

Sermon – 1 PETER 1:1-12, Leroy Coote 31 January 2021

The definition of an exile means that someone has been forced away from home. This means home comforts are gone and following your home country's religion might be fraught with danger. In many countries around the world, Christians are being forced not to follow Christian beliefs otherwise it will cost them their lives. While our lives are not at stake yet, there are many scenarios in our state where the Christian Message is being stopped from being talked about. In my near 20 years of ordained ministry, I have seen the reduction of lunchtime Christian groups in schools due to government intervention. I have gone from teaching seven RE classes a week to zero due to government intervention. I have also seen attacks on prominent Christians on the increase for holding to biblical views and values in this "anything goes" society that we live in. Last year, did you question as to why it took longer for churches to reopen than a lot of other organisations.

With that in mind, the following questions come to mind. Is there any hope for the Christian in this world? How do we live as believers of Christ in this world? Are these questions even answerable? Brothers and sisters in Christ, I am more than happy to tell you that there is an answer to this scenario that we live in. That answer is in the form of 1 Peter which we will be preaching through over the next few months. This is one book of the Bible that I haven't preached on in my time here but is a letter I believe speaks to us now at this time in Australia.

In this first section of the letter, Peter assures the recipients of this letter of what they have as believers in Christ mainly to assure them that they can live as God's people when they are forced away from home ...and being forced away from home can easily apply to living in the world today which is a world that is ever changing and different to the world that we grew up in.

However, the comforting thought from the first part of this letter is that the commands of God do not change regardless of circumstances and as we go through the letter of 1 Peter, we will see much practical bible-based wisdom to live as God's people in a world where Christians are gradually being exiled into the background of the mainstream world. I will look at this letter under the following headings:

Believers are described in verses 1 and 2. What gifts believers receive in verses 3-5. How the readers are to respond to these gifts in verses 6-9 and briefly, the history of these gifts in verses 10-12. By the end of today, what will be clear is the foundation of what all genuine Christian believers place their trust in. I also hope and pray that this is the foundation of our lives as well.

1. Description of believers: 1 Peter 1:1-2

This passage starts with what regular Bible readers know as the common introduction to New Testament letters. Verse 1 tells us who the letter is from, to and the location of the recipients. This letter is written by Peter, who is genuinely an apostle of Jesus Christ. Peter was with Jesus during his ministry and I suspect over time learnt a thing or two which he puts in this letter as well as 2 Peter. Peter wrote this letter to God's elect specifically to God's elect who have been scattered through the provinces mentioned at the end of verse 1 which is now located in present day Northern Turkey. Given the Biblical History of exiles, it would appear that the provinces mentioned have some hostility towards Christianity. So, Peter – an apostle of Jesus Christ - is writing to God's elect who are located in modern day Northern Turkey. However, there is one question that comes to mind when looking solely at verse 1 without anything else to look at. That question is: What

does it mean to be God's elect. We find the answer in verse 2 and I need to spend a little time on this as this is foundational to what a Christian is.

There are three foundational parts to this:

1. Believers in Christ are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God. This means that God had planned to choose you to be one of his before you were born. God deals in long term planning and has earmarked those who are going to be his. He communicates this to the people he chooses through the Holy Spirit. This is part of the function of evangelism as evangelism is designed to proclaim the good news of the gospel so that those chosen can respond to the gospel they are chosen to follow.
2. How do they know they are chosen? This is where God's Holy Spirit comes into it because it is through the work of the Holy Spirit that one is initially pointed towards God. However, that sanctifying work of the Spirit continues throughout the life of the chosen believer because over time, their faith will grow and continue throughout their Christian walk and their faith will continue to grow until they leave the earth.
3. How then will the sanctifying work of the Spirit be expressed? It will be expressed through obedience to Jesus Christ. It is with the Spirit's help that we obey the teachings of Jesus and his word spells out how we do so even in troubled times. But also through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, we will be sprinkled by his blood in order to be cleansed of our sinful past when we confess of our sinful past to God and repent of our sinful past lives. I hope and pray that we have all done this and continue to do so.

Through these three points, what we have spelt out is how someone is made into a Christian – by God - and through this, what is clear is God's hand in the whole process and that is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. One thing I need to say at this point is that more often than not, we don't realise that we are chosen by God until we come to faith in Him. To these people, Peter says "Grace and peace be yours in abundance" at the end of verse 2. While those words may appear as a conventional greeting in this letter, what is clear is that believers in Christ receive an abundance of grace from God. This becomes even clearer in my second point.

