

Thriving In Exile

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[0:00] Let's read just the first two verses here. 1 Peter 1, verses 1 and 2. 1 Peter 1, verses 1 and 2.

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Let's read a letter from a loved one that maybe you haven't heard from in a little while. They took the time not just to give you a call or shoot you a text, but they took the time to sit down with pen and ink and paper and dedicate a message just for you.

That's exciting, isn't it? It's warming. Maybe it's a bonus check from work that you either are or are not expecting. Maybe you discover that you are a finalist for the publisher's clearing house giveaway.

[2:09] Ed McMahon is about to come to your door, whatever. It's a good mail day, right? When this little letter arrived via a personal courier to the churches in Asia Minor, it was a great mail day that day.

Can you imagine you show up to church on Sunday morning and you're going through your worship. The elders get up. One of them gets up and says, today we've got something really exciting.

We've received a personal letter from Peter. Amazing. At the time that the letter was written, 30 years or so have passed since Peter had been with the Lord.

30 years since he had left his nets on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. 30 years since he had listened to Jesus teach. 30 years since he was on the Mount of Transfiguration to see this amazing moment with the Lord Jesus.

30 years since he denied the Lord three times on the night of his suffering. 30 years since Jesus restored him.

[3:21] That little breakfast meeting again in Galilee. 30 years since the day of Pentecost when Peter preached and the Holy Spirit was poured out. 3,000 people came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's been three decades. Peter is now living in Rome. He's just a matter of months from his own martyrdom.

His own crucifixion and identification with the Lord Jesus Christ in his suffering. And his influence at this point, 30 years beyond the ascension of Jesus Christ, is enormous in these churches.

How exciting it must have been for these Christians, these struggling Christians, these persecuted Christians and embattled and beleaguered Christians.

How exciting it must have been for them to show up. And there's a letter from Peter. That Peter. How wonderful that God has preserved it for us.

[4:25] So that even today and in the months ahead, Sunday by Sunday, we get to learn and read and be encouraged by the same things that those Christians were encouraged by 2,000 years ago.

When we read this letter, we read and listen to one of Jesus' closest friends and most important apostles. But who exactly are these people to whom Peter initially wrote?

We're told here that they were Christians in local churches spread throughout a few regions, what is considered modern-day Turkey today. But Peter doesn't address them as such.

He doesn't address them as churches or as Christians. He uses peculiar language here in his address. He could have simply written Peter to the churches in these places.

He doesn't do that. He could have Peter to all of those who are in Christ. That would have even been a little bit stronger and certainly worth our consideration. He doesn't do that, though.

[5:35] He uses this peculiar language. He says, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect exiles of the dispersion in all of these places.

Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia. And he's using this language on purpose from the very beginning. He wants to set the tone for this letter.

He wants these Christians to understand themselves in a particular light. And the reason that he uses this particular language undergirds the whole purpose and content of the letter.

Peter uses exiles here metaphorically. Of course, it could have been that some of the condition of the people in these churches were as exiled Jews, maybe dispersed and expelled from Jerusalem. That certainly could have been some of their condition. But that's certainly not most of their condition. Peter's not speaking of this in a literal sense. He's not writing because everybody in these churches have been kicked out of their hometowns.

[6:44] That's not what it is. No, he's painting a picture for them. He's painting a picture of the Christian's place in this world. He calls them exiles.

They weren't exiles in the sense of being punished by God. That's not how we need to understand it here. Often, we read our Bibles, this term is used and translated as strangers, sojourners.

We might use the word pilgrim. It denotes people who are temporarily residing outside of their homeland.

And from the very beginning of the letter, Peter wanted these Christians to think of their place in this world as strangers, sojourners, pilgrims.

And as we read it here in the SV, exiles. Though they lived here, they didn't belong here. That's his point.

[7:51] They served a different king than the emperor of Rome. They represented a different country, a country that's not of this world. And from the very beginning, he wants to know, I'm writing to people that I believe are strangers here.

They're exiles. They're sojourners. And he wants them to think of themselves in this way. Now, 1 Peter might be the most practical, practically relevant of all the New Testament books.

And if you're a Christian, if you know Christ, your condition is no different than the condition of these Christians to whom Peter first wrote.

It's exactly the same. This world is not your home. And it shouldn't feel like your home.

If you're comfortable here, that's a red flag. If you feel at home here, there's something seriously wrong with your spiritual condition.

[9:06] Either you're not really a Christian, or it's been some time since you really lived like a Christian. Christians are strangers here.

We're called by God to live as his representatives in this world. We are exiles, strangers, sojourners.

