

Providence, Part 1

1 Peter 1:1-2

Pastor Jeremy Cagle, May 28, 2017

If you're joining us for the first time this morning, we are on the front end of the series called "The Suffering Church", where we are learning how the church should handle suffering and hardship. I have told you before that you all have a great foundation here at Grace Fellowship Church. You've done a great job laying the groundwork, and now, we want to test that out. You don't test a foundation when the weather is good, you test it when the weather's bad. And in a similar way, you don't test the church when the weather's good, you test it when the weather is bad. You test it in a time of trial. And that's what we're talking about in this series: How are we supposed to handle trials and difficulties as a church? No one likes to suffer, but suffering shows you where your priorities are. It shows you what lies beneath the surface.

I don't know if you've ever studied the disease of leprosy before, but leprosy is caused by the absence of pain. It's a disease that kills all the nerve sensations in your body to the point that you don't feel pain anymore. Some people want a pain-free life. If you want a pain-free life, you need to study this disease. It takes away your pain to the point that you get a sunburn and you don't feel it anymore. You have no idea you have one. As a result, you keep burning and burning, or exposing and exposing your skin, to the point that it begins to decay and rot. You've seen pictures of lepers with their skin all rotted off. The loss of pain sensation is what causes the deformity. That's what a pain-free life gives you. You can't tell what's going on. It's the same way with the Christian life. Without pain, without hardship and suffering, you can't tell what's really going on in your heart. That's why God gives it to you.

It has been said this way: One way to find out what's in a rag is to squeeze it. You put a little pressure on it. It's the same way with us. God puts pressure on us. God squeezes us to show what's going on beneath the surface, which means hardship and suffering are good things. They test our foundation. And that's what I want to talk to you about this morning. If you would, turn in your Bibles with me to the Book of First Peter. It's right before Second Peter. You have to go to seminary to learn stuff like that. It's right after the Books of Hebrews and James.

As you're turning there, some of you have heard the name William Cowper. William Cowper was a famous hymn writer in the 1700s, who wrote some hymns that we still sing today, like "There is a Fountain Filled With Blood." He wrote another hymn called "God Moves in Mysterious Ways," which we'll talk about in a minute. He was a close friend of John Newton, who did not invent the cookies. Newton wrote "Amazing Grace." Cowper was a close friend of Newton's, but what many people don't know about William Cowper, is that he struggled with depression. In his own words, he said, "Day and night, I was upon the rack." That's how he described his depression. He called it "the rack" or "the torture chamber". He was born in 1731 to a wealthy family who sent him to boarding school at a young age. And while he was in boarding school, he said that, "I was struck with such a dejection of spirits, as none but they who felt the same can have a conception of. Day and night, I was upon the rack, lying down in horror and rising up in despair. I presently lost all relish for studies, to which before I had been closely attached. The classics had no longer a charm for me. I needed something more salutary than

amusement, but I had no idea where to find it." William Cowper said, "I was completely and utterly lost." He said, "I lay down in horror and I rose up in despair." He tried changing his scenery and moving places. That didn't help; he stayed depressed. He tried pursuing romance; he was engaged. That didn't help. The depression stayed there. He tried changing jobs, partying with friends, reading poetry, gambling. It only made things worse, to the point that William Cowper tried to buy some laudanum and poison himself.

And when that didn't work, the next morning, he got a rope, and he hung himself. The rope broke. Then he got another rope, and he did it again, and that rope broke. And then he got another rope, and he did it again. Three times in one morning, he tried to hang himself. And after the third attempt, his friends found out about it, and they put him in an insane asylum, where he met a Christian doctor who shared Christ with him, and he was saved. Of all the places to get saved, William Cowper was saved in an insane asylum. We would call it a mental hospital. He would later write about his experiences in the hymn "God Moves in Mysterious ways," where he said this, "Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust Him for His grace. Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face." Can we all say Amen to that? "Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face."

