

God's Chosen People in Exile

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 October 2017

Preacher: Rev James Maciver

[0 : 00] Now, if you would turn with me, please, to 1 Peter, and reading at the beginning of that letter, 1 Peter, chapter 1, we'll read again these first two verses. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, and the sanctification of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ, and for sprinkling with his blood, may grace and peace be multiplied to you.

And last time, as we began looking at studies in 1 Peter, we noticed particularly the emphasis here on them being God's chosen people, and we confined our thoughts last time to how, as God's chosen people, they were chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

In other words, the love of God the Father had settled upon them from all eternity. And secondly, they were chosen through or in sanctification of the Spirit.

In other words, as the chosen people of God in this life, after coming into this world, after being born, coming under the influence of the Spirit of God, as God's chosen people, they were sanctified. They were set apart and continued to be made holy through the work of the Spirit. And that is unto obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with his blood.

[1 : 35] And we saw that that was a reference to the application of the salvation or the redemption that Christ, by his death, has actually obtained and procured and made certain for his people.

And tonight I want to turn to another aspect of these verses and this description, where they are called exiles of the dispersion. Because these words, I hope we'll see, are also important in the context, although it's very easy to read over them and feel there isn't perhaps all that much in them, compared to the rest of what's in these two verses.

But as we look at them, we'll see that they are in fact important, and indeed they provide for us a very significant introduction into the whole thought of this letter of 1 Peter.

When he says dispersion, he calls the elect exiles of the dispersion, the chosen people of God, they are exiles of the dispersion.

Dispersion, you find the word diaspora used nowadays for people who are scattered or have come to be dispersed over different areas. And indeed that's what's happened here.

[2 : 45] The Jews in the Old Testament regarded themselves in many ways as dispersed, especially after the time that they had been taken to Babylon and all the history that took place after that.

They were dispersed among nations. And here Peter is saying God's people, as he's writing to them, are dispersed. And he mentions these five areas. Now that's largely what you have today in the region of the world we know as Turkey.

These regions, he says, they're dispersed in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, the vast area that he's mentioning there, all these regions.

But he's writing to God's chosen people in his day as they were found in these areas, as they were dispersed in these areas. And in fact, before we go on, there's just, in the passing really, without opening it out too much, there's an important connection there with them being described as God's elect people, God's chosen people.

Because one of the points is that although they're scattered around all of these areas over this vast area, they are still one people. They're still one chosen people of God.

[3 : 59] And whatever differences there may be in the regions in which they find themselves, in the experiences they are going through, they are still just the one people of God. God does not have peoples.

He has a people. And that's important for ourselves always to remember that we are, as part of the people of God, joined to the family of God, wherever else they are in this world.

It's an important link with this emphasis on them being God's chosen people. They are still so, despite the fact that they are exiles, that they are dispersed.

And therefore, they can actually realize that whatever they're experiencing in their own regions, they're experiences that are common to and important for the people of God in every age.

So that's the first thing, they're dispersed. They're dispersed throughout these regions. But then he comes to use the word exiles. And it's a difficult word, really, in the Greek text of the New Testament to translate.

[5 : 05] But exiles doesn't quite capture it, and probably not one word captures the meaning of this word. It really is something to do with the idea of pilgrimage or sojourning.

It has essentially the meaning of being in a place on a temporary basis, or having a residence only for a short time, but you're not at home there. You can think of it, you know, in terms of when you're traveling, when you're on holiday, you're away from home, you're actually in a guest house or hotel, whatever it is you're staying, and you can see that you're actually a sojourner.

You're traveling at the time, you've taken up temporary residence, but you're not at home, and you expect to be leaving that temporary residence and heading for home shortly, when your holiday is over.

It gives you an idea as to the kind of meaning in this word, exiles or sojourners. What Peter is really saying is that these people that he's writing to are not only scattered throughout these regions, but they don't have a homeland there, because Peter is using these words in a spiritual fashion first and foremost.

He's not talking so much about geography, although he is including that and the scattering throughout these regions, obviously that has a geographical emphasis, but when he comes to sojourning, he's not just saying to them, you're actually in these regions for a short time, and then you're going to be taken back to Jerusalem or whatever else it is.

[6 : 35] What he's doing is building these words together so as to give a spiritual picture of the chosen people of God in this world. They are travelers while they're in this world.

They're on a journey while they're in this world. And in this world, they are sojourners who have a temporary residence that they cannot call home because home is in heaven.

And it's important when Peter was writing to these people, as we said last time, and as we'll see throughout the epistle, he's writing to people who are really suffering for what they believe and for the way of life they're following.

