

# A to B Life

Sermon Text: 1 Peter 1:1-9

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<sup>1</sup> Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> 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. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, <sup>9</sup> obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

## Introduction:

In their film "O Brother where art thou?" The Cohen Brothers retell the story of the Odyssey, but set in the depression era south. Everett McGill convinces two other prisoners to break out from a chain gang, telling them that there is an enormous treasure hidden in a cabin which will be at the bottom of a lake in a few days' time. They all have different plans for the money: Delmar wants to buy back his family farm, saying "you ain't no kind of man if you ain't got land." Pete wants to go out west to open a fancy restaurant and be the Maître d'. Everett, we come to find out, really just wants to get back to his wife and daughters.

They endure many trials and hardships in their attempt to make it back to the treasure in time. They're on the run from the law. They are knocked unconscious by a one-eyed Bible salesman. They get caught up in a high-speed chase with Baby Face Nelson. One of them gets turned into a toad (or so they think).

The film, while whimsical and comedic, attempts to answer a very fundamental question: what lengths will someone go to in order to reach a goal? What will someone endure to get to the promised land?

If these last few months have reminded us of anything, it's that this world is not our home. Disease, political unrest, racial injustice, economic uncertainty, while they are normal parts of our fallen existence, are not God's intent for this world. In our text this morning, the Apostle Peter wants to remind Christians of this fact, and to set our eyes on a better hope. To do this, Peter presents to the church 3 sets of seemingly

contradictory realities which shape our present existence, which we will look at under three headings: Exiled but chosen, tested but rejoicing, and unseen but loved.

### **Exiled but Chosen:**

Peter opens up his letter by addressing these congregations as **“those who are chosen exiles, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia” (1 Pet 1:1)**. Peter uses a specific term in defining their exile, the dispersion or “scattering”. This term originally was connected to the Babylonian exile, in which God’s people were forcefully removed from the land and scattered throughout the Babylonian empire. There was another dispersion of Jews after the Jewish revolt in 70 AD, which sent Jews throughout the Mediterranean world.

Peter however, is not writing to a strictly Jewish group of Churches. These regions in Asia Minor were all provinces of Rome, populated by Roman citizens. Peter, later in his letter, even alludes to the fact that many of these Christians had come out of Paganism, encouraging them not to return to its practices. So, Peter is writing to a mixed group of Jews and Gentiles, many of whom had presumably lived in these provinces their whole lives. Peter is not addressing a political or ethnic reality when he speaks of exile, but he is addressing their spiritual identity as exiles in this world.

Their geographic location is inconsequential to Peter. It is not because they are in these provinces that they are exiles, but despite their status as residents that he wants to remind them that they ARE in fact exiles, regardless of where they might find themselves. And so, Peter identifies all Christians in all times and places as exiles.

He wants to stress to God’s people, from the very start of his letter, that this is not our home. It’s as if he’s saying to us, “I know that you’ve lived in Torrance or Lomita your whole life, but you are an exile.” He’s saying no matter where you are or how long you’ve been there, you are an alien in this world. By doing so, Peter’s intention is not merely to untether us from this world and make us feel that we are drifting aimlessly through this life, but to give us confidence of who we are and where we are going. In light of the transient and uncertain nature of our lives, he wants to affirm that we are not just exiles, but *Chosen* exiles.

He begins to expand on this idea of being chosen, assuring his hearers of the firm foundation of their election. He says that our election is rooted in the sovereignty of God. He says that we are chosen **“according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,” (1 Pt 1:2a)**. We are reminded here of the precious reformation doctrine of Election. That apart from anything in us, or anything that we would do or have done, God chose us in his grace.

As Calvin says in his commentary on this passage: **“when Peter calls them elect according to the foreknowledge of God, he sets forth that the cause of it depends on nothing else but on God alone, for he of his own free will has chosen us. Then the foreknowledge of God excludes every worthiness on the part of man.”**

God did not, as some would argue, look down “the corridors of time” and see what actions or decisions we would make. Rather, God chooses us in his foreknowledge to be saved. God chose us knowing full-well our sinful condition. In fact, he chose us because of our sinful condition, knowing our need of salvation. Peter elaborates on our election later in his letter, telling us the purpose for God in choosing us. **“But you are a**

*chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession," (1 Pt 2:9).* God has chosen us for himself, to be holy, and to be in fellowship with him.