And that's a difficult life. Often we feel like, as Christians, I know you feel this way. I know I feel this way regularly.

We feel like day to day, we're just doing everything we can not to give up the faith by the end of the day. We're just trying to survive. We're just trying to make it to the end.

Through the temptation and the suffering and the doubts and all the things that come and we face on a regular basis as strangers in this world. We're just trying to make it.

[10:04] The purpose of 1 Peter is not to help you merely survive this time of exile.

The purpose of 1 Peter is to show you what it looks like and that it's possible for you to thrive in this time of exile.

It doesn't mean you won't suffer because you will. It doesn't mean that you won't have serious seasons of doubt because you'll have plenty of that too. It doesn't mean that you'll always have the answers and it doesn't mean that you'll never face temptation.

All of those things are part and parcel of being a Christian in this world. It doesn't mean that those things go away. But what it does mean is that it is actually possible in the grace of God for you to live in light of all of those things with faith and with joy and with confidence longing for the Lord's return to take you home.

That's what 1 Peter is about. And right here in the opening greeting, Peter underlines three fundamental truths that we must hold on to if we're going to thrive in this exile.

[11:19] Okay? Three fundamental truths that we've got to grasp, we've got to lay hold on if we're going to thrive and not merely survive.

Ready? Number one, Jesus leads us in our exile. Jesus leads us in our exile.

John 17 records that, John records for us that amazing high priestly prayer of the Lord Jesus when he prays for his disciples.

Right in the middle of that prayer, there's something that I would imagine if Peter and the other disciples in the room might have perked up at for just a moment. You remember Jesus prays, he says, Father, I do not ask that you remove them from this world.

Now that would be a really cruel prayer. If Jesus was asking the Father, leave my people here, but then he had no plan, no power, no way to lead us and instruct us as we remain here.

[12:31] But he does lead us. And in this opening line of Peter's greeting, we're reminded of that fact. Look at what he says, opening, it's very simple, but it's important.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. As exciting as it might have been to receive this letter, this letter was not simply story time with Peter.

As amazing as that would be, can you imagine if it wasn't a letter, but Peter actually visited our church? What would we want to hear from him? Oh, you got to tell us about all the stuff, right?

This isn't story time with Peter. It's more than that. Neither does the content of this letter amount to Peter's personal thoughts and opinions on what he thought was best for these people to do.

No, that's not what this letter is either. The designation that accompanies his salutation, it's functioning as a statement of authority, but it insists that the authority is not actually Peter's.

[13:39] He is not simply Peter. He is Peter, an apostle or a messenger from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The message is not Peter's. The message is from Jesus given to us through Peter. Therefore, the authority of the letter is not intrinsic to Peter.

It is a delegated authority from the Lord Jesus Christ. Now, what am I saying? I'm saying that God has not left us alone to fend for ourselves, neither has he left us to be guided by the thoughts and opinions of fallible, sinful men.

No, Christian, in this time of exile. Our king himself leads us through this life, giving us all that we need to trust him and obey him and be at peace with God.

Jesus graciously instructs and comforts through the apostolic witness of the Holy Scriptures.

[15:02] And 1 Peter is a crucial piece of that witness. This letter is God's word given through God's servant, and it is authoritative for all of God's people.

What am I saying? I'm saying that a fundamental truth that we have to hold on to as believers, if we are going to not merely survive but thrive in this season of exile, we must remember that Jesus leads us, and he leads us by his Spirit through the word of God.

And when we come to 1 Peter, we need to accept it as the very word of God. So that in chapter 3 and verse 7, when Peter tells husbands that you need to understand and honor your wives, he isn't just giving good advice, happy wife, happy life.

No, he's saying this is the very will of Christ for your life. And to do anything less than this is an offense against God. That's what he means.

Well, what about the Christian wife who's struggling, trying to figure out how to honor the Lord before her unbelieving husband? Well, Christ has a lot to say to you in this too.

[16:25] What about in chapter 1, verse 22, when Peter writes to the churches that they are to love one another earnestly from a pure heart, not out of obligation, not out of compulsion, not casually, but earnestly from a pure heart.

He doesn't mean that this is a good idea for us. No, he means this is binding on us as God's will for our lives. When he talks about the substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ, the electing love of the Father before the world began, of the necessity of faith for justification, He's not giving us his personal interpretation on things.

No, what he's giving us is God's word for us. He's giving us the truth of Christ that is able to save your soul. The bottom line is this.