They're suffering for their obedience to Christ. They've been brought as chosen people of God to be obedient to Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood. They're known as Christians. They're known as the people of God.

And they're suffering for that. They're oppressed for that. There's different kinds of ways in which Peter is mentioning the difficulties, the persecutions even, that they're experiencing.

[7 : 36] And one of the things he wants to assure them of is that this is only for a time. It may be difficult. It may be sometimes exceedingly difficult. But they're on the way home.

They're only in a temporary residence. And it's part of God's preparation for them as they travel homewards that what they're experiencing now will ultimately be for their good and for their benefit as God will bring them home to heaven, to that inheritance that he has prepared for them.

So the two points that we want to really take from that tonight firstly is that God's people are on a journey homewards when they're in this world. God's people are on a journey homewards.

Well, we use the word pilgrimage very often, don't we? I know that that word itself is sometimes misused nowadays. But pilgrimage is really built into the fabric of the Bible in its description of God's people and their experience.

You cannot understand much to do with God's people as the Bible describes them without taking account of the fact that they are called pilgrims, they are sojourners, they are travelers.

[8 : 45] Go back into the Old Testament and you'll see that Abraham is described as a sojourner, as dwelling in a strange place, as Hebrews 11 also catches that emphasis for us.

He dwelt in that land which was promised to him as an inheritance, the land of Canaan. But he dwelt there with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise as in a foreign country. How could he be in a foreign country if that was the land that God had promised them for their inheritance? Well, because Canaan is actually not the ultimate inheritance. Canaan is only a type or a representation or a picture for them of the spiritual inheritance that heaven is for God's people.

That's why Hebrews 11 says that Abraham dwelt there in the land of promise as in a foreign country, for he looked for a city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God. There's the element of pilgrimage. Or take Israel themselves as a people. When they went down in Jacob to Egypt in Jacob's family, you know the story yourselves, how they grew in Egypt into a massive and powerful people and ultimately came to be released by Pharaoh against his will. [10:03] but then they entered into a journey. They entered into a 40-year pilgrimage or journey through the wilderness on towards the place that God had provided us an inheritance in this world for them.

And all of that, as you see, God described in the books of the Old Testament, book like Numbers, for example, which is largely about God's care for his people, God protecting them, testing them, guiding them, feeding them, watering them, chastising them, teaching them, leading them. All of these features of God's relationship with these people and their relationship to him are part of their pilgrimage experiences, part of what has now for us become a paradigm or a pattern, if you like, drawn from Scripture in the teaching of Scripture of what the Christian life is like. And that's what Peter is dealing with. He's drawing from all of that Old Testament emphasis on God's people, on pilgrimage and on a journey spiritually that's represented by their journey through this life.

And now he's saying to them, you are, as God's chosen people, you are sojourners scattered throughout all of these regions, but you're on a journey towards home. [11:25] And of course, when you, all of you, I'm sure, will know that one of the best examples, if not the best examples, of work drawn from the Bible that describes the Christian life as a pilgrimage or a journey is John Bunyan's great work, *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

It's all built upon the biblical teaching of the Christian life being a journey with experiences on the way home until they're finally brought to their inheritance that God has provided. So God's people are in this world, but their home is elsewhere. Now let me just point out one or two ways in which that's mentioned by Peter. First of all, you go to chapter 2 and verses 10 to 11, you can see it again emphasized there, once you were not a people, but now you are God's people, once you had not received mercy, but now you have.

Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles, picking up these two words, to abstain from the passions of the flesh which war against your soul.

[12:34] And then go as well to his fellow apostle Paul and go back a bit in your Bibles to Philippians and chapter 3 and in Paul's letter to the Philippians and in chapter 3 you'll find him describing there some people that he talks about in a way that denounces them really for their behavior.

He says in verse 18 of chapter 3, many of whom I have told you and now tell you even with tears, they walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction, their God is their belly and they glory in their shame, their minds are set on earthly things, they live for this world. But he says, our citizenship is in heaven and from it we await a Savior or the Savior the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, there is, again, the Bible's emphasis here are people that Peter is writing to, Paul is writing to, they're in this world, they have a temporary residence in this world but they don't belong to it.

They're traveling homewards, their home is in heaven. And in fact, that's really essentially the key to 1 Peter. Once you've got the key, then you can open up the book and see that that's really what it's about.

[13:56] Peter is essentially, as somebody said, writing a traveler's guide for God's people as they were in these regions at that time. A guide for people who are facing so many difficulties as Christians.

A guide for people who seek to be obedient to God but find the way difficult and tough and have to confess to failures at times. That's what Peter is doing. That's why his letter is so incredibly relevant and personal to ourselves in the age and day in which we're living.

