

January 3, 2016

Sojourners God's Chosen Exiles

1 Peter 1:1 – 2

This morning we begin a new series in the book of 1st Peter. The last time we were in 1st Peter we spent most of a year in this book and I don't anticipate a shorter journey this time. 1st Peter has a lot to say about our life of faith in Christ. One commentator describes this book as "*the most condensed New Testament resume of the Christian faith and the conduct it inspires*".¹ Martin Luther was of the opinion that it contained everything a Christian needed to know, a strong statement considering his love of the letter to the Romans. 1st Peter is a remarkable letter that manages to cover all the key doctrines of the faith in a fairly short space, and yet conveys a depth of love and encouragement that is intensely personal and comforting.

This letter was written to comfort and encourage and reassure Christians in the first century who were experiencing pressure and persecution and suffering for their faith. It's a letter written to hurting people. They're going through some things. There were physical and psychological pressures. Real persecution against Christians was flaring up. At the most favorable level they were viewed as oddballs and slightly off by their neighbors. At the worst they were viewed as subversive and treasonous by the government. They were being marginalized and excluded in society. They were dealing with the temptations and seductions of life in a culture that did not value Christ. They were swimming against the prevailing tide of pagan world views. They were dealing with tensions and inconsistent behavior in the church; and there were doubts about the reliability of the promises of God and the future. And along with all this, they were contending with Satan's usual temptations and snares.

So Peter writes to them. He writes to the Christians who are living in what we know now as Turkey. It was known as Asia Minor and was part of the Roman Empire during Peter's day, divided into 14 or fifteen provinces. We don't know how churches came to exist there. We do know from Scripture that Paul ministered in the south of the province of Galatia, and a little in the province of Asia, but that he was later forbidden by the Holy Spirit to minister throughout Asia Minor. And there's no biblical or historical records that indicate that Peter ever visited these provinces. And yet there are churches. One thought is that these churches were planted by those who were saved on the day of Pentecost in Jerusalem where Luke lists those from Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia. Since Peter was the primary spokesperson that day and leader of the church in Jerusalem, some argue that he was the one who took oversight over these churches. Others believe there were also evangelists from Paul's ministry that spread the message in Asia Minor.

But how they came to be is not as important as that they came to be. And these Christians were suffering for their faith. So Peter writes a letter. And this morning, we're going to take an overlook as it were of this letter to give you the broad scope of what Peter is saying. And then we'll take it verse by verse as we go through this letter this year. And what Peter is telling them in this letter consists of three things: perspective, place, and provision. Essentially we can categorize what Peter is saying under these three headings: perspective, place and provision. He's writing to people who are suffering, people who are being ostracized by society, people who are beginning to question this Christian thing. And what they need is someone to give them perspective on their issues, remind them of their place in the world, and offer hope and provision for making it through these trials. And although this is an overview of the whole letter, we see these three things operating in these first two verses.

Peter knows that what these believers need, what we need, first of all, is perspective. When life is hard, when things go south, when it looks like evil is winning, we need to have the right perspective. And the first thing we learn is that suffering is a normal part of life. Right away Peter brings this perspective to bear: *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 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.*² One of the first things Peter talks about is the fire of suffering that comes into our lives. This is a major theme throughout this letter.

1 Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1st Peter*, (InterVarsity Press, 1988), 15.

2 1 Peter 1:6-7 ESV

In chapter two he tells us to expect suffering: *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.*³ In chapter 3 he says: *For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.*⁴ In chapter four he warns us not to be blindsided by suffering: *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.*⁵ And in chapter five he reminds us that suffering is inevitable: *And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*⁶

Peter addresses this letter to the '*elect exiles of the dispersion*'. That word is Diaspora, and in its broadest interpretation, refers to all Jews who are living outside their homeland. That is exactly what John referred to in his gospel where the Jewish religious leaders were wondering where Jesus was going and if He was intending to go to "*the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks.*"⁷ However in the rest of the New Testament, the word seems to refer more specifically to Jewish Christians who were scattered over the Roman Empire rather than to Jews in general. We find this term used in chapter eight of the book of Acts when persecution arose in Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen and the Christians began to be scattered or dispersed throughout Judea and Samaria, and those who were dispersed went everywhere preaching the word.⁸ James, in his letter, writes to the '*twelve tribes in the Dispersion*'⁹, clearly referring to Jewish Christians who were scattered throughout the Empire.