Not only does he stress the source of our election, but he also says that we were chosen with a particular purpose or goal in mind: **"through the Sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for Sprinkling with his blood," (1 Pt 1:2b).** Here we are reminded of the New Covenant promise that God would send his son to cleanse us from our sins, and to put a new Spirit and a New heart within us. Not only did God graciously choose us for salvation but he secures it. Note that Peter wants to emphasize the unilateral nature of our election: The Father elects, the Spirit sanctifies, and we are justified by being sprinkled clean by the Son. God does it all.

We also see our election connected to our adoption. God himself, who Peter refers to as Father in verses 2 and 3, causes us to be born again to a living hope. God makes us his children by adoption, through our regeneration. More than this, he speaks of us having an inheritance. As his children, we are saved for an inheritance. This is family language.

The doctrine of election in isolation may feel to some like a cold, intellectual idea. As if God stoically and arbitrarily chooses us before time. But we must keep it connected to the whole purpose of God in our salvation. Paul in Ephesians connects these two ideas of election and adoption: **"In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons"(Eph. 1:4-5).** God has chosen us for himself, in love, and has graciously secured it through the work of Christ.

Here in these few short verses, we see the wonderful work of God in the life of believers, from beginning to end. We see from eternity past to eternity future and are assured. God elects, God justifies, he regenerates us, he adopts us, he sanctifies us. In the beautiful Golden chain of our salvation, God does it all. And this, to Peter, is the basis of our identity in this world. While we may have some autonomy over our present situation: where we live, who we interact with, what profession we have, these things ultimately do not form our identity. Our identity is not primarily determined by who we are or what we do, But by WHOM we have been chosen. God has called us his people, his children.

In bringing up our inheritance, Peter is also pointing us to the future. Jesus conquered sin and death on the Cross, and shows his victory over them in his resurrection. Despite the secure foundation of our salvation, we are reminded in this passage that there are aspects of our salvation that we do not fully possess. Peter tells us that, while our salvation is secured through the work of the Father, Son and Spirit, we don't yet possess all that this salvation has to offer. We are told that we have an inheritance and we have a homeland.

What do we know about this inheritance? Peter says it is **"an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you," (1 Pt 1:4).** This inheritance is our living hope, the hope of the new creation, which was secured for us by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This language reminds us of Jesus' command in Matt 6. He says, **"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."** (Matt 16:19-21) The truth of our future

inheritance is what makes us exiles. We are exiles in this world not in spite of our election, but because of it. God has called us out of the world, and he is faithful to bring us home. But right now, we are in the tension of the already and the not yet of our salvation.

So how do we get from A to B? How do we get from the grounds of our salvation to the goal? **“by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time, (1 Pet 1:5).**

Peter’s answer is faith.

The author of Hebrews reminds of this truth when speaking about Abraham, the prototypical exile: **“By faith Abraham, when he was called, obeyed by going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Heb 11:8-10).”** Likewise, we go out into this world, not knowing what the future holds, but trusting in him who is faithful to finish what he started. Faith is what makes us exiles rather than merely wanderers.

### **Tested but Rejoicing**

This leads us to Peter’s second set of contrast, that we as Christians are tested but rejoicing. **“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,” (1 Pet 1:6).**

Why testing? Wouldn’t it great if we could go straight from salvation to glory? Why this in between? On a basic level the answer is the fall. Life is hard. We toil and strive, there’s pain, disease, discord and death.

More importantly, and more pertinent to our text, we know that we suffer for the sake of Christ. As a Christian, suffering is part of the package. The Apostle Paul says that suffering is essential to our Christian life: **“The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him,” (Rom. 8:16-17).**

Throughout Peter’s letter, he mentions several trials that these churches are facing: they are “accused of wrong doing”, they are “suffering unjustly”, they are “insulted”, “suffering for what is right.” In 3:16 he mentions “Those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ ...”