Because this is addressing us right here and now for our circumstances here and now in this world. So that as Christians, we will listen to what he has to say as he addressed those exiled sojourners in these regions.

Christians. And what he's saying to them really throughout the epistle as we'll see is think of who you are. Contemplate who you are. You are the chosen people of God.

Contemplate where your home is. When you really feel the weight of the journey, contemplate where you belong to. You are God's people but you belong to heaven.

[15:13] That's where you're heading. That's your destiny. That's what God has held secure for you. And contemplate thirdly, what you are to be doing meantime. Because as we'll see, Peter is providing directions for them as to how they must live in the meantime in the setting of the world.

So that's our second point. Firstly, God's people are on a journey homeward. Secondly, God's people have a mission as they journey homewards. Now the setting for them is the world.

These are the geographical regions as we mentioned but spiritually they're set in the world. And remember when we're talking about the world and when Peter was writing to these people they would not have associated the world as somewhere comfortable to live.

The world is the world that's at enmity with God. The world that is opposed to God. The world that's opposed to God's people. The world that's actually in rebellion against God.

That's the setting. That's where they're actually placed for the moment. That's what they have to travel through on the way homewards. Yes, home is awaiting them but it's not an easy journey.

[16:27] And Peter is not writing to put them off continuing in the journey far from it is the very opposite. He's writing to encourage them. He's writing to give them strength. He's writing to assure them that as God's people they will reach heaven.

But meantime this is how they have to live. It's interesting that he's actually writing at the end of the epistle you can see what he's saying to them where he says there in chapter 5 and at verse 13 it's a little bit mysterious the way he writes there she who is at Babylon who is likewise chosen sends you greetings and so does Mark my son.

What does he mean? She who is at Babylon who is likewise chosen sends you greetings. Well it seems likely that Peter is talking about the church in Rome God's people in Rome because Rome in the Roman emperor's day in Peter's day was known as Babylon going back to the Old Testament description of Babylon that great power that opposed the people of God that stands as one of the great instances of worldly opposition to God and sinful opposition to God.

Well he's saying you have people who are also related to you spiritually in Babylon in Rome and Rome at the time was in many ways the pinnacle of human pride of pagan opposition of ungodliness of immorality and he is assuring his readers there that they're not alone that he knows of people even in the pinnacle of ungodliness in the world that are true to Christ and that are associated with them they're sending you their greetings that's again to encourage them to go on in the journey that they face and now that's our setting isn't it as well because that's our civilization today just as it was for these people that Peter wrote to and for Peter himself that's what our civilization today largely the ungodly aspect of our civilization is marked by by opposition to God by rebellion against God by hatred by cynicism by sexual deviancy by attacks on the gospel by religious and other kinds of violence by a drive for that which we know is wrong according to scripture whether it be in relationships or in euthanasia the call for euthanasia let's not forget that last

Friday was the 50th anniversary of the act that made abortion lawful in our nation 8.7 million unborn children in 50 years have had their lives terminated mostly for convenience that's the world we're living in that's what we're facing these are the ideas the ideologies that the world itself has that the world throws at us that opposes the values and the teachings of the gospel and the witness of God's people that's the Babylon of our day that's the worldliness through which we have to make our way and Peter is giving us directions as to how to do it and what he does really is give us that alternative lifestyle that belongs to God's people and I'm not going to open up much on that we're dealing with this really just in its essence tonight and it'll open up for us

[20:23] God willing as we go through the epistle how we are to relate as Christians to the world in which we live to those in authority to many different aspects of society as we live amongst them and all of that will come to light but in essence and just in brevity we can see what Peter is really saying to these sojourners is yes you are not to withdraw from the world that's not the way you face the world you don't just say well we can't take that on or it's so different to us let's just be by ourselves let's just enter into a monastic kind of life let's withdraw from the world no he's very much in the letter saying that's not the way forward that's not how you live that's not how you sojourn but neither is it to be conformed to the world you don't conform to it you don't capitulate to it you don't give in to

its insistences on living a life that is untrue to God you don't conform to it neither he says to you withdraw from it now that's why we read that's why we read a few verses that relate to this verse 6

I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world they no longer belong to the world because God has given them to Jesus as his people and in verses 14 to 16 this is what he was praying for he says I have given them your word and the world has hated them because they are not of the world just as I am not of the world I do not ask that you take them out of the world but that you keep them from the evil one in other words the Lord is really saying and of course Peter would have known these words the Lord is really saying they are to be kept in the world and while they're in the world I'm praying that you would keep them from the evil one that as they go about their life their witness their sojourn keep them father from the evil one and then he finishes or goes on verse 18 where he says as you sent me into the world so have I sent them into the world and then of course you have the same emphasis later on in chapter 20 and verse 21 in other words this world is not our home as Christians but Peter is saying it is your mission field it's not a place or values that you conform to but you don't withdraw from it it is a God provided mission field for his people as Jesus said in that prayer as you sent me father into the world even so I am sending them I'm not asking that you take them out of the world but that you keep them now that prayer of Jesus doesn't really have much meaning if you think of it applying to people who are not engaged in witnessing to Christ in actually taking the gospel to the world in engaging with the world and in confronting with the gospel the false ideas you find in it they are only to be kept in relation to them acting for

Jesus in the world I don't ask that you take them out of the world he said but I do pray that you keep them from the evil one it's not our home but it is our mission field and let me just point a few verses in Peter again in the same epistle chapter 2 verses 9 to 12 but you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for God's own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light then turn to chapter 3 and verses 13 to 16 now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good but even if you should suffer for righteousness sake you will be blessed have no fear of them nor be troubled but in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy or you could say sanctify

Christ as Lord in your hearts always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason that is for the hope that is in you yet do it with gentleness and respect having a good conscience so that when you are slandered those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame all of that is directed to people who are sojourners in the world who must not conform to it but who must not withdraw from it who must act for God in it who have a mission to that world even as they face its opposition and of course just in passing again we'll deal with it again God willing more fully but how we relate to one another is also significant and linked to how we are in our relationship with the world see there in chapter 1 and verse 22 where Peter is saying having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love love one another earnestly from a pure heart or go to chapter 3 and verse 8 finally all of you have unity of mind sympathy brotherly love a tender heart and a humble mind and so on in other words he's really saying the world is not going to believe you or not likely to believe you if you are very different to one another to what you should be he's saying that's what you must be as pilgrims as journeying through this life so

[26 : 42] God's people have a mission as they journey homewards they're in the world they're in a world opposed to them they're in a world that doesn't share their ideas their ideology their outlook their concerns their hopes indeed they're very much against that and in that they live an alternative lifestyle not by withdrawing from the world but not by being conformed to it but rather by being God's obedient people witnessing that that's who they are that that's who their God is that heaven is their home now let me finish by some questions first of all questions to myself to all of you who are Christians or professing Christians here this evening does my life tonight show that I am a pilgrim that this world is not my home am

I making it clear to all those who see me that this world is not where I belong to that I am heading homewards that my hope is set on heaven if I strip away my verbal confession if you do the same all of you confess Christ as saviour if we strip away tonight our verbal confession and just silently stand and live in the world I know we're not to do that but just for argument sake would your lifestyle without your verbal confession make it clear you're a Christian you're one of God's chosen people your home is not in this world you don't belong you're not comfortable at the thought of belonging to

this world am I and are you making it clear to the world around us that there is an alternative and there's a better world and it's a world we belong to and it's a world where our citizenship is world to people really know that from seeing the life we live and the lifestyle that we hold in this world or are we in anything so like the world that people have a difficulty really distinguishing us from it Peter is saying here you are you're in this world don't conform to it but don't withdraw from it by God's grace by God's spirit by God's help live clearly for Christ that alternative lifestyle that challenges the world and proves to be something that really provokes the conscience of the world and also to any of you tonight who are unsaved you have not yet come to accept Jesus as your saviour into your heart do you feel at home in this world do you feel at home in the present life you live does that leave you comfortable are you happy with it is that what your life is really saying well you remember how

Jesus spoke on another occasion when he addressed questions that were being put to him and on that occasion you find in Matthew chapter 7 words where Jesus emphasised the need to be in the right way and travelling in the right direction to the right destination this is what he said enter by the narrow gate where the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction and those who enter by it are many for the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life and those who find it are few what's your preference to have a comfortable life and a dreadful eternity or to follow the way that's narrow and hard that leads to everlasting life to be with Jesus and his people in heaven forever in Numbers chapter 10 and verses 29 to 32

Moses that great man of God addressed Hobab and this is what he said to him we thinking of himself and the people of Israel that he was leading and had led out of Egypt we are traveling on to that place of which the Lord has said I am giving it to you come with us and we will do you good for the Lord has spoken good concerning Israel and whatever good the Lord will do to us we also will do to you that's our pledge to you as Christians to you who are maybe here tonight unsaved come with us and we will do you good we're not pointing to ourselves we're not asking you to join us for what we can get out of it it's all based on this great fact the Lord has spoken good concerning his people why would you not enjoy that why would you not join the sojourners who are traveling homewards and who will come at last as we've been singing in the psalm to Zion into God's presence so that they appear there before

[32 : 54] God let's pray almighty