

Week 1 - Salutations, Sojourners - 1Peter 1:1-2

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11:1-16

Introduction

During her junior year of college, our youngest daughter studied at a university in central Mexico in a large city located far from the normal tourist areas one finds along the coasts

When Kathy and I flew down to visit her for a few days we found ourselves instantly immersed in a foreign culture surrounded by people who, for the most part, didn't speak English

Talk about feeling like a fish out of water!

We couldn't even walk into a store to make a purchase on our own because we didn't understand how much money we were being asked to pay

While we were there, we took a bus on a day trip to Guadalajara and spent the day wandering and looking at the sights and all was well until evening came

All of a sudden, the atmosphere changed in the crowd around us and it became very obvious that, as foreigners, we were no longer welcome and it was time for us to catch a taxi back to the bus station

This world can be a hostile place to those who don't belong

This morning we are beginning a new sermon series in which we will work our way through the New Testament book of 1Peter

When the apostle Peter wrote this letter around 64 A.D., followers of Jesus Christ were experiencing pressure from those around them who believed differently

After all, we need to remember that Christianity didn't enter into a religious vacuum and many people took offense to this then new belief that said God had appeared in human flesh, been unjustly crucified on a Roman cross, then rose from the dead to provide salvation to mankind

Those were heretical beliefs as far as the practitioners of other, established religions were concerned and followers of Christ were finding themselves criticized, ostracized, and, at times, brutalized by their neighbors

It happened that there was a collection of Christ-followers living in an area that encompassed most of modern-day Turkey who were struggling because of such mistreatment

So Peter wrote this letter to those believers to give them proper perspective, the divine perspective if you will, so that they would be encouraged and empowered to endure steadfastly in the faith

Our world today isn't all that different from their world regarding its hostility toward the followers of Christ

Perhaps the biggest difference is in the minds of Christ-followers who have been taught that God wants them to experience a life of ease here on earth -

That what God truly wants is for them to have a trouble-free life that is filled with nothing but health and wealth

And when reality sets in and trials arise many Christ-followers are prone to wail, "Why me!?" as they allow a root of bitterness to take hold in their hearts

Because, when you buy into the lie that you deserve nothing but happiness and fulfillment, suffering results in a form of dissonance that can lead one to question why God would allow such a thing to happen to one of his followers

But the key to 1Peter is found in 4:12-13 where Peter writes [**1Peter 4:12-13**]:

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

And that's more than the key to 1Peter it's the reality of this life

As Jesus told his disciples in the last part of John 16:33 [**John 16:33b**]-

"In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."

The message of 1Peter is that Christ-followers can live lives of hope in spite of the hostile world we live in and it's a message that is as much for Christ-followers today as it was for Peter's original, first-century audience

We need the practical counsel, comfort, and assurance that Peter's letter delivers because the reality is that each of us is either in the midst of a trial, have just seen a trial end, or are just about to enter a trial

And what Peter has written is authoritative - we can trust it completely and order our lives according to it

Because, as an apostle of Jesus Christ, Peter was commissioned to speak and write the very words of God himself and we should receive them with the same force as if Jesus were to come and speak them to us directly

So, as we begin, let me encourage you to open your Bible and join me in 1Peter chapter 1 (page 1014) so you can follow along as I read our passage for this morning [**1Peter 1:1-2**] –

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

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

If you have spent much time in the epistles, or letters, of the New Testament this appears to be a simple, standard greeting that tells us who the author and the recipients of the letter are and it is tempting to read right past it

But these first two verses contain so much more as they encapsulate the major themes of the remainder of the letter and set the reader up for what is to come in the body of the letter

So let's dig in and see what we can see from these opening verses –

First, we see that Christ-followers are sojourners in a strange land

I. Christ-followers are sojourners in a strange land

After introducing himself, Peter addresses his letter to "those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia"

Those five names represent four Roman provinces that border the Black Sea on the south in what is today known as the nation of Turkey

And the order of their listing indicates the likely path the messenger who was carrying the letter would have taken as he travelled through the provinces - starting by landing at a port in Pontus and travelling counterclockwise to Bithynia

The Greek word used here is *parepidemos* and it always refers to a temporary resident in a foreign place

We see it used this way in the Septuagint translation of **Genesis 23:4** where Abraham told the Hittites, *"I am a sojourner and foreigner among you..."*