Jesus has something to say to you in this letter. It's not that Peter has something to say. No, Jesus has something to say to you through this letter. And thriving in exile begins by recognizing Christ's authority through his word.

So fundamental truth number one, right here in the greeting, Jesus leads us in this exile. How amazing. He's given us what we need in his word. Number two, fundamental truth.

[17:52] It's a big one. You belong to God. You belong to God.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion. Exile speaks to our present condition.

Elect speaks to the Christian's true identity. The word simply means chosen. Which the scriptures use to speak about those on whom God has set his redeeming love.

They are the chosen of God, the elect of God in Christ Jesus. Which is a remarkable designation here in this letter. Because Peter is writing to churches that are predominantly non-Jew.

The Old Testament speaks often designating Israel, the nation of Israel, as God's chosen and elect people. But Peter, here, right in the greeting, affirms that the church of Jesus Christ is the true Israel of God.

[19:17] His chosen people. You belong to him. And this truth is presented to us as a means of comfort and encouragement and assurance that Christians, regardless of their ethnicity, belong to God.

Exile is what we are. Elect is who we are. It's a statement of identity. Now, Peter could have easily moved on from this.

He could have easily said, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in all of these places, may grace and peace be multiplied too. But he doesn't do that. He takes this concept of the Christian identity further.

He roots it in the saving work of the triune God. And in verse 2, he uses three really important phrases to express how we have come to be God's people.

How we have come to belong to him. How we have received this identity. Let's just quickly look at the three statements in turn. Number one, Christians belong to God because he chose them before the world began.

[20:38] Listen, Christians belong to God because he chose them before the world began. Look at verse 2. We are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

Now, this term can be a stumbling block for us, can't it? What exactly does Peter mean when he speaks of the foreknowledge of God? It could just simply refer to God's ability to know what will happen in the future.

It certainly doesn't mean less than that, but it definitely means more than that in the scriptures.

Peter isn't trying to encourage them just by letting them know that God knew everything in advance that was going to take place.

Just the simple knowledge of that doesn't mean anything to us, does it? No, that's not what he's referring to here. He's speaking of something more than just simple knowledge. To know in the scriptures that particular word, Old Testament in Hebrew and in Greek and the New Testament, both, it can refer to an intellectual knowledge.

It can also refer to a personal knowledge, an intimate knowledge. For example, if you were to come to me today and you were to say, Jared, do you know Shane Nault?

[21:54] You aren't asking me if I know a certain set of facts about Shane. That's not what you're asking. It could be what you're asking, but it's probably not.

What is it that you're asking? You're asking, Jared, do you have any relationship with Shane? Do you know him? Not do you know about him or information about him, but do you actually know him? And this is the sense in which the Bible uses this term for knowledge and foreknowledge. God doesn't merely foreknow information.

He foreknows people. And the term, therefore, is conveying the fact that God chose and set his covenant love on his people before the world began.

Now, what does this mean for these believers? You belong to God, and he made you his own before he even created this world.

[23:01] He set his affection on you. How do you hear that as someone in exile? You're struggling because your neighbor would really love to just see you taken out because he can't stand this life that you live.

He can't stand this faith that you hold to. And you're suffering as a result of the people around you literally hating you for your faith. And then Peter writes, and he says, remember, you belong to God, and he chose you before this world was even created.

And well after this world is gone, you'll still be his. Not because he knew some things about you or about what you would do, but because he knew you.

There's a helpful parallel for us right here in chapter 1. If you just look ahead to verse 20, Peter uses the same word again, except this time he's using it in relation to Jesus.

He says, Jesus was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest, put on display to us in the last times, that's this time, for the sake of you, for our sake.

[24:18] Now what is Peter saying? Peter doesn't mean that the Father simply foresaw what time Christ would come.

That's not what he means, clearly. What he means to say there is that the Father foreordained not only that Christ would come, but when he would come.

That before the world began, he ordained Christ to come at this time for our sake. That's what he means.

So when Peter says that our election is rooted in God's foreknowledge, he means that the Father set his covenant love on us before the foundation of the world, chose us as his own, and foreordained our eternal salvation.

That has nothing to do with you. It has nothing to do with me. It has everything to do with his gracious and sovereign love. We are God's people because in eternity past he set his divine love on us.

[25:26] We are his. Now I spend a lot of time on that. Let's move a little quicker through the other two. First thing here, remember what Peter's doing. He's telling us how we have become God's people.

How we have received this identity. Well, we belong to God because he chose us before the world began. Secondly, we belong to God because the Spirit set us apart in regeneration or in our conversion.

