



## Hope In Exile

1 Peter 1:1-2

David Sunday    April 19, 2020

Good morning, New Covenant family. Here we are in the sixth Sunday of our stay-at-home time. I find myself resonating even more with the Apostle Paul's words at the beginning of Romans 1, when he said, *"I long to see you, in order to impart some spiritual gift to strengthen you...that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine."* It's going to be wonderful when we can gather again, but while we wait, let's pay attention and be on the lookout for evidences of grace—and there are many.

We had a wonderful prayer time on Good Friday at noon and we're going to continue doing that now, starting this Friday and continuing throughout this stay-at-home period. We're also encouraged by the ways you have expressed a desire to minister to one another during this time of need. Although we're not aware of a lot of physical needs right now, please don't underestimate the power of a phone call. I want to encourage everyone this week to call one person from our church family and ask three questions.

- "How are you?"
- "How were you encouraged or challenged by our video service this past Sunday?"
- "How can I pray for you?"

Just three simple questions. I believe God will use that to encourage, build us up and help us stay connected during this time of physical separation.

It's been so good to hear from you. Many of you are talking about the joys of being at home with your family, playing games at night. One family brought little chickens home to entertain their kids. They said, "We want to make this a crisis to remember." I thought, "Boy, if I brought chickens home to Kate, that would be a crisis to remember in our house." But it was so fun to see pictures and hear some good reports, even to get letters speaking about God's faithfulness in drawing you closer to Him during this time. I'm praying that's what will happen for all of us.

To that, I've been thinking about where we should go in God's Word in this unique season. I had planned on doing a series on the Apostle's Creed right after Easter, and I still very much want to do that, but I think it would be best to save that for some time in the future when we can all be

physically gathered again. I've been wanting to find a portion of Scripture that we can really focus on together during this season, something we can read over and over again, to be shaped by it, to be formed into more faithful disciples and to be transformed by the Spirit as we read something together. I've already been studying 1 Peter for a series I was planning to do in the fall and as I was reading it recently, I thought, "Boy, this is exactly what New Covenant needs right now. I think it will encourage us tremendously."

So I'd like you to open your Bibles and as you're turning to 1 Peter, listen to what Martin Luther said about this letter from Peter: "One of the noblest books in the New Testament, a paragon of excellence, on par with Romans and the Gospel of John." That's a mighty high compliment. Luther also believed this short book of 105 verses contained all that was necessary for a Christian to know.

I want to encourage you to immerse yourself in this book. You can read it in one sitting in about 20 minutes. There are just five chapters, so if you want to, take a chapter a day, Monday through Friday, and really dwell on it. I'd like us to read this short letter every week over the next two or three months, just letting it transform us as a body.

Let's begin with reading the first two verse this morning. These two verses set the trajectory for the whole letter and are potent with gospel dynamite. Hear God's Word as I read 1 Peter 1:1-2:

*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ: To those chosen, living as exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen<sup>2</sup> according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*

Let's pray.

Father, I pray this would happen as we read this letter repeatedly over the next several weeks. May grace and peace be multiplied to us, making us more hungry for the home we will live in forever with You and Your Son Jesus Christ, making us more ready to live holy lives here on earth as we wait for the salvation that will be finally revealed when Christ comes in glory. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's start with just this first word: Peter. "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...*" How fitting that we should go into 1 Peter right after the Gospel of Mark, because Peter and Mark had a very close relationship. At the end of this letter, he calls Mark "my son" (5:13). That's how close they were.

We believe that Mark relied on Peter for much eye-witness testimony in writing the Gospel of Mark. During our recent study through the Gospel of Mark, we've seen how miserably Peter

failed, denying Jesus the very night he had said, “I will never deny You. Even if everyone else falls away from You, even if I have to die with You, Jesus, I will never deny You.” Then he falls and miserably abandons his Lord in His hour of trial.

We saw last week that after Jesus rose from the dead, He summoned all the disciples to meet Him in Galilee, singling out Peter. He said, “Tell Peter I’m going to meet him there in Galilee.” That was Jesus’ way of saying, “Peter, I’m not done with you. I’m going to carry on My work in and through you.”

Here we are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century reading this letter of a recommissioned disciple of Jesus who knew how miserably he had failed. I think that’s wonderful because it’s a letter bristling with grace and full of tenderness toward sinners, calling us to the pursuit of holiness.