And we see it in **Hebrews 11:13** where all the heroes of the faith from Abel to Abraham acknowledged they were *"strangers and exiles on the earth"*

So the word "exiles" is a good word as long as we are careful not to attach the idea of being forced to live in a foreign place as we might be prone to do since that is the normal usage of the word today

For that reason the word "sojourner" might better capture the idea of temporarily living away from one's true homeland and residing for a season as an alien in a foreign place

And Peter says his original readers are part of the “dispersion” which conveys the idea of sowing or scattering seeds

This Greek word is used three times in the New Testament

We find it first in **John 7:35** where the Jews were questioning Jesus’ meaning when he said they would seek but not find him

We find it also in **James 1:1** where James addresses his letter to “the twelve tribes in the dispersion”

In both of those cases, the meaning is the dispersion of the Jews into Gentile lands whether voluntarily to facilitate trade or forced upon them by conquering nations

But notice that Peter attaches an adjective to the word exiles he calls them “elect” exiles

That Greek word is used 22 times in the New Testament and it always refers to persons who are chosen by God from a group of other who are not chosen

In all but three instances where the word is used in relation to Jesus and one that speaks of elect angels, the elect are people who are chosen by God for inclusion among his people - in other words they are true Christ-followers

Undoubtedly, many of Peter’s original audience would hear echoes of the word’s use in the Greek Old Testament as it was used to refer to Israel as God’s chosen people

And they would have rightly concluded that Peter thought of them as having a privileged status before God that was at least equal to that enjoyed by the people whom God protected, preserved, and blessed in the Old Testament - Israel

So, in our passage Peter appears to use the word in the broader sense of all Christians, not just ethnically Jewish Christians, being scattered throughout the known world

And he pictures them living as pilgrims who are looking travelling toward and looking forward to their heavenly homeland

Compared to today, the dispersion in Peter’s day was really quite limited as there isn’t a place on earth where one could not find a single Christ-follower

That’s not to say that every people group has been reached for Christ because we know that the experts estimate there are still somewhere around 7,400 people groups who are considered to not have an indigenous community of believing Christians

But we have to admit that in a geographical sense the dispersion of God’s elect exiles covers the earth

And every one of those Christ-followers is both an alien and a sojourner upon the earth

That is to say, Christ-followers no longer belong to this world even though we continue to reside here for a time

In what we call his High Priestly Prayer found in John 17 Jesus says to the Father [**John 17:14-18**] –

I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.

We readily understand that Jesus was not of this world and that he was sent into the world by our heavenly Father

Likewise, Jesus says his true followers are no longer of this world but that he has sent them into the world

This is where we get the idea of being in the world but not of the world which tells us that we are to live as foreigners who are merely sojourning here

And a sojourner should always be distinct from the residents while we conduct our lives here

We aren’t called to be hermits who separate themselves from the world - that would actually be far easier in many ways to what we are called to do which is to live admirably in the world like Christ

Jesus sojourned on this earth for 33 years and yet he considered all the people and circumstances of the world in the light of eternity and conducted himself accordingly

And he leaves his followers in the world so that they might do likewise in community with other Christ-followers

One person put it this way: “We aren’t supposed to live in the world and go to church; we are meant to live in the church - the community of believers - and go out to the world”

We are the salt and light of the world that is here to witness to Christ

And to do that we need to engage with the world

It’s like the God said through the prophet Jeremiah in **Jeremiah 29:5-7** –

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

We must remain in the world but not be like the world in order to have a positive effect on the world

We can’t just blend into the world and have an effect; we must be different from the world

But we can’t be weird because weird is off-putting whereas different can be interesting and intriguing

So when you’re different you attract others but when you lapse into weirdness you actually repel others

Again, we see that in the life of Jesus who was so different from everyone else that people wanted to be near him

And, while he certainly had his detractors, he wasn’t some oddball who turned everyone off

Still, for all of that the world eventually crucified the Christ and the world remains a hostile place for his followers today

And we shouldn’t be surprised by that because Jesus told his followers what to expect from the world

Remember our theme verse for this letter **1Peter 4:12** where Peter says believers should not be surprised by the fiery trials they face

But let’s also look at **John 15:18-20** where Jesus taught:

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.”