I mention that because some of you are experiencing the frowning providence of God this morning. Some of you would say, if I asked you how you were doing, you would say you're on the rack. You're feeling tortured. You lay down in horror and you rise in despair. You go to bed in anxiety, and fear, and you wake up in it, and nothing seems to help. You say, "God is frowning at my job. God is frowning at my marriage. God is frowning at my family. No matter what I do, no matter how hard I try, I can't get past this thing," whatever it is. I want to tell you, this morning that behind the frowning providence, God hides a smiling face. It's not a sarcastic one, but a genuine one. God cares about your suffering, friends. He's not out to get you. I don't know the numbers, but a huge percentage of the Bible is devoted to the subject of pain. I don't know if you've ever thought about this, but entire books of the Bible are devoted to the issue of suffering. For instance, the Book of Job (we talked about that last time) is devoted entirely to suffering. If you think your life is bad, read the first three chapters of Job. You will feel better about what you're going through. The Book of Ecclesiastes is written about pain. Solomon comes to the end of his life and he says, "This is all painful to me. I'm disappointed." Huge portions of Psalms and Proverbs as well as the Book of Lamentations is devoted to it. You could call Lamentations "The Book of Pain", because that's what it's all about.

You could look at it this way: In Genesis chapter 3, Adam sinned and brought pain to the whole human race, and the rest of the Bible tells us how God dealt with it. The rest of the Bible tells us how God deals with pain. You have a loving God, friends. You have a God who cares. He didn't just wind up the world and let it go. He's involved with it. He's involved in your lives. He's involved with it for good. And that leads us to the Book of First Peter. First Peter is all about pain and suffering. It was written to a church experiencing heartache. Now, the book starts off in Chapter 1:1, "To those who reside as aliens." And it ends in Chapter 5:8 with the devil prowling around like a roaring lion. I don't know about you, but that sounds painful. The book starts off with aliens and it ends with the devil. And all throughout the book, Peter's point is that there is hope in the midst of your suffering. In spite of the pain, God still cares about you.

First Peter is actually called “the catholic epistle” or “the universal epistle.” The word “catholic” means universal, because it was written to Christians everywhere. The first verse, if you are looking in your Bibles, says it was written to Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, and we'll talk about that in a minute, but that's an area the size of British Columbia. It's about 300,000 square miles. In other words, it was completely massive. In the first century, it was even bigger, without modern communication and modern travel. Peter writes about something that all these people could relate to: the problem of pain. Everyone experiences pain. It is universal. Peter, bringing them together, talks about this subject of suffering.

First Peter has also been called “The Handbook of Foreign Ambassadors,” because it was written to foreigners. Verse 1 calls them aliens, which brings with it a different type of suffering. I was standing in the parking lot last week, and a certain gentleman who will not be named, was throwing a football underhanded, like they do in rugby. And I said, “Hey, throw it right.” And he said, “I am throwing it right.” I said, “No, you're not. Let me shepherd you through this. I think there's sin involved here.” It doesn't... I'm just kidding. I'm a foreigner too, but you get the point. It's a different type of suffering that comes with being from somewhere else. These people were all from somewhere else and they were suffering.

The book revolves around this topic of pain - of the frowning providence of God. What I want to do this morning is just see what it says in the opening verses, so let's see how First Peter starts off, okay? Read it with me, and then we'll talk about it together - just the first two verses. It says, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.”

If you're taking notes this morning, just to give you an outline for the book, in these couple of verses, Peter gives us some reminders to get us through suffering. If you're taking notes, he gives us several reminders to help us get through suffering. They say that good teachers repeat themselves over and over again. Peter is repeating himself here. He's already said this to the church and he's saying it again. Here are some reminders. The first one is this: You are chosen. That's the first reminder in the passage. We talked about this last time, but when you're suffering, when you're wrestling with being a foreigner and an alien, remember that you are chosen. It's not random. God chose it for you. It's exactly what he says in 1 Peter 1:1, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, [to these different people] who are chosen.”

