

Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1:1-12 (NASB - New American Standard Bible)

¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen ²according 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 fullest measure.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ⁸and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

¹⁰As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, ¹¹seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. ¹²It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.

Good morning, everyone. It is good to see you all again. Today, I am beginning a new sermon series. My previous series went through the Epistle of James, my favorite book of the New Testament. The next book after James is the First Epistle of Peter, and I decided that I would like to go through this book with you all. There are a few themes in this book that have really caught my attention, and for quite some time I have been wanting to study them in more detail. So, now is my chance to do that. Let's study this book together. By the way, this epistle was one of the favorites of the founding pastor of our church. That's another reason why I chose to study this book now, right after we celebrated our church anniversary.

First, let us ask the question: who is the author of this epistle? It is Simon Peter, one of the original twelve disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was the leader of the twelve and had a special relationship with Jesus. His original name was Simon, but Jesus gave him the name Cephas or Peter, which means “rock.” “Cephas” is a name in the Aramaic language, a language related to Hebrew and which was the main language spoken among the Jews at this period of time. The name “Peter” is the Greek version of this name.

Peter calls himself “an apostle of Jesus Christ.” This is a very special designation. While the term “apostle” can simply mean “messenger,” Jesus specially designated twelve men among His wider group of disciples to be called “apostles” (we read that in Luke 6:13). Note the words “of Jesus Christ.” In the New Testament, the office of apostle is the only one where you sometimes find this phrase “of Jesus Christ” attached to it. You never see “teacher of Jesus Christ” or “prophet of Jesus Christ.” This term “apostle of Jesus Christ” designates a special office indeed, with unique authority. Bible scholars note that there are some special features to this office of apostle: 1) they were specifically called by Christ Himself (we see that in the call of the 12 and in the call of Paul on the road to Damascus) and 2) they had seen the risen Christ after the resurrection (you can look at 1 Corinthians 9:1 and 15:7-9 for more about that); 3) the apostles governed the early church, and 4) they had authority to speak and write the words of God, equal in authority to the Old Testament scriptures.¹

¹ From the *ESV® Study Bible*, Crossway; study note on Romans 1:1.

My second question is this: to whom was this epistle written? In verse 1, we read that it was written “to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” I have a map on the screen over here. Today, this region is known as Turkey, but the Turks didn’t occupy this area until the Middle Ages. This map is showing the various provinces that existed during Roman times. In the west, you see a province called Asia – the main city there was Ephesus, on the coast, though there are other cities you may remember that are mentioned in your New Testament. In the north, along the Black Sea coast, you see the regions of Bithynia and Pontus. In the center, you see Galatia – the Apostle Paul wrote his Epistle to the Galatians to the churches in that area. In the east, you can see the region of Cappadocia. There were churches throughout this region, and it is to these churches that the Apostle Peter is writing his epistle.

He calls these people “those who reside as aliens ... who are chosen.” The New International Version translates this phrase “To God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces ...” Bible commentators say that the idea here is not that these people were literally exiled from somewhere else, but that we Christians reside as aliens/exiles on this earth until we can come to our true home with Christ in the future.

My *ESV Study Bible* has this to say about these people:

Peter is not speaking of a literal exile (cf. 1 Pet. 1:17; 2:11). Believers long for their true home in the new world that is coming and for their end-time inheritance, for they do not conform to the values and worldviews of this present evil age. Believers are not only exiles but God’s “elect exiles.” They are his chosen people, just as Israel is designated as God’s chosen people in the Old Testament (Deut. 4:37; 7:6-8; Ps. 106:5; Isa. 43:20; 45:4).²

The audience for this epistle is mostly Gentile Christians, but there are also Jewish Christians among them. In his epistle, Peter frequently uses Old Testament language for Israel and applies that language to the Christian church. We will see examples of that as we progress through this series of sermons on 1 Peter.

Let’s move on to verse 2, where the Apostle Peter addresses these exiles or aliens, who, he says, are chosen “²according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood...” Note that all three persons of the Trinity are mentioned here: the Father, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ. All are intimately involved in our lives as disciples of Christ.

There are a few verses in the New Testament that mention all three persons of the Trinity. Perhaps the one that is most familiar to you is in the Great Commission, in Matthew 28:19 – “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit...” God the Father ... His Son ... and the Holy Spirit. Another verse where we see all three persons is in the benediction of 2 Corinthians 13:14 – “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” God, His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit.