We belong to him because the Spirit has set us apart. Now look at the second phrase here, the second prepositional phrase. We are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in or through, we might say, the sanctification of the Spirit.

Now what does it mean to be sanctified? It means to be set apart or made holy. Typically, when we think of sanctification, we think of that progressive work of the Spirit where he takes believers and he makes them day by day more and more holy as we are on our way to heaven, right?

And oftentimes that's what the Scripture means here. Peter's using the term more holistically than that. He is referring to that mighty work of the Spirit in our conversion.

[26:41] Yes, we are being sanctified day by day, but it's also true that we have been sanctified. We have been set apart unto God.

And that happened the moment we were, as Jesus said, born again, regenerated by the Spirit of God.

We were made to be his own. Now that's what Peter has in mind here. He's not talking about the progressive work. He's talking about the moment of our conversion when the Spirit of God brings us to life and sets us apart unto God as his people.

Though we are foreknown by the Father in eternity past, God effects our election in time and space through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

What does that look like? I once was lost. Now I'm found. Well, who found you?

[27:48] God did. God did. The Spirit came in with the preaching of the gospel and brought something that was dead to life.

And you were born again and received the new birth. What is that? That is the mighty work of God in making you his very own.

You belong to God, Christian, because the Spirit, through his mighty power, God has made you his own. He has set you apart. He has brought you to life.

Third, Christians belong to God because Jesus redeemed them on the cross. Christians belong to God, in other words, because God paid for them.

He bought them with the blood of his Son. Look at the third prepositional phrase. There's two parts to it, isn't there?

[28:52] We are elect 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.

It's the same dynamic. There's just two pieces at work here. What is this? It's a purpose statement, isn't it? The Father chooses us.

The Spirit sanctifies us. With the result that we obey Jesus and we receive the benefits of his atoning work on the cross.

Now, obedience here is not a moral condition that you have to meet before God is willing to call you his own. That's not what Peter means by obedience.

It's not moral conditioning here. Peter means obedience to the truth. Obedience to the truth of Christ, to the truth of the gospel, namely faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

[29:55] So think about this process that Peter is describing. We are known by God before the foundation of the world. In time and space, the Spirit comes through the preaching of the gospel, and he gives us life.

He gives us the new birth, which results in us saying, I believe, following after Christ. But there's a second piece here.

He says that in conjunction with this faith and obedience of Jesus Christ is this sprinkling with his blood. What is this? It's weird, isn't it? It's weird to our ears.

Peter is bringing our attention back to the Old Testament. I think probably the primary backdrop to this language is Exodus 24.

If you want to write that down, you can read it later. You remember, though, Moses and the people of Israel, they're at Sinai. Moses has received the law of God. God is going through a covenant ceremony with Israel.

[30:53] He is making them his own. And part of that process was a sacrifice of atonement was made, and the people were then sprinkled with the blood of this sacrifice that signified their cleansing.

It signified their entering into covenant with God as his people. Now, that sacrifice had already been made. The sacrifice was applied, though, the benefits of that sacrifice was applied as the people of Israel enter into this covenant ceremony trusting God and what he has said.

That's what Peter has in mind here. That's what he's thinking through here. The effect of the Father's foreknowledge and the Spirit's sanctification is our faith in Christ.

And by faith alone, the saving benefits of the atoning work of Jesus Christ on the cross are then applied to our account.

Our sins are forgiven. We are made at peace with God. Christian, that's who you are. Known by God.

[32:17] Sanctified by the Spirit. Paid for by Jesus Christ. Chosen. Sanctified.

Regenerated. Brought to faith. Forgiven. Now, why does any of this matter to Peter's greeting? That's the question, isn't it?

Why? What's the point of this? Remembering our identity as God's people is critical to thriving in exile.

When we're tempted to conform to the ways of the world, which we're going to cover greatly in this letter, remembering who we are in Christ will motivate our obedience.

If we really belong to him, we'll want to serve him as king. When we suffer for the faith.

Remembering the love of God for us and how he has saved us will bring comfort in our distress, perseverance by his grace.

[33:26] Perhaps the most important reason for this little section here is to give us confidence and joy as we await the Lord's return to remove us from this exile and take us home.

To remember all that God has done to make you his own should cause you to be joyfully confident that he's going to see it through to the end.

So you may be struggling in your exile right now. And maybe the struggle that you have at the moment is you're facing doubts about whether or not he really is yours and you really are his. Really are. Is he really that forgiving of a God? That he will forgive what I've done. That he'll forgive my apathy or complacency or whatever it is.

Will he really fulfill this promise of heaven and eternity and peace? Remembering your identity should say absolutely.