If you look at a map of the Roman Empire in the first century, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia were all provinces within the territory of Asia Minor. Today, that is the nation of Turkey. It's also known as the Balkan Peninsula. If you want to get your bearings, it was a land bridge between Europe and the Middle East. That's where this was--in between the Aegean and the Black Sea. Today, there's not much going on. You don't really hear much about the nation of Turkey today. But in this day and age, it was a very busy place. All the seven churches in Revelation are from Asia Minor. Galatians - you see Galatians in this list - that was in Asia Minor. Colossians was in Asia Minor. Tarsus, Paul's hometown was in this area.

It was a huge tract of land, and if you notice, Peter says that they were dispersed there, “scattered”. He says in Verse 1, "To those who reside as aliens scattered throughout these places." In other words, they didn't choose to be there. It wasn't a decision they made - they were put there by someone else. The Babylonians and Persians had a practice of taking over an area, and settling the people elsewhere, to keep them from revolting. That's how Paul landed in Asia Minor. Paul was a Jew, he was from Israel. Babylonians, or the Persians, or one of the other ones, picked him up and put him in this place. They would invade Egypt and they would take the Egyptians to Italy. They would invade Italy and take the Italian people into Greece. That's what was happening here - these people were taken from their homes and moved elsewhere. In other words, they were immigrants by force, not by choice. "But that's okay," Peter says, "Because you're not an immigrant to God." "You're not a foreigner to Him," he's telling them. "It's okay if you didn't choose this, because God chose it for you." "And more importantly," he says, "He chose you." If you read just the passage, that's what it means. It doesn't mean, simply, that God chose your circumstances, although that's part of this. He chose your home, your job, and your kids - that's true, but definitely, it means that He chose you. He chose you to be saved is the idea here.

In fact, Peter goes on to say in verse 2, that, "This is according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." That word “foreknowledge” means more than just looking down the tunnels of time. If you look down in chapter 1:20, Peter says that, "Jesus was foreknown before the foundation of the world." You see that word again there. That doesn't mean that God looked down the tunnels of time and saw Jesus. It means God had a relationship with Him before time. It means that God loved Him before time. He was precious to Him. Verse 19 says, "Before the foundation of the world." And the same thing goes for us, for believers. God had a relationship with you. God loved you. He saw you as precious from before the foundation of the world. That's how Peter starts off this letter. He says, "Even if no one else wants you, God still wants you", is the idea here. "Even if no one else cares about you, God cares about you, and He started caring about you from before you were born.”

Now, I know there are lots of questions that come up when you talk about the doctrine of God choosing. I've got lots of questions myself: "What do you mean God chose me? How did He do that? On what grounds did He make His decision? Did He look down the tunnels of time, and see something good in me, and that's why He decided this? Or do I have no say in the matter? Do my choices not matter to God? Or are my choices considered at all? And what about those He doesn't choose? Do they go to hell? And how fair is that?" All kinds of questions come in the midst of this doctrine of God choosing. I can't get into all of this but let me just say quickly that our choices do matter to God. Choose Jesus Christ and you go to heaven; reject Jesus Christ and you go to hell. The Bible is very clear on that. Choose to do sinful things and you will reap the consequences. Choose to do righteous things and you will reap the consequences. But how that all plays out in the mystery of eternity is not known to us, we don't know.

But what Peter does say here is that this foundation of our salvation is God. Do you see that? That's what this passage is saying. The hope that we have when we're suffering - when we're in a trial, when we feel out of place in this world - our hope is in God, not in ourselves. The doctrine of election is often used as a debating point for people. You say, "God elects," and they say, "Oh, yeah?" And they want to fight. Peter doesn't use it that way here. Peter uses this to comfort

people and to remind them that God cares about them. You could look at it like this: When you start asking, "Why am I in this depression? Why am I in this funk? Why do I feel like an alien? Why is God squeezing me? Why do I have pressure in my life right now? Why? Why? Why? Why?" You need to stop and ask, "Why would God love me at all?" That's how Peter starts this off: "Why would God save me at all? Why would God see me as precious from before the foundation of the world?" That's a better question, isn't it? It puts it in perspective.