These were people, uprooted from their homeland, living as aliens and exiles, the words Peter uses in chapter two, among cultures that were distinctly non-Christian. They were experiencing the suffering common to many who are forced to live in countries not their own. Immigrants of that time were described by two words: *parepidemos*, which means someone who is sojourning in a strange place, a foreigner or exile; and *paroikos*, which describes someone who lives in a place without the right of citizenship, an alien. As a result, they were experiencing suffering, not only due to discrimination and marginalization by the culture around them, but also because this Christian faith was seen by the ruling authorities as subversive to the welfare of the State. Like many immigrant peoples, they were subjects of slander, and suspicion and outright lies by the native populations. There were incredible pressures to conform to the local customs and religions, and they had virtually no legal standing in the local courts.

And so Peter writes to give these believers some perspective on their suffering. Life is full of suffering, don't be surprised, this is normal. And in the letter he gives them four reasons suffering happens. First of all in chapter one he tells them that this is God's refining work. These trials have come he says, *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.* Why do Christians suffer? Because God refines our faith. He puts it through the fire. And it is only there that we discover that life's greatest sufferings work to write life's deepest truths on our souls. John Piper writes, "*I have never heard anyone say, "The deepest and rarest and most satisfying joys of my life have come in times of extended ease and earthly comfort." Nobody says that. It isn't true." What's true is what Samuel Rutherford said when he was put in the cellars of affliction: "The Great King keeps his wine there" -- not in the courtyard where the sun shines. What's true is what Charles Spurgeon said: "They who dive in the sea of affliction bring up rare pearls."*"¹⁰

In chapter two Peter says the second reason we experience suffering is because of indwelling sin. *Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.*¹¹ Suffering happens because the sin that lives in us is always resisting the work of the Holy Spirit in us. Paul, in the book of Galatians tells us that, '*...the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.*'¹² We want to obey, we long to obey, and yet we find many times that we do not obey.

3 1 Peter 2:21 ESV

4 1 Peter 3:17 ESV

5 1 Peter 4:12 ESV

6 1 Peter 5:10 ESV

7 John 7:35 ESV

8 Acts 8:1-4 ESV

9 James 1:1

10 <http://www.desiringgod.org/messages/why-we-can-rejoice-in-suffering>

11 1 Peter 2:11 ESV

12 Galatians 5:17 ESV

The third reason suffering happens is because of the nature of the unredeemed culture in which we live. The pagan culture in which they lived, and in which we live, for the most part, rejects the values we Christians hold. Peter tells them in chapter four, '*For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you.*'¹³ The culture around us feels in some way rebuked by our thinking and lifestyle and is always putting the pressure on to conform to their thinking and lifestyle. And when we don't, they malign us, they speak evil of us, they call us ignorant and backward and hateful. The truth of that is in the news everyday.

There's an eternal source of suffering. God is at work refining and purifying our faith. He ordains all things, even our suffering to prove the glory of His grace. There's an internal source of suffering; indwelling sin is always resisting that refining work. There's an external source of suffering. The culture around us is pressuring us to conform to their thinking and way of life. And finally there is an infernal source of suffering, Satan's strategies. Peter tells us in chapter five: '*Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*'¹⁴ There is a real devil and he's really after us. Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean that there isn't someone after you. There is a reality of the demonic forces in the world that are daily attacking our faith, sabotaging our joy, undermining our confidence and trying to derail our walk. And Peter is saying, 'You need to have perspective on this thing. You need to understand that the things you suffer in this world are working for your good and the glory of God'.