It has encouraged me a lot, because I am one who is often more aware of my failings than I am of God’s grace working in me. Reading this book this week and thinking about how God restored Peter and continues to work through Peter today was a great encouragement to me to keep pressing on, trusting in the grace of God to continue working through me. I hope this series will be that for you as well.

## **Christian, remember who you are.**

Peter wants us to understand who we are in Christ, because when we understand who we are, what our identity is, it transforms us in a radical way to live for Jesus in this world. So his first point this morning is just this: Christian, remember who you are.

In verse one, we see who we are. We are the elect. We are chosen by God. Election is a very important theme for Peter. He speaks of it here at the beginning, in the middle (2:9), plus at the end (5:13).

As you read your Bible, you’ll discover that it’s an important theme for the whole Bible. We heard a passage in Deuteronomy read to us this morning speaking of how we were chosen by God, not because of anything in us, but because of His great love for us. We find Jesus teaching the same thing, as well as the Gospel writers like Matthew and the Apostle Paul. This theme is throughout the Bible. Just like Peter doesn’t apologize for it or try to hide it, neither does the rest of the Bible. In fact, the Bible exalts in this truth of election. It rejoices in this truth. It gives thanks to God for the election of His children. It is positively excited about this truth and we should be as well.

I want it to sink in for each of us this morning, because some of us may not be having experiences like some we are hearing about with families who are doing well and enjoying this time together. Some of us may feel like we’re very isolated, forgotten, marginalized or insignificant in

this world. You may feel right now like you're not anyone who's special to anyone. You might be thinking, "There are other people who are doing great financially, but I am struggling." Maybe you've been furloughed from your job. Or you look at other families that seem to be getting along so well, while yours is full of strife right now. You wonder, "Has God forgotten me?"

This trust of election is a wonderful encouragement to you, friend, that if you are trusting in Jesus Christ, you are someone God has been thinking about from before the foundation of the world. He set His love upon you long before you existed, long before you had ever breathed a breath. He has loved you for all eternity and will love you through ages to come without end. Praise God for our election in Christ. We are chosen. God has brought us into a living, lasting, loving union with His Son by His own free and gracious choice.

You can personalize what Isaiah says by hearing God saying to you, "*You are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you. I will give people in exchange for you and nations instead of your life*" (Isaiah 43:3-4). This is who you are. You are chosen by God. But it's also very normal for those who are chosen and precious to God to be simultaneously rejected and despised and ostracized in this world. Paradoxically, we are at one and the same time chosen and exiles in this world. We see this also in 1 Peter 1:1, which is the second aspect of your identity in Christ: you are a chosen exile, a resident alien, an expatriot, a sojourner in a foreign land.

Peter is writing this letter from Rome, the center of power with all its seductiveness and wealth. He's writing to Christians who are scattered throughout the Roman Empire. Maybe they have been displaced by the emperor, living out in the boonies, in the area of the world we now know as modern-day Turkey. But they're on the far outskirts of the Roman Empire, just like half the population of Syria today has been displaced from their homeland, scattered throughout the world. It's becoming a gospel opportunity, and many people are being brought into the Kingdom through ministries like the one Ruth Dougherty is associated with in Athens, Greece—Helping Hands. Pray that she can get back there soon. She's in Colorado right now, longing to return to the great work God has for her there.

Peter is in Rome and can smell persecution on the horizon. In fact, he himself is going to be executed in a short time by the emperor Nero. He's writing to encourage these believers in Asia Minor who are also starting to experience the hostility of the world. He wants them to know, "This is the grace of God—stand firm in it." That's what he says at the end of his letter in chapter five.

The key to standing firm in the true grace of God is to remembering your identity in Christ. You have a different home now. You're an exile. You are longing for a different country. You have different values and priorities and expectations. You've been transferred out of the kingdom of darkness into the Kingdom of light, so now you don't fit into this world's system. You're a

temporary resident in a foreign place. Because of that, people are going to find you strange. Your actions, attitudes, words and commitments are going to be out of sync with their values and priorities. Sometimes they're even going to be threatened by how different you are. They might sense you're a subversive threat that needs to be dealt with through hostility or even persecution.

Now, that doesn't mean we should withdraw from this world because we're exiles in it. When you go live in a foreign country, you try to learn the language, adopt the customs and be a blessing where God has placed you. That's what we want to be to our neighbors. That's what we want to be in our nation at this time—praying for our leaders, praying for wisdom and praying that we would be a blessing in our community.