I'm not trying to minimize those other questions. I'm just saying, "Put the cookies on the top shelf." I don't have to tell you when you suffer, it feels like nobody cares, doesn't it? Does anyone know what I'm talking about? When you're in pain, it feels like you're all alone. It also seems random, doesn't it? I think it's the hardest thing about suffering. It seems pointless. You get in a car accident and it seems pointless, "Why did it have to happen to me? What did I do wrong?" You find out that your house doesn't have air conditioning in it and it feels pointless. You guys didn't tell me that it gets hot here. You said, "It doesn't snow," but... And you didn't tell me that going up 5 degrees Celsius is different than going up 5 degrees Fahrenheit. I'm an alien, right? Foreign.

I don't know all the answers to these questions, but Peter doesn't tell us here, God doesn't tell us in His Word, but what Peter does say is that it's all been planned out from before the foundation of the world. He says that it was chosen for you before you were born. It's not random, it's not a mistake, it's not pointless. And you may never know the point of it in this life, but God does, and that makes it okay.

Just consider for a moment all the things that had to line up, in order for you to become a Christian, just for you to be saved at all. You had to survive childbirth. Do you know how many children in this world do not survive childbirth? Not everyone gets to do that, but God allowed you to survive childbirth. And then He allowed you to grow up to an age where you could understand the Gospel, that's a miracle too. Everyone doesn't get to do that. And then you got to live in a place where you could hear it. You got to live in a country where there were Christians to tell it to you. Do you understand there are countries in this world where whole people groups are lost, and going to hell, and no one's telling them about Christ? You got to grow up in a place where they would. Then you got to meet a Christian, and then you had a soft heart to hear the message, and then you had your eyes opened. Who orchestrated all that? You? Me? Did you decide where you would be born? Did you decide what country you would grow up in? Did you decide to meet a Christian, or grow up in church, and have a soft heart? God decided all of that in His mercy and grace. That's Peter's point here: You can't get through suffering, until you first understand that it all rests on the shoulders of God. You can't get through pain, and misery, and heartache until you understand that the one holding you up - the one holding you together and the one holding you through it all - is God. Amen?

When I was immigrating to Canada, I talked with a Jamaican lady who had immigrated to the US. She had gone through the whole process of getting a visa, a passport, and all that kind of stuff, and we were talking about life and the future. I think she was a believer and she said something very profound. She said, "I think God doesn't tell us the future, because if He did, we couldn't handle it." I think she's right. Friends, God doesn't withhold the "why" answers, because He hates you; He withholds it, because He loves you. We can't handle that information. He holds

back the veil of mystery because He's protecting us and we have to trust Him in that. This is how you get through suffering. This is where it all starts--with the sovereignty of God. You trust that this is best because He chose it for you. This is best because this is what He wants, even though I don't have all the answers.

That brings us to another reminder that helps us get through our suffering - and that is - you are being sanctified. Peter says that not only have you been chosen - past tense; way, way, way past tense. He also says that you are being sanctified - present tense. It's an ongoing thing. This is happening over, and over, and over again. In fact, if you want to tie these two reminders together, some people want to know, "How do I know if I've been chosen?" I'm sure everyone in this room would want to know that. The answer is, "Are you being sanctified? Are you obeying Jesus Christ?" That's the next thing Peter says here. If you read on from verse 1 to verse 2, he says, "To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ."

If you notice, there are several prepositional phrases here that follow the word "chosen." Peter says, "Who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ," which is another way of saying, "Be sanctified." All of this modifies the word "chosen." Sanctification flows out of the sovereign choice of God. "Sanctified" is another way of saying, "You are made holy" or "set apart". If you remember your Bible history, there were certain objects in the temple that were holy. That means they were set apart for the use of God. "That's the point of your trials," Peter says. "That's why God puts them in your life: To make you different; to make you stand out."