We need perspective, and we need to understand our place in this world. And our place, Peter says, is that we are elect exiles: '*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles...*' The first thing we need to know about who we are is that we are the elect, chosen people of God. Chosen exiles. The word exile we've already seen defined as people who are sojourning in a strange place, foreigners or strangers. In other words, Christians are those who are temporary residents, who are in the culture but don't belong to the culture. They are sojourners. Someone living in one place but headed somewhere else. The way Peter uses this word here to describe these believers meant that he saw them as strangers in a strange land. It was a comment, really, on the relationship between the Christian and the surrounding culture. He uses the term to distance his readers from their surrounding culture. Not as a way to withdraw from culture, but to set them apart from the culture.

As we'll see as we get into this book, Peter is all about engaging the culture, while at the same time keeping your identity as a sojourner. On the one hand as sojourners we resist the pressure to conform to this age. On the other, we accept the responsibility to engage the culture for the sake of the gospel. You see, Peter, being a Jew, was well aware of his people's strong sense of keeping themselves separate from the culture. If you were Jew, you would keep your interaction with Gentiles to a bare minimum. They understood the dangers of becoming too familiar with the culture. But they completely missed the fact that they were to be a blessing in the world. They were always praying, 'God bless us'; forgetting that the point of the blessing was that they would be a blessing. They should have been praying Psalm 67: '*May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.*'

From chapter one to chapter 2 verse 10, Peter hammers away at the identity of believers, who we are in the world. We are chosen exiles, protected by the power of God, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. From chapter 2 verse 11 to chapter four verse eleven, he focuses on our responsibilities as believers in the world, talking about keeping our behavior excellent among the Gentiles, and submitting for the Lord's sake to kings and governors, and honoring all men and not returning evil for evil. And from there to the end he talks about the believer's relationship in community. Know who you are, know how to live, and do it in community. You see, there is the very real danger that our identity as sojourners would be swallowed up by the pressures to conform to the culture around us. It's uncomfortable to be a stranger in a strange land. People want acceptance. They want to be welcomed. They don't want to be ostracized or marginalized or demonized. But Peter is saying, 'Your position in the world is as an exile, a sojourner'.

But we are not just any exile or sojourner. We are chosen exiles, he says. What Peter wants us to understand is that it is our relationship to Christ that determines our relationship to the world. And the most significant thing about our relationship to Christ is that we have been chosen.

13 1 Peter 4:3-4 ESV

14 1 Peter 5:8 ESV

What that means is that our salvation is first based on the fact that we were chosen. Not first of all that we chose Him, but that He chose us. As Jesus told His disciples '*You did not choose Me, but I chose you...*'¹⁵ The foundation of our choosing is that first He chose us. And He chose us before we could do anything to either merit that choice or disqualify ourselves from that choice. Peter says that we were chosen or elected, *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*. This is not a foreknowing by God that is simply a looking ahead, or foresight that is limited by human will. That is, God did not look down the corridors of time and according to His foreknowledge of events, see each person's ultimate decision to follow or not follow Christ, and then based on their decision, choose them. The doctrine of election, or predestination that the Bible speaks about repeatedly, is this: ***Before creation, before any human choices were made, God selected from among those humans He would create, those whom He would redeem, justify, sanctify, and glorify in Jesus Christ – and by implication, those He would not.***

The doctrine of election maintains that God is the one who determines who will be saved. '*I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. So then it does not depend upon the man who wills, or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy.*' Rom. 9:15-16 And so it is not up to the desire of the person, '*...who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but God.*' God is the one who ordains the Christian into forgiveness, '*...and as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.*' Acts 13:48 And in Romans chapter 8, Paul gives us the shorter catechism of election: '*For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined, He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified.*' Romans 8:29-30

It is a decision of free and sovereign grace, based upon God's own will and mercy – it is absolutely apart from any merit or ability or goodness in those He chooses. We are undeserving of salvation. God does not owe sinners any mercy of any kind, only condemnation; and so it is a wonder that He should choose to save anyone. And the knowledge that God chooses should cause us to respond to Him with profound gratitude and humility, and also with great confidence and assurance, knowing that He who began a good work in us would finish it – and we are at peace knowing that all things work together for good for us – and our days are filled with a deep and powerful joy knowing that one day we will be with Him in glory.