He also reminds them that their suffering is not unique, but that “The family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings,” (1 Peter 5:9). Believers, as aliens in this world, and preaching a message that is hostile to this world, will face persecution. As Jesus himself says, **“If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you, “ (John 15:19).**

So how do we endure in the midst of this suffering? Do we just grit our teeth until we get to heaven? Peter says that we don’t simply endure trials, but we actually rejoice in the midst of them. If you want a practical example of what rejoicing under trial looks like, read the book of Acts. Over and over again we see God’s people rejoicing, not only in spite of persecution, but because of it. Then they left the presence of the council,

rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name. And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus." We rejoice when, through our trials and suffering, the gospel advances, and God's people give glory and praise to God.

James makes the same point in the opening of his letter, **"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing," (James 1:2-4).**

Peter says that there is actually a benefit that is produced through enduring the trials of this life. He speaks of our faith as being tested like Gold. From this metaphor, Peter emphasizes the immense value of our faith. He says that the faith we possess is more precious than gold. While our faith is often weak and wavering, and looks like foolishness to the world, it is the most precious thing we possess in this life.

I remember watching re-runs of Underdog as a kid, and there was always the scene where shoe shine boy would be shining shoes, and someone would give him a coin. I always thought that was so weird. But he was testing to make sure the coin was real. Just like precious metals, it is when our faith undergoes the fire of testing that we are able to see God's refining work in our life. By faith we are actually able to rejoice in the midst of suffering, as we see not only see God working faith in us, but we see the church built up and people coming to faith.

### Unseen but Loved

Finally, Peter presents his third contrast, as he turns our attention to Jesus, who he describes as unseen but loved. The Westminster Confession, in Ch. 14 "Of Saving Faith," describes our faith as follows: **"This faith is different in degrees, weak or strong; may be often and many ways assailed and weakened, but gets the victory growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith."** Faith is not some sort of mental abstraction. It is not something that we muster up. Our faith is strengthened as we look TO Jesus. He is the object of our faith.

Peter demonstrated faith when walked on the water towards Jesus. But he also showed faith when he was sinking into the water, and he cried out "Lord, save me!" It is not the strength of our faith which we rely on, which is sometimes strong and often weak, but the object of our faith, Jesus himself.

Why do we look to Christ? Because our salvation is in Christ. Our faith is in Christ. Our inheritance is in Christ. It is Christ himself who sustains us in this world. Through prayer, through fellowship. Through the preached word and the sacraments administered, Christ himself sustains us till the end. As we look to Christ by faith, we are sustained and sanctified, and our faith is strengthened and purified.

A few weeks ago, Lucy was calling for me from bed. And so, I came in, and I asked her what's wrong. And she said "I'm just lonely." So, I reminded her that her sister was in the bed below her, and that we were just in the other room. And then I said, "you know, you can always pray to God when you feel alone." And she kind of sighed and said "I always pray for Jesus, but he never comes."

The wonderful thing about children is that they have the same struggles as us, they're just not so afraid to say them out loud. Because we feel the same thing. "I keep

praying to Jesus and nothing is changing." I'm still out of work. My marriage is still struggling. I'm depressed again. We long for Christ to return. We long to no longer see Christ through the eyes of faith but face to face. Until that day, however, may we look to him by faith, knowing that he cares for us. God says this to his people in Is 46:

**3 "Listen to me, O house of Jacob,  
all the remnant of the house of Israel,  
who have been borne by me from before your birth,  
carried from the womb;  
4 even to your old age I am he,  
and to gray hairs I will carry you.  
I have made, and I will bear;  
I will carry and will save. (Is 46:3-4)**

So, the question I ask is this: Has God every been unfaithful to you?

This is why I am so grateful to God that many of us are able to return to church. In the midst of our exile, we gather week after week to commune with Christ. We are called by him to worship, and our faith is strengthened as we hear from him in Word and Sacrament. And as we look to Christ this morning, I pray and trust that our faith will be strengthened, and that we would, as Peter concludes, **"rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls," (1 Pet. 1:9).**

Questions for Further study:

1. How does the understanding of our election encourage us in our exile?
2. What is the source of our election and the goal of our election?
3. What is the difference between an exile and a wanderer?
4. Why does God allow us to undergo trials and suffering in this life?
5. How do these trials lead to rejoicing?
6. What do we know about our inheritance?
7. How do we love Christ even though we don't see him?
8. What are the three contrasting realities Peter presents?
9. Has God ever been unfaithful to provide for and strengthen you?