As we seek to be a blessing here in this world, we always need to remember where our true allegiance lies. We love our nation. We love our communities. We want to see them prosper. But we always have to be careful to march to the drumbeat of the Kingdom of Jesus, not any other drumbeat. We are chosen exiles in this world.

As you grow in Christ, you will find yourself with a longing and homesickness arising in your heart. Hebrews 11:13-16 says we are *“foreigners and temporary residents on this earth.”* We are *“seeking a homeland.”* We *“desire a better place—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called [our] God, for he has prepared a city for [us].”* We are homesick for that city and the more we grow in Christ, the greater that homesickness will be.

In the words of C.S. Lewis:

At present we are on the outside of the world, the wrong side of the door. We discern the freshness and purity of morning, but they do not make us fresh and pure. We cannot mingle with the splendors we see. But all of the leaves of the New Testament are rustling with the rumor that it will not always be so. Someday, God willing, we shall get in.

Then we shall be welcomed into our true home.

So who are you, Christian? You are an elect exile, chosen by God and precious to Him, but also rejected and not at home in this world—just like Jesus was.

## How did this all come about?

Now I want to ask how did this all come about? Remember who you are. Then rejoice in how it came to be that you became an exile chosen by God. In 1 Peter 1:2 we're told it came about ***“according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”*** That word “foreknowledge” is the root from which we get our word “prognosis.” When a doctor intervenes in a bad situation to try to

bring about healing, she gives you a prognosis. This word is speaking about God's sovereign purpose and plan throughout history to include you in His wonderful grace.

It's the same word that's used in 1 Peter 1:19-20, to speak about the Father's plan for His Son's death on the cross. We read there that Jesus is the "*unblemished and spotless lamb*" who was "*foreknown before the foundation of the world.*" This is saying that Jesus' death on the cross was carefully planned even before the world began. In the same way, God's election of you was carefully planned before the world began. He was thinking about you in eternity past. He had set His love upon you way back then.

Now, some people who struggle with the idea of election want to say that this word "foreknowledge" actually means that God knew in advance who would elect Him, so then He elected them on the basis of their election of Him. There's a real problem with that idea and it's this. It actually takes out all the beauty, graciousness and preciousness of what the Bible is describing for us here. We did not choose God; He chose us. He knew us with a personal, particular, fatherly love while we were still walking in ignorance and the futile ways of our forefathers—as these Gentile believers had been.

It wasn't because of your birth, achievements or morality; it was because of grace that God set His fatherly love upon you, that He knew you from before the foundation of the world. Just like He chose Abraham to become His while Abraham was still worshiping foreign gods, that's what God has done for you. You became a chosen exile "*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*"

And here's the second aspect of how it came about: "***through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.***" So the Father knew us before we knew Him. He loved us before we loved Him. He chose us while we were totally ignorant and walking away from Him. And then the Spirit of God set us apart. That's what "sanctified" means. He set us apart so that He could carry out the Father's electing purpose of love in our lives.

The Spirit sanctified us. He took us out of our former way of life in the realm of death, destruction, darkness and damnation, bringing us into newness of life in Christ where there is light and love, where there is restoration and salvation. As He brought us into this new realm, He convicted us of our sin, causing us to be born again—that's regeneration—so that we were given new appetites, new affections, new sight and new desires now for the Kingdom of God. He then sealed us, marking us out as God's prized possessions.

The Spirit has done all of that for us in sanctifying us and is also continuing to work out His sanctifying purpose in our lives every day, transforming us from being the people we once were as we walked in darkness into the people we now are as God's elect, chosen people. The Spirit is

doing all this for the purposes of, thirdly, bringing us into ***“obedience to Jesus and for sprinkling with His blood.”***

I love this. We weren't chosen just to be spiritual. Spirituality is popular in the world and it has always been. We respect spirituality. But we were chosen to be obedient to Jesus Christ. That is not popular. That's narrow. That requires submission to a new King, a new authority. We were chosen and sanctified to be obedient to Jesus Christ. For Peter, conversion is to be brought into a new life of joyous obedience to our Savior and Master. I'm so thankful he doesn't speak only of obedience to Jesus. He also tells us that we were chosen to be sprinkled with His blood. That might sound weird. We don't usually speak of sprinkling people with blood. In fact, if you tried to do that to your neighbors or friends, you would get into a lot of trouble. But in the Old Testament, this idea of sprinkling with blood was very precious. In Exodus 24, after Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai and he gathered the people to hear God's law, they said, "We will obey everything God has told us" (which we know they didn't have the power to do). In addition to giving them the law, Moses sprinkled them with blood of a sacrificial animal. That was God's way of saying, "You will be in a covenant relationship with Me that depends on a sacrifice being made for your sins."