But this does not mean that we do not in turn need to choose to follow Christ. From the Old Testament when God told His people, '*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live...*'¹⁶; to the New Testament where Peter preaches to the crowd on the day of Pentecost and when they ask him how they can be saved he replies, '*...Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.*'¹⁷ The Bible makes it clear concerning salvation, that there is something God does – and something we must do. He has chosen us, but we must choose Him. And one proof that we are chosen, is that we choose. D.L. Moody said it like this: '*The elect are the whosoever wills, the non-elect are the whosoever won'ts*'. Or as Spurgeon once said, '*...I am quite certain that, if God had not chosen me, I should never have chosen Him; and I am sure He chose me before I was born, or else He never would have chosen me afterwards; and He must have elected me for reasons unknown to me, for I never could find any reason in myself why He should have looked upon me with special love.*'

Then Peter adds that this choosing is '*in the sanctification of the Spirit*'. In other words, our being chosen is practically applied to us through the work of the Holy Spirit. That is, God chose us before time began, and then when the time was right for each of us to be born, there was a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives to set us apart for His purpose by drawing our hearts to Himself. And we were all brought to faith by so many different means – some may have heard the gospel as a child and committed their lives to Christ; some heard the Good News on television when a Billy Graham crusade was on; some may have had a neighbor tell them about Jesus – but in each and every case, the Holy Spirit was at work setting up the situations and opportunities, working in their lives even before they came to faith, putting a yearning in their hearts for God so that they would, in time, respond to the gospel.

15 John 15:16 ESV

16 Deuteronomy 30:19 ESV

17 Acts 2:38 ESV

That is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is very clear about this – Jesus said, *'No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him.'*¹⁸ And the Father sends the Holy Spirit to draw all those whom He has elected to Jesus, and apply redemption to them, setting them apart from sin and purifying them for a life of service to God. *'But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.'*¹⁹ And then he says, the point of the choosing, the goal of the sanctifying work of the Spirit, is that we would obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood. *'...for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood.'* We were chosen by God, for obedience and for sprinkling with His blood.

Now we probably understand the obedience part, but what about the sprinkling part? For obedience and for sprinkling. Peter reaches back into the history of the people of God when they were camped around Mt Sinai for this part. If you remember when we went through the book of Exodus, the children of Israel had reached Mt Sinai and Moses had gone up the mountain and come down with the words of God and the people had said, 'All that God commands we will do'. Then Moses took some animals and sacrificed them. He took half of the blood and sprinkled it on the altar and the other half he took and sprinkled on the people. This was significant. What this meant was that the people were cleansed, and they were claimed. The blood of Christ cleanses us, and it claims us as His own. We were chosen for obedience to Jesus Christ, and we are claimed by Him as His own possession. Everytime we celebrate the Table of the Lord with the cup of the New Covenant, as we'll do shortly, that is proclaiming to us and to the principalities and powers that we have been cleansed and claimed by Jesus Christ.

And that brings us to the final thing here – provision. How are we going to make it in this world, living as strangers and exiles, sojourners in the world, going through the fires of affliction, and not falter in our faith, not be compromised by our trials or conformed to the culture? How are we going to live in joyful obedience to Christ? How are we going to make it? **Provision.** God has made provision for us, and that provision is God Himself. You see, the whole trinity is involved in my life. Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Father knows us – we are chosen according the foreknowledge of God Peter says. When the Bible talks about this kind of knowing, it is with relationship in view. Of course God knows everyone and everything, but God knows some in a more intimate and personal way. It's a knowing that speaks to a relationship whereby God chooses people, and cares for them and provides for them and protects them as a father. Peter wanted his readers and us to know that we are chosen and loved and accepted by God the Father. And this is before we could do anything to earn this or be disqualified from it.