There is one more verse I would like to take a look at. It is 1 Corinthians 6:11 – “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.” Here is God ... and the Spirit ... and the Lord Jesus Christ. Note that this verse says we are washed and sanctified and justified “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.” And this is accomplished “in the Spirit of our God.”

² From the *ESV® Study Bible*, Crossway; study note on 1 Peter 1:1.

This is stated again in today's passage, in 1 Peter 1:2, but with some different wording. Let's read that verse again: 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..."

Peter states that the exiles/aliens to whom he is writing this letter were chosen of God, chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." This is language reminiscent of the Old Testament covenant God made with His chosen people, Israel. Let me read a quote from New Testament scholar Thomas Schreiner, who comments on this word "foreknowledge":

We should begin by observing the covenantal dimensions of the word. The word "know" in Hebrew often refers to God's covenantal love bestowed upon his people (cf. Gen 18:19; Jer 1:5; Amos 3:2). The rich associations of that term continue in the New Testament. That foreordination also is involved is clear from Acts 2:23, where foreknowledge is paired with predestination. ... Therefore, when Peter said that believers are elect [chosen] "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father," he emphasized God's sovereignty and initiative in salvation. [Christian] believers are elect because God the Father has set his covenantal affection upon them.³

The emphasis here is on God's sovereignty and initiative in salvation. It is He who chose us, just as He had chosen His people Israel in the Old Testament. The people of Israel entered into a covenant relationship with God at Mount Sinai, in which the people promised to obey God's commands and God promised to care for His people. In a similar way today, we Christians experience God's covenantal love toward us. This gives us confidence that He will continue to love us and care for us during our time as exiles and aliens on this earth.

The next phrase I want to look at in verse 2 is that we are chosen "by the sanctifying work of the Spirit." Sanctification is one of the primary works of the Holy Spirit. As I said last week, it is by the power of the Holy Spirit within us that we are made holy, that we are consecrated to God, set apart from this sinful world to live God-honoring lives.

The third key phrase in verse 2 is that we are chosen so that we would "obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood." The first step of obedience is our conversion to Christ, when we turn away from our sin and follow Him. And then we commit our lives to following His teachings, as I pointed out last week. This verse also tells us that we are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ. It is His sacrifice on the cross that pays the penalty for our sin.

When Peter uses this imagery of sprinkling with blood, he seems to be alluding the scene in the book of Exodus when the old covenant was inaugurated at Mount Sinai with the shedding of blood. Let's read Exodus 24:3-8 – ³Then Moses came and recounted to the people all the words of the Lord and all the ordinances; and all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do!" ⁴Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. Then he arose early in the morning, and built an altar at the foot of the mountain with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the Lord. ⁶Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and the other half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" ⁸So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words."

1 Peter 1:1-2 is foundational. God is sovereign and salvation is initiated by Him. We are loved by God and chosen by God, we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, we have been sprinkled with the

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), pp. 53–54.

blood of Jesus, who is the sacrifice for our sins, and we live lives in obedience to Him. We live as exiles and aliens on this earth, looking forward to our future home with Jesus. These ideas are the grounding for everything else that we will look at in the First Epistle of Peter. Peter ends his opening statement with this prayer at the end of verse 2 – “May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.” Grace and peace – in full.

Let’s now read verses 3-5 – “³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Wow – Peter really packs a lot of theology into every sentence he writes. Through God’s great mercy, He “has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

According to God’s great grace and mercy, He caused us to be reborn as new creatures in Christ (2nd Corinthians 5:17 says, “Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”).

We have “a living hope” – we don’t live by wishful thinking but we have a hope that is grounded in a faithful God and His promises. This reminds me of that marvelous chapter in Hebrews: chapter 11 which talks about faith and gives numerous examples of people who lived by faith. Hebrews 11:1 & 3 – “¹Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen... ³By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible.” The chapter goes on to give the testimonies of many Old Testament saints and how they lived by faith, each with a different story – some of them suffered martyrdom and others had unique triumphs after periods of difficulty. In the middle of the chapter, we read this in verses 13 & 16 – “¹³All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ... ¹⁶But 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 a city for them.” That sounds like the same hope that Peter describes at the beginning of his epistle.