Another great picture of the sprinkling of blood in the Old Testament was with what happened to lepers. We're thinking about social distancing right now, but lepers who had this dreadful disease went through the ultimate social distancing, living utterly outside the community and unable to have contact with family and friends. If in God's mercy they were healed, they could go to the priest who would declare them clean and sprinkle them with blood to confirm their ritual purity and show they were then welcomed back into the family and community.

That's what Jesus has done for us through His death on the cross. He has removed the separation between us and the Father, so there is no longer a need for social distancing between us and God. We don't have to stay six feet apart. God is saying to us, "Draw near; I want you to be close to Me." You've been sprinkled with the blood of Jesus and because of that, it is now both possible and a delight to live in obedience to Him. We're going to learn a lot about that in this letter of 1 Peter.

Think about what it would be like to hear we were chosen for obedience to Jesus, but not to have that last part—sprinkling with His blood. I think we'd quickly fall into despair. We do long to obey Him, but we know we often fall short. But praise God, our ongoing acceptance with God does not depend on our success in obedience. God accepts us because He chose us before the foundation of the world. He set us apart by His Spirit and sprinkled us with the blood of Jesus His

Son, so even when we fail now, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin as we confess our sins to God.

Nothing in all creation is able to destroy this new identity we have in Christ. It is the work of the triune God, resolved in eternity past, carried out in the present by the Spirit and maintained by the present value of the blood of Jesus, as we learn through the Spirit to walk in obedience to Him. How secure we are, Christian, in our new identity. What a difference it makes when we rejoice in this new identity and how it all came about. The courage and boldness it brings us is wonderful.

I heard a story about a war lord who some time ago was trying to take over the surrounding villages. He was systematically attacking the villages and pillaging the people's possessions, then carrying the people into captivity. When he sent his soldiers out to this particular village, there was an elderly woman who was a follower of Jesus. When the soldiers came to take her away, she said, "I won't leave. I belong here. God has put me here to have a ministry in this community. I belong to Him."

Well, the soldiers dragged her off and took her before the chief war lord. When he looked at this woman, he said, "Do you know who I am? I am he who can run you through with my sword without batting an eyelash." This woman, who knew who she was in Christ and who rejoiced in the grace that got her that new identity in Christ, looked this war lord straight in the eye and responded, "Do you know who I am? I am she who can let you run me through with a sword without batting an eyelash."

That's the confidence our identity in Christ brings us. It is secure through the electing work of God the Father, the sanctifying work of God the Spirit and the cleansing work of God the Son—and nothing can take it away from us.

As we continually need grace, Peter closes by saying, "*May grace and peace be multiplied to you.*" God's grace and peace is not static; it's dynamic. It multiplies. It overflows. And this week, friends, we will live in the goodness of that grace.

Before I close in prayer, there may be someone here today who is wondering, "How can I know if I've been chosen by God?" I want to say to you, friend, if you are finding in your heart today a growing desire to be obedient to this gracious Master, Jesus Christ, and you sense your need to be cleansed by His blood and forgiven of your sin, that is a sure sign the Spirit of God is already at work in sanctifying you and setting you apart to believe in Jesus.

He is calling you right now to put your faith in Christ, and when you do, Jesus will bring you to the Father, and you will discover that there is a God Who has set His heart of love on you

from before the beginning of time. He has loved you from before time, and He will love you into eternity future—and that is amazing grace!

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, I pray that You would give faith to all of us to believe and trust in Your Son today. Help us, Lord, to know where our true joy and hope lie. It's not in grocery shelves being restocked or stimulus checks coming in the mail or by direct deposits. It's not in the economy getting restarted or even in being able to resume our normal lives. God, our true joy, our true hope, is reserved in heaven for us, where we have an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled and that will not fade away.

I pray that You would make that inheritance all the more precious to us as we study this letter together. Make this a formative time in the life of our church that we will never forget, as this wonderful letter, by Your Spirit working through Your Word, is transforming us. Sanctify us through Your Word, Lord; Your Word is truth. Now may grace and peace be multiplied to Your people at New Covenant and may we encourage one another through our prayers and phone calls this week, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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