one theologically rich introduction to a letter!**

**If the Trinity is a doctrine that is only understood in view of NT teaching, salvation in Christ can only be fully understood in the**

**context of Old Testament teaching. When Peter writes that we are elect exiles of the Dispersion, you can only understand what he means if you know about God’s judgment on the Jewish nation for their sins that resulted in them being sent away to many nations. It was in those nations that God’s ways became increasingly apparent to Gentiles and prepared the way for the spread of the gospel. Now, Peter is saying to Christ followers, your home is not in this world, so do not expect to feel comfortable here. While you here, though, you will make the ways of God known in all the places you presently live and wherever you go. It is a privilege to be God’s ambassadors on earth! A willingness to suffer for Christ only increases our witness.**

**Another truth Peter roots in the OT is listed at the end of verse 2 – our relationship with God is based on the sprinkling of Jesus’ blood. Peter expects his Gentile readers to remember Exodus 24 when Moses read the Law to the people and they responded by saying, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” Moses then took the blood of sacrificed animals and threw it on them, saying, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” In other words, if you do not live up to this covenant, your blood will be required as payment. None of us can meet the perfect standard of the law, and so in accordance with Leviticus 16, blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat, first in the Tabernacle and then in the Temple, to make atonement for the sins of the people. Now, we are made whole by the blood of Christ, and the need for further animal sacrifices has been eliminated. What a blessed position we hold!**

**Since we are not Jews, how did we receive this privilege? By being elected into God’s family. Verse 2 says that we were elected according to God’s foreknowledge. Does that mean God knew what decision we would make when confronted with the gospel and so he chose us to be in his family? If you will look carefully here and, in Romans 8 and Romans 11 where God’s foreknowledge is associated**

**with his people, there is no mention of our decision. This is an active foreknowledge that is all about God’s covenant with his people. Remember, Peter is writing to Gentiles and their position in the family of God. We must confess that we often sadly take our position in God’s family for granted. Shame! Consider both the privilege and responsibility articulated in 1 Peter 2:9-10:**

**“9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” That is great news, as is our second point:**

## **2. Jesus – our living hope and soon-coming King**

**Greek verbs have three components – voice, tense, and mood. The indicative mood tells you that a writer is indicating something he wants you to know. He is giving you information about what God has done for you. The imperative mood is a command, or, a directive for you to act. If you are in Kindergarten, that just made your day and you cannot wait to talk about it at lunch! Most of the authors of the NT Epistles begin their letters with verbs in the indicative mood and only after they have established the truth about our relationship with Christ, do they then give commands about how we should live. You may or may not find this interesting, but in the first 11 chapters of Romans, there are only two imperative verbs, and both of those are in Romans 6. In 1 Peter, a much smaller letter than Romans, the imperative verbs begin in the 13<sup>th</sup> verse of the first chapter, thus, next week’s text and sermon will be a response to the truth of today’s text.**

**I want us to absorb the truth about the future that God wants his children to know - children who now live in exile. Verses 3-5:**

**3 Blessed 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, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

**Praise the Lord! We have only begun to understand what salvation means for God's people. The fullness of who we are in Christ will only be known when Jesus is revealed at his Second Advent. In the meantime, we have the privilege of trusting God in our struggles, bringing both peace and perspective. We begin the Christian life by trusting God for salvation in Jesus. We are later tempted to try to work out our time as exiles in our own strength and according to our own wisdom. One of the reasons God brings trials into our lives is to keep us dependent on him, and we do so by trusting his goodness, even when life is hard – no, *especially* when life is hard, and that is the focus of our third point:**

### **3. Trials: designed for God's glory and our good**

**What areas of your life are trouble for you, even to the point of being sources of grief? What are we to make of the difficulties of this life? Even though Peter does not issue commands, here, his words have an imperatival force, which means he is encouraging his readers to keep on doing what they are already doing. You don't mind reading this encouraging text again, do you? Verses 6-7:**

**6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so 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.**

**You may think that the difficulties you are facing are evidence of God's displeasure with you or a lack of care for you. Au contraire! God says that your trust in him is more genuine and more precious than gold that has been purified, by fire, from all impurities. It is important to grieve when we hurt, but it is also necessary to trust God that all will make sense when Jesus returns. Look for his coming at any moment! The early church surely did, and we should never let go of our expectation that we will see Jesus at any moment.**

**What does faith look like? Verses 8-9 give a good description, reminding us that we can always trust God, and as we do, rather than bemoaning our status as exiles, we will be filled with a joy that cannot be explained, and that gives evidence that the relationship we have with Jesus is genuine. Much of 1 Peter describes the benefit of rejoicing in suffering. It is a mystery to the world and an attraction to the gospel. We have the privilege of seeing the on-going benefit of the salvation that God has worked into us, which will be fully revealed when Jesus returns. That's good news! The last point:**

#### **4. The breathtaking reality of our identity in Christ**

**Wait – isn't this the first point? Yes – exactly! Although I may have connected a few dots for you in this text, you already know most of this – but, we need *always* to be reminded of how great our salvation is in Christ!**

**Speaking of connecting dots, the prophets who spoke of the Messiah's suffering, such as Isaiah and Zechariah and David, could not make sense of a Suffering Servant who was the Messiah. It was the Spirit of Christ who led them to write about Jesus' betrayal, crucifixion, and resurrection, and even though they could not understand, they trusted God with his plan. So, with their faithful**

**service and hungry hearts, did God give them some level of understanding about what they were writing? Verse 12:**

**12 It 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.**

**Have you considered that with the knowledge you have of God's ways or with the sufferings you are experiencing, you may well be serving others – even future generations – with your godly response? Have you noticed how the words suffering and glory are often close to one another in the NT? It is only one of the breathtaking mysteries of our relationship with the Creator of the Universe – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. How big of a deal is it? Angels want to understand it, but they are incapable of knowing what it means for a holy God to grant forgiveness and eternal life to sinners. Have you forgotten just how great your salvation is?**

**As we leave 2019 and prepare to enter 2020, may our hearts and minds and lives be infused with a new spirit of gratitude for all the Father has done for us and for what the Holy Spirit has revealed to us through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus died for you. If you do not know him, call out to him in repentance and faith, acknowledging your sin and putting your trust in Jesus' sacrifice for your sins as what saves you. If you know him, praise him with me while the worship team comes to lead us in our closing song as we take our benevolence offering. Would you stand with me?**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow  
Praise him all creatures here below  
Praise him above ye heavenly host  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Amen.**

**Let's pray.**

**Be seated for the benevolence offering.**