In Hebrews, chapter 12, those saints from chapter 11 are called a “great cloud of witnesses” who testify that the life of faith is worth living and then the Christians reading the letter are given these words of hope in verses 1-3 – “¹Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³For consider Him who has endured such hostility by sinners against Himself, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

What we read in Hebrews 11 and 12 runs parallel to Peter’s words in our passage today. Let’s read 1 Peter 1:3 again – “³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ...” Our new birth to a living hope comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It is through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross for our sins, followed by His resurrection which proves His victory over sin and death, that makes our new birth and our living hope possible. Because Jesus was raised from the dead, those of us who have placed our trust in Him are assured that we will be with Him in our heavenly home in the future.

Verse 4 says we have obtained “an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away,” which is “reserved in heaven for you.” Our spot in heaven is reserved. Have you made your reservation for heaven? Have you trusted Christ as your Lord and Savior? Have you turned away from your sin, confessed it, and received His forgiveness? If you have not yet done so, then after the service today please talk to our pastor or one of the council members or the person you find at the “Lift/Prayer” sign at the back of the auditorium and we can show you the way to a right relationship with God.

Verse 5 says we are “protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” We were saved when we confessed our sins and put our faith in Christ, but our salvation will be fully realized at the end of time when Jesus returns and restores all things. The full realization of our salvation will involve new bodies and complete freedom from all corruption of sin. I am reminded of 1 John 3:2-3 where we read what happens when Christ returns – “²Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He [Christ] appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. ³And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” Let’s keep our hope fixed on Christ.

Let’s move on to 1 Peter 1:6-7 – “⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

The churches in this region were experiencing persecution and other trials, which is why Peter wanted to remind them that they have been chosen of God and they have a sure inheritance that is imperishable and will not fade away – with this confidence, they can be sustained through various difficulties. Verse 6 suggests that it *might be necessary* that they experience these trials and verse 7 says that such trials will test their faith as through fire and that this testing will, in the end, prove their faith. This is actually the desirable course: the testing and proving of our faith is something more precious than even gold.

This reminds me of James 1:2-4 – “²Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, ³knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”

Romans 5:3-5 has some related things to say on this matter – “³And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Tribulations and trials don’t feel good, but they prove our faith and they bring about some desirable character traits: perseverance, proven character, hope. Again, there is that word: Hope.

Let’s return to 1 Peter and read verses 8 and 9 – “⁸And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.” The Christians in this region had not seen Jesus in the flesh, but they love Him and believe in Him. In John 20:29, Jesus had this to say to Doubting Thomas after he was finally able to see the risen Lord – ²⁹Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”

Let's read the last part of today's passage, 1 Peter 1:10-12 – “¹⁰As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, ¹¹seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. ¹²It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.”

The angels marvel at God's unique creation of mankind. They marvel also at God's provision of salvation for men and women. Through the revelation of the Holy Spirit, who is called “the Spirit of Christ,” the Old Testament prophets made their predictions of the coming grace that God was going to provide through the coming Messiah. Here in verse 12, we read that it was revealed to those ancient prophets that the message that was given to them was not just for themselves and their generation but primarily for the people of the first century A.D. and beyond, people like the audience to whom Peter was writing this epistle: Christians. The Holy Spirit who is sent from heaven spoke through the Old Testament prophets and spoke through the New Testament apostles and evangelists bringing the gospel message to people needing salvation.

I have come to the end of my message today.

What are some of the main lessons that we have learned in today's passage from 1st Peter?

- We reside as aliens on this earth until we join Christ in our heavenly home.
- Like Israel of old, we Christians have been chosen of God to enjoy His covenantal love.
- Salvation is the work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – the Father's choice, the Son's sacrificial death and victorious resurrection, and the Spirit's sanctifying work in our lives.
- Although we have many trials in this life, we can remain steadfast with a “Living Hope” grounded in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and the promise of our own resurrection in the future.
- This promise of eternal life is the special inheritance that we have obtained, and it is imperishable and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for us.
- The Holy Spirit spoke through the Old Testament prophets, prophesying the coming of the Christ and then He spoke through the New Testament apostles, bringing the gospel message to us.
- Trials should be welcomed because they produce perseverance and they prove our faith.
- The outcome of a life of faithfulness will, in the future, be our ultimate salvation when we join Christ in heaven.