You guys understand that when the guy catches the football (catches it after it's thrown overhanded) and scores a touchdown and points up to God, it doesn't take a believer to do that. We all thank God when we score a touchdown. It's the guy who thanks God when he misses it - when he suffers. "That's what makes you stand out," Peter says. "That's what sets you apart and sanctifies you." It's said that, "The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay." And the same sun that melts a believer hardens an unbeliever. Trials do that for us; they melt us and make us tender for God. To use another analogy, when you purify gold, you put it in fire and you let it burn away the dross. As it's burning in the fire, the dross, or the impurities, come up to the top and you scrape the impurities off. That's how you make pure gold. When you purify a Christian, you do the same thing: You put him in fire and you let it burn away his dross.

How many of you have ever been through a trial and said, "Man, I didn't know that about myself. I sure learned something about myself in the middle of that trial." Does anybody know what I'm talking about? Have you ever been in pain and said, "I never knew I struggled with that before?" You may have said, "That anxiety was not there when everything was going great. My pride... I didn't see my pride before I had that awful thing happen to me." That was the point of it: To burn away the dross.

And the Bible says this several different ways. Just a couple passages on this: James 1:2 says, "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials." I don't know about you, but when I read that first verse in James, I want to shut it. "Consider it all joy when you encounter

various trials." I don't know what he's about to say next. That's not the way I want to start off... But James says, "God allows us to suffer." He goes on to say that, "The testing of your faith may produce endurance." "Suffering gives you endurance," he says. It teaches you how to keep on keeping on. Romans 5:3 says, "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance." It's the same idea of endurance here.

I'm just going to read a couple of these passages to you. Hebrews 12:5-6 says, "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the LORD, nor faint when you're reprov'd by Him; For those whom the LORD loves He disciplines." And why does God do that? Verse 10 says, "...For our good, so that we may share His holiness." But you get the idea: Trials are given to us for a reason - to sanctify us and make us holy. There are some lessons you can only learn in a trial. There are some things in the Christian life you can only learn when life is bad. You can only learn patience in a trial. When life is easy, you don't need patience, do you? When the kids are good and they go to sleep through the night, you don't need patience. Some of you have kids that are so good, I don't know how you would ever learn patience. (You need to borrow my children for a while and I will serve you in that way. Just come over at nap time.)

You can only learn contentment in a trial. You don't learn contentment waiting five minutes at the drive-thru at Dairy Queen. You learn contentment waiting 25 minutes at the drive-thru at Dairy Queen. Same thing goes for endurance. You only learn endurance by having to endure. Same thing goes for forgiveness and mercy. You only learn forgiveness when you have to forgive someone; when you've been wronged. Trials teach us all this. That's why God gives them to us.

Just a couple of thoughts on this from some ancient authors: Thomas Watson says, "When God lays men upon their backs, then they look up to Heaven." He said,

God smiting his people is like the musician striking the violin and makes it put forth the musician's sound. How much good comes to the saints by affliction? When they're pounded, and broken, and beaten, they send forth their sweetest smell. Affliction is a bitter root, but it brings forth the sweetest fruit. God lays us upon our backs, so that we will look to heaven.

Jeremiah Burroughs said,

I cannot know what your afflictions are. I'm sure that there can be no afflictions in this world as great as your mercies. Set any affliction beside your mercy and see which one weighs the heaviest. That you have a day of grace and salvation, that you are not now in hell, this is a greater mercy.

I've heard people say before, "You know what? I don't deserve this trial." You know what? That's right, you don't, you deserve to go to hell. If we're gonna talk about desserts and what we deserve, that's what we deserve. Everything else is mercy. Everything else is grace. Burroughs says,

That you have the sound of the Gospel on your ears, that you have the use of your reason, this is a greater mercy than your afflictions, that you have the use of your limbs, your senses, that you have the health of your bodies. No man who is rich and has a sickly body would not part with all his riches, that he might have health. Therefore, your mercies are greater than your afflictions.