[34:38] Why? Because he chose you before the world began. And in his own gracious initiative through the preaching of the gospel, his spirit brought you to life which affected your faith and applied the blood of Christ to your account.

Isn't this what Paul means in Romans 8? For whom he did for no, he predestined to be conformed to the image of his son. And those whom he predestined, he called.

And those whom he called, he justified. And those whom he justified, he glorified. Paul uses glorified in the past tense. It's as good as done. He will see it through.

So during this time of exile, remember who you are, Christian. You belong to God. And to thrive in this time. You need to remember that.

Well, third, there's a third fundamental truth and we'll be finished. First was this. Jesus leads you here. There is authority in this letter. It's Christ's authority. He's leading us.

[35:38] You belong to God. It's important. That's the big one. Third, God supplies you with grace and peace. So that you will thrive.

God supplies you with everything you need. Look again at the end of verse 2. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect exiles of the dispersion and Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia.

According to the foreknowledge of God the Father and the sanctification of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with his blood. And then he lays the blessing. May the grace and peace of God be multiplied to you.

Now, if you were to take a poll today of the Blankenship household and say, what is your least favorite school subject? Ashlyn, tell them, universally, every member will say, what?

Math. We stink at math. But multiplication is a concept that we actually do understand, don't we, Ashlyn?

[36:45] We got that much, don't we? Peter could have said, may grace and peace be added to you. Right? Addition, yeah, good. Give me grace and peace.

He uses multiply. Why? It's strengthening the blessing, isn't it? Oh, may the Lord God himself give you everything over and over and over and over exponentially, abundantly, so that you might thrive in this life, Peter says.

But why does he say it? Because he knew that for us to thrive in exile requires, it requires an abundant outpouring of God's favor.

You cannot do this. You, me, we cannot do this. If we're to even make it, much less thrive in it, we need an outpouring of God's favor and of his grace.

Peter knows that. And he also knows that God willingly supplies his people with all that they need. You know the passages, Christian, his mercies are new when?

[38:00] Every morning. Philippians 4, he supplies us with grace according to his riches in Christ Jesus.

He gives us a peace that what? Surpasses all understanding. What is that? It's a peace you can't explain.

When everything going on in your life should be screaming panic, panic, panic, and yet you have a sense of peace and you don't even know that you really understand it that much.

That's not just because you are a stronger mental health than the guy next to you. No, that's the grace of God at work in your life.

He's supplying you. Now, I think it's important that we see that though this truth comes in the shape of a prayer of blessing, it's more than wishful thinking.

[38:56] There's no point in Peter's life that he ever doubts that God would actually answer this prayer. That's not in his mind. So though it's a prayer, though it's a blessing, it's taking that shape, it's not just wishful thinking, something that he hopes that God will do but he's not sure if he will.

That's not what Peter has in mind. In one sense, the blessing is just meant to call our attention to the fact of God's infinite supply. Grace and peace are not things that we hope God will give us. But because he's made us his own, we know he's already poured them out. God's grace and peace are present possessions for his people.

That's a present possession for you. That's not something you have to hope for. It's just something you have to recognize. The fundamental truth then is a challenge for us to lay hold on the power of God that is already ours in Christ Jesus.

And this letter is going to walk us through what it looks like to do that. But what you must know now is that God's supply for thriving in exile is abundant and it's already yours.

[40:15] If you're his, his supply is already yours. And by his grace, he will give you all that you need to go through this suffering and this temptation and this doubt and everything else that this world will throw at us.

With faith and with joy and with love and with obedience. So what's the greeting ultimately about? Well, Peter, he's laying a foundation for us. He's helping us to see where he's going to take us over these next five chapters. What are we to take from it now? As a Christian, are you prepared to acknowledge that your true condition is as a stranger and a sojourner in this world?

You don't belong here. And the more faithfully you will live for Christ now, the more painfully obvious it will become that this world is not your home.

You are just passing through. As the old song says, Miss Faye, your treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. But God's goal is not just simply for you to survive it.

[41:35] No, he intends that you, that we, will thrive as his people on this earth.

And to do that, we need to live in light of these three fundamental truths that are going to launch us into the rest of the practical teaching. We need to recognize Christ's authority and submit to it.

Remember your identity as God's people. Living distinctly in the world. For God's glory and for your good. And then you need to lay hold on God's infinite supply day by day.

Living this life in the power of his strength. And not trying to do it on your own. This is how we'll thrive in exile. This is where Peter's going to take us in the next few weeks.

Let's pray. Let's pray.