Those first disciples went on to experience the hatred of the world as they all, except John, died as martyrs for Jesus

It’s not that the world didn’t try to kill John, but he miraculously survived and died of old age while exiled on Patmos

The Roman historian, Tacitus, spoke of people “hated for their crimes, whom the mob call Christians”

And Suetonius referred to Christians as “a race of men who belong to a new and evil superstition”

Then look at **Matthew 10:24-25** where we see Jesus teach what he referred to in **John 15:20** –

“A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.”

And a couple of verses before that in **Matthew 10:22** Jesus said very plainly “you will be hated by all for my name’s sake”

While we aren’t presently in danger of death because of our Christianity in this country, violence is ever increasing toward true followers of Christ globally

And Christ-followers are victims of rising hostility not only from secular groups in the U.S. but also from our government

We've seen bakers forced to violate their consciences, people driven from their careers for expressing biblical points of view, the Ten Commandments being removed from public display, a cross removed from a veterans' memorial in San Diego after the 9th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals held its display to be unconstitutional, and the list grows longer every day

And while it's not yet a crime to be a Christian in the U.S. those who are allied against us are continually working on making it so and they are currently winning more battles than they are losing in the war to silence biblical influence in our nation

We might well be tempted to wonder if following Christ is worth all the pain

And that's where this letter of 1Peter comes in as it provides comfort and hope to those who are following Christ and suffering for it

So let's look at our focus verses and see what keys to maintaining hope in this hostile world Peter provides us

II. Keys to maintaining hope while living here

Remember that biblical hope isn't a pie in the sky wish for something beneficial that may or may not happen

Far from being a desire for something uncertain, biblical hope is certainty of something that has simply not yet been realized

Hope as it is used in the Bible expresses confidence in some future good and the word "assurance" could easily be substituted where we see the word "hope"

People who are going through trials and tribulations need hope because feelings of hopelessness or the inability to triumph over or even change your present situation is devastating

And looking down to verse 3 [**1Peter 1:3**] which we will look at next week, we see that God has "*caused [Christ-followers] to be born again to a living hope...*"

Living hope is hope that can be active in the lives of all who have trusted in Christ and are living for him

And in his salutation, Peter gives us four keys to maintaining hope while we sojourn in this world

The first key to maintaining hope is the recognition that God has chosen us

If you are a true follower of Jesus Christ you are one of God's elect and an elect exile as Peter puts it

To put it simply, God has chosen you through no merit of your own to be the object of his mercy and favor

I don't intend to dig deeply into the doctrine of predestination today - that would take us too far afield and would require a whole lot more time than we have in one single sermon to work through

The whole argument over the balance of the seemingly contradictory themes of election and free will has smoldered and flamed for a very long time and I doubt that we would resolve it to everyone's satisfaction if we were to try

I came across a quote from Dr. J. Vernon McGee that I think strikes a balance on the subject and I would like to share it

There are certain things which I believe that to me are not contradictory, but they certainly are paradoxical. Election and free will happen to be one of those... There are some who put all their eggs in the basket of election. There are other who put all their eggs in the basket of free will. I'm not proposing to reconcile the two because I have discovered that I cannot. If you had met me the year that I entered seminary, or the year I graduated, I could have reconciled them for you. I never have been as smart as I was my first year and my last year in seminary. I knew it all then. I could reconcile election and free will, and it was a marvelous explanation. Now I've forgotten what it was. It was pretty silly, if you want to know the truth... You can argue about divine election and free will all you want to, but it works. You cannot make it work by arguing, but it sure works out in life.

Regardless of the debate over election and free will here's what I want you to understand from 1Peter 1 -

If you are a saved individual, your salvation is God's doing and your connection to him isn't dependent on your feeble grasp on him but on his strong, sure grasp on you

I once sat under a preacher who illustrated this truth by bringing his toddler daughter onto the platform with him
And after she lifted up her little arms and took hold of his thumbs, he began to swing her out into space over the edge of the platform

And his little daughter was delighted - you could tell this was a common activity in their household

But the point was that the little girl was safe not because of her strong grip on her father's thumbs but because he, unbeknownst to her, had wrapped his finger securely around her wrists

She thought she was hanging onto him, and she was, but more importantly, he had hold of her

The comfort that comes from the assurance that we are in God's grip should help us to maintain our hope in spite of the hostility we face from the world

The second key to maintaining hope is that we are being sanctified by the Holy Spirit

Of course, sanctification begins with salvation as salvation is the first, crucial work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer but sanctification doesn't stop with salvation - it's a life-long process in everyone who follows Christ

And every Christ-follower should see evidence of the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in their life

And as we see how the Spirit is working in us gradually to free us more and more from whatever sin remains in us and to make us more like Christ we come to see how our whole existence is lived in presence of God

No matter how trying our circumstances or how deep our sorrow might get we are assured that every hardship is turned into a tool for the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit

Romans 8:28 comes readily to mind in this regard but so do **Hebrews 12:10-11** which speaks of discipline that is painful in the present but leads to the "peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it"

Or **James 1:2-4** where we read about the trials we face –

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.