Can we all say Amen to that? You are blessed so much more than your afflictions, and when you are afflicted, that's when you see that. When you're in a trial, that's when that is brought out to you. Samuel Rutherford said, "Grace grows best in winter." That's what he meant.

And this leads to another reminder that helps us get through our suffering. You've been chosen. You're being sanctified. Third, you have been sprinkled. That's another past tense word here. You have been sprinkled. Peter goes from the past, to the present, back to the past. He gives us our next prepositional phrase in verse 2, "Who are chosen, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood." Not only did God choose you to suffer, but He chose you to be sprinkled with His blood. That's a reference to sacrifice. In the Old Testament, when someone sinned, the priest had to sprinkle the blood of an animal on the altar. He would take an animal, cut its throat, and then sprinkle its blood to show that God had forgiven the sin. A debt had been paid for it, a life for a life. The cost of your sin, the wages of your sin is death. In the Old Testament, they represented that by killing an animal. And in the same way, Peter says that God the Father took His Son to the cross, killed Him, and then sprinkled His blood on us, to cleanse us, and to show us God had forgiven us, a life for a life, a debt had been paid. Peter says at the beginning of his letter, "Remember that you were chosen for this. God called you out for this." If you ever wonder, "Does God care?" This is how much He cares. If you ever wonder, "Does God love me?" This is how much He loves you: Enough to die for you, enough to spill His blood for you.

There are a couple of ways to tie this into our suffering. For one thing, God suffers too. I mentioned before, when we suffer, we often think we're all alone, don't we? We look up to heaven and we say, "Where are you, God?" Wasn't that Job's complaint? "Can you hear me?" You go to the hospital ... I'd mentioned this last week ... You look up to the sky and it feels like you're talking to a concrete wall, doesn't it? "Where's God?" Let me tell you, friends, God is still there. He didn't leave you. And more importantly than that, He suffered right along with you. In fact, He suffered more than you ever could. How many of you have ever died for God? I'm guessing nobody, because you're all still alive. How many of you have given your life for Him? You see, this is what He did for you. He gave His life for you. He gave everything.

William Cowper got this. In the midst of his depression, he wrote those words that we sang this morning, "There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins. And sinners plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains." My friends, there is a fountain filled with blood for you. It's not just sprinkled, but it's filled to overflowing, enough to cover every sin, enough to wash them all away, so that when you're suffering, you can't ask the question, "Does God love me?" He loves you this much. A pastor was once counselling a man who said, "I don't like this talk of Jesus dying and being sacrificed. I don't like the violence. I don't like the bloodshed. I just want to follow Jesus." To which the pastor replied, "Well, are you perfect?"

And the man said, "Well, no, I am not." The pastor said, "Then you need a sacrifice. You need Jesus to die for you." And that's what He did, because He loves us.

Which leads to another way to tie this into our suffering: Your guilt has been erased. When Jesus died on the cross, He erased all your guilt with God. Now, there's no more guilt to pay. When you suffer, you feel guilty, don't you? Does anyone else relate to that? You feel like you've done something wrong, and sometimes, you have done something wrong. If you rob a bank and go to jail...you should probably feel guilty for that. But if you get in a car wreck and break your arm, that's different. But either way, Jesus paid for it. He took care of your guilt. One elderly woman said, "He took my guilt to the east, and when it came back, He took it to the west." Your sin is as far removed as the east is from the west. There's nothing more for you to pay.