2. What believers receive: 1 Peter 1:3-5

To start with, what believers receive is praiseworthy. Listen to what is written in verse 3, "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!*" God is always worth praising and we are given reasons why in these three verses. All of these come out of his great mercy.

God is merciful to those who are his and as we have seen, he has given them many things. The first of the things he has given us is new birth. Now that does not mean that we re-enter our mother's tummy and come back out again. But it means that we are reborn as one of God's children with God as our Father. And being one of God's children means that we are born into a living hope. This means that we have a future that is full of life because we are with God. Brothers and sisters in Christ! Isn't that a great thing? What is even greater is the fact that the act that gave us this hope was not initiated by human beings – it was initiated by God. That act was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That act of Jesus' resurrection is what gives us hope. But what does this hope lead us to.

Verse 4 gives us another reason in that our hope leads us *into an inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade*. That sounds wonderful doesn't it? An inheritance that never perishes, spoils, or

fades. But where is it. The end of verse 4 tells us that this inheritance is kept in heaven for the believer in Christ. This means that this inheritance will be ours when we leave this earth, provided we leave as a believer in Christ. However, God will ensure that we, as his chosen people, are protected when true salvation comes in the last time which is when Jesus truly returns as mentioned in verse 5 which is the final reason in this section why God deserves praise.

What is clear for God's chosen people is that they receive much from God. But what is received are the essentials for salvation. But these essentials for salvation are essential foundations for living as God's people in exile. Are these essentials central to our lives today? Are these essentials something you want to share with your neighbours and friends? If we did, that would grow the kingdom of God. Given that we have received these wonderful gifts, there is only one thing that we would love to do with them – and that is to share them so that others can have them. Therefore, verses 3-5 spell out what we receive as people chosen by God.

3. How then do we respond to these gifts? 1 Peter 1:6-9

These verses start by encouraging us to rejoice. Rejoice because we have been given so much essential gifts by God to live as God's people in exile. However, the context of rejoicing is that the people Peter is writing to have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. Being in exile would bring about much suffering for the people that Peter is writing to. However, the context of trial that is being spoken of here appears to have been sent by God. Why do I say this? Because verse 7 tells us that *these trials have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed*. Effectively we live out our faith through the good and the bad times with joy and rejoicing is what verses 6-9 is saying. Humanly speaking, this is not easy, but given that our salvation comes from God and our lives are guided and shaped by God's sanctifying Spirit, then this is possible. Through these trials, we are showing how God works in our lives because the end result of doing that is the real salvation of our souls where we end up in safety with God in heaven. Remember, how we get to heaven is by displaying how God works in our lives in word and in action in a joyous manner and in today's passage, we have been shown the foundation of that.

However, these gifts that form the basis of our salvation have history that goes back through the Old Testament.

4. How the Old and New Testaments fit together: 1 Peter 1:10-12

What is clear so far from this passage is the fact that our salvation is the theme of this section and being saved is foundational to our Christian lives. But verses 10 – 12 tell us that the salvation we have was given by God and found by the prophets who then revealed this to the people. God's salvation of his people was revealed in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New Testament through Jesus which is God's plan for the salvation of the elect. There was great care in trying to find what God was saying in terms of salvation by the prophets as mentioned in verse 10 but what they predicted was the suffering of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. This is consistent with the death and resurrection of Jesus and this was pointed out to all believers so that they would all hear the gospel of Christ. In essence, this shows that salvation is a theme of the whole Bible.

In our sermon today, what is clear is that our salvation is the work of God in our lives through the sanctifying work of the Spirit which starts when God commences His work in leading us towards Him. It is foundational to the walk of the Christian and it shows us how we are to live as God's

people in exile as we cannot think of Australia as a Christian country now. What is also clear as God's people is that we receive much from God as a result of our salvation. As a result, we are to rejoice in what God gives us which is plenty and if we stay doing what the Bible teaches about salvation in belief and in living it out, then our reward is heavenly.

What then do we do with the wonderful content of the first twelve verses of 1 Peter? We need to ensure that we are believers in Christ who are willing to live God's way from the basis God gives us. We need to assure ourselves of the fact that our salvation has come from God. We need to rejoice in the fact that God Himself has provided for us the foundation to live his way but also make sure that foundation is a part of our lives. The foundations laid in these 12 verses are important for the rest of the book because how we live out these foundations is spelt out through the rest of the book. These foundations are the building blocks for the reboot of the church in this COVID normal period of world history so that Christians avoid being pushed into exile. Let us pray that these foundations are the centre of our lives as we leave the building today.