And He does this through the work of the Holy Spirit, drawing us to God, setting us apart for His purpose and pleasure, working in us to conform us more and more into His image, bringing us into obedience to Christ. The Holy Spirit works in us to bring us into the obedience of faith where we surrender to Christ and trust Him for salvation and then go on to live a life of obedience to Christ. Our ambition begins to be one of pleasing Him, making Him Lord of our lives, wanting His will and His way, living as those who are sprinkled by the blood of Jesus, as those who have been claimed by Jesus Christ. This is our provision. Everything we need to make it, God has provided in Himself.

I want to close by looking ahead just a bit to what I think sums this up in chapter five. Turn to 1 Peter 5 verse 10: *'And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.'* Notice three things here – present suffering, sufficient grace and ultimate glory. These three elements run all the way through this book from the first verse to the last. Suffering, grace and glory. You will suffer. There's some time of suffering you will go through and Peter says, 'It only lasts a little while'. Expect trouble and difficulty, but expect it under the hand of the God of all grace who has called you to His eternal glory. In other words, there is stuff going on down here that is meant to prepare you for eternity up there. There are things that look like trouble down here, but they look like glory up there. We don't understand all the time how it all works together, but it does. Because this God of all grace is at work doing four things – restoring, confirming, strengthening, and establishing.

18 John 6:44 ESV

19 2 Thessalonians 2:13 ESV

First of all Peter says this God of all grace will **restore** you. Restore here is a word that was used of setting a broken bone or repairing a torn net. In other words, God will repair you. Do you need repairing? I do. That's good news for broken people. We've got a lot that's broken and torn about us. We desperately need repair. And that's the promise. He'll restore us. He'll repair us. Secondly He promises to **confirm** you. This is a word that means to make something stable, to strengthen something so that it stands firm. In other words, the God of all grace promises to set you firmly on the path and you can be secure in the knowledge that He has chosen you. It means that He will make good on His promise that all who believe in Him will never be disappointed.

Thirdly He promises to **strengthen** you. which means He will make you strong. There is the sense that this is a strengthening of the soul, an inward strength. Oh how we need strength of soul. There are so many temptations that come at us that simply overpower our weak wills, and we are very much like the guy who said, I can resist anything but temptation. God does not anticipate that we should live this Christian life in our own strength – but by the strength with God Himself supplies. Lastly, He promises to **establish** you, which literally means to lay a foundation that is immovable, and fixed, and that cannot be moved, disturbed, or shaken by anything. What He does is make you stormproof. This word is used in Matthew 7 where the Lord describes the man whose house is built on the rock. *'Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man who built His house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house, and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded [established] upon that rock.'* Matthew 7:24-25 The storms will come. The floods will rise. The winds will howl. He has not promised a storm-free life. But He has promised to make you stormproof.

We need to have the right perspective in this life. In this world we will have suffering. In this world we will have trouble. We shouldn't have any illusions about that. You'll be wrecked if you do. But we need to know that in this world of suffering and trouble we walk as God's chosen exiles. God Himself chose us. Our place, our standing, is that we are loved absolutely and accepted unconditionally by the God of all grace who is at work to refine us, to purify us, and bring us all the way home. He Himself is our provision. And He has promised to restore us, confirm us, strengthen us and establish us.

Our gracious God and Father,

Grant us we pray the perspective we desperately need in this life of faith here on earth. Don't let us be blindsided by the suffering and evil we experience as though some strange thing were happening. Remind us of Your unfailing love and faithfulness. Remind us that although we are exiles and strangers in this world, we are chosen and beloved by You, and everything in our lives works for our good and Your glory. We are broken, but You have promised to repair us; we are shaky and unstable, but You have promised to make us firm and unmoving; we are weak, but You have promised to strengthen us; we are prone to be tossed about in the storm, but You have promised to make us storm-proof. You have cleansed us and claimed us and called us to be sojourners on this earth. Be gracious to us and bless us and make Your face to shine upon us, that Your way may be known on earth, Your saving power among all nations, we pray in the precious name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

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