An Old Testament believer never understood this or never had the full revelation that we have. Peter mentions "sprinkling" here. That's an Old Testament expression. An Old Testament believer, every time he sinned, he had to give one more animal, one more sacrifice, one more offering. I've heard it said that the priests in the Old Testament were like professional butchers, because people sinned all day long. All day long, they had to bring these animals in, and kill them, and sprinkle their blood all over again. Peter says that Jesus' blood was sprinkled one time. One sacrifice, that's it. There's nothing more to pay, which means that, if you suffer externally, you don't have to suffer internally anymore. If you suffer in the body, you don't have to suffer in the soul. Jesus took care of that. One author said it this way: He said,

Was there a price to be paid? He paid it. Was there a victory to be won? He won it. Was there a penalty to be borne? He bore it. Was there a judgment to be faced? He faced it. And now, I'm free.

This all leads to one more reminder that gets us through our suffering, and this one really ties it all together: You are loved by the Trinity. I'll explain what that means here. You are loved by all three members of the Trinity. This love should give you hope in your suffering. There's only a few times in Scripture where all three members of the Trinity are mentioned in the same passage, and this is one of them. As Peter is writing to these believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia and giving them hope, he's telling them that God chose them, and is sanctifying them, and has sprinkled them. He ties it all together by reminding them that all three members of the Godhead are involved in this. Let me read back over this again. Just follow along with me and see this for yourselves. It says, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia [...all these places], who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ [the Son] and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure." If you notice here, Peter says that all three members of the Trinity are involved in your pain. God the Father foreknows you, God the Spirit sanctifies you, and God the Son sprinkles you. God the Father chooses you, God the Spirit sets you apart, and God the Son dies for you.

It doesn't get much better than that, which means that, if you ever wonder, "Does God care?" God cares very much for you. If you ever wonder, "Does God notice?" God notices. Every member of the Godhead is involved in your problems. "And as a result of this," Peter says, "You have grace and peace." You have peace, because your sin has been taken away. And you have

grace, because you did not earn it. In fact, if you notice in this passage, man is not mentioned in here. We are not mentioned, because salvation is all of God. Your hope is all of God. This is why so much of the Bible is devoted to the topic of pain, because God is personally involved in it, in your pain. This is a topic near and dear to His heart, He loves to give grace to people, He loves to give peace.

How many of you have ever read the Psalms during a trial? Anybody? Could we all raise our hand to that? We all have. Why do you do that? You do that, because you want to remember that your Father loves you in the trial. You do that, because you want to remember that He cares, and the Psalms say that, don't they? Over, and over, and over again, they say that. How many of you have ever read the Book of Job during a trial? Anybody? Yeah, we've done that. Why do you do that? You want to remember that the Spirit loves you. He sanctifies you in the trial, like He did Job. How many of you have read the Gospels during a trial? You do that, because you want to know the Son loves you. The point is that all three members are involved in this. That's why you read your Bibles. You want to remember the hero of the story: The hero of the story is God. Your foundation in the trial is God. "Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face." Behind all the loneliness, and heartache, and misery, God is smiling at you. He's working for your good and you want to remember that.

This is how Peter starts off the letter: Not by bragging on his audience, but by bragging on God, by focusing on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Friends, this is how you're going to get through your trials this morning: By focusing on God, and not on yourself. You don't survive a storm by staring at the rain; you survive a storm by staring at your foundation, by looking to the rock, by looking at His smiling face, even when it's hidden behind a cloud. And that's what we're gonna be looking at in the Book of First Peter in the weeks to come. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for these opening words in this passage. I feel, in my own life anyway, like I've suffered so little compared to believers in the past, reading about these beloved Christians who were uprooted forcefully from their homes. I've never experienced anything like that. And Lord, we thank you for these words of Peter, how he focuses on your goodness in the midst of the trials. I pray for my friends who are here this morning who are suffering, who are going through a difficult time. Lord, I pray You would draw them closer to Yourself as a result of the study of this passage. I pray You would remind them where their hope is in the midst of the storm: Their hope is in You. Thank you for Christ. Thank you for His death on the cross for our sins. I pray if there's any here who are suffering because of their sins - because their sins have not been forgiven - You would draw them to Christ and save them. We pray in His name, Amen.