The indwelling Holy Spirit is the source of the Christ-follower's supernatural power that enables us to avoid walking according to the flesh - or as the unsaved, hostile world lives

And when we see ourselves becoming more like Christ in our very nature as evidenced by our attitudes and actions, we are assured of the presence of the Holy Spirit in us and that helps us remember who we are in Christ and to whom we belong

Of course, that means that our lives will consequently be moving ever more in line with obedience to Christ

But, we know, as did Peter's original audience, how often we fall short of that standard and just how incomplete our obedience is

In fact, the more we mature in Christ the more the Holy Spirit makes us aware of how far short we fall and how full and complete obedience will not be attained in this life

And that leads us to our third key for maintaining hope in this world - our sprinkling with Christ's blood

In the Old Testament, the sprinkling of blood was a reminder that a life had been given as payment for sin and the blood was typically sprinkled on the mercy seat above the Ark of the Covenant

In only three cases was blood ceremoniously sprinkled onto people themselves

1. in the covenant ceremony at Sinai when Moses sprinkled the people to initiate them into God's covenant
2. in the ceremony of ordination for Aaron and his sons as priests
3. in the purification ceremony for the leper who had been healed from leprosy

Peter most likely had the third ceremony in view as believers have already been initiated into God's family at the moment of salvation and all believers are considered to be priests

Besides, skin disease was serious enough to exclude the afflicted from the community - they were forced to live alone outside the city and to shout "Unclean! Unclean!" whenever they moved about

And this is an excellent way to illustrate cleansing from any defilement that would disrupt one's fellowship with God and his people

King David might well have had a similar thought in mind when he penned **Psalm 51:7** –

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow

Peter is alluding to the spiritual defilement of sin and saying that, since as sojourners, we are so frequently defiled by sin that we can rely on the continuing sprinkling of the blood of Christ to bring about restored fellowship with God

He's talking about the ever-present assurance that our sins are forgiven and we are welcome in God's presence **1John 1:7**

God's plan for those who follow his Son is not obedience that is marred and scarred by unforgiven sin

Rather, it is a life lived daily in obedience whose failings are cleansed by the blood of Christ

And, the fourth truth we must take note of is that this is all according to God's plan

We read in verse 2 [**1Peter 1:2**] that our sojourning in this hostile world is according to "*the foreknowledge of God the Father*"

Given all the disappointments we face both from without and within we might well become discouraged until we are reminded that God is in control of it all

What a blessing and encouragement it is to know that the entire triune Godhead is involved in our experiences no matter how daunting they might seem to us

I'm reminded of one of my favorite verses which is **Psalm 139:16** which tells us that all the days that were formed for us were written in God's book before we were born

Technically, that refers to the number of our days - the length of our lives -

But logic tells us if God knows the number of our days he also knows the content of those days and that is a real encouragement when facing trials

Conclusion

Peter closes his greeting with the blending of Old Testament and New Testament blessings that are a staple in the letters of the apostles - May grace and peace be multiplied to you

Grace and peace are both underserved spiritual blessings that God bestows upon us and if anyone understood the value of those blessings it was Peter

Of all the apostles, Peter knew all too well the pain of having denied his Lord and the grace and peace that he had received so it's quite compelling that Peter wrote this letter to help God's elect exiles as they suffered all kinds of trials

And he closes his letter by bookending it with grace as he admonishes his readers to stand firm in the grace of God [**1Peter 5:12**]

We may be second-class citizens in this world but our citizenship isn't of this world and in the remainder of his letter Peter is going to show us more about how to maintain our hope as sojourners in exile

Over the next three weeks we see that Peter focuses on our salvation and next week we will be looking at The Security of Salvation that we enjoy as we consider verses 3-5

Let's pray

Hebrews 11:1-16 (page 1007)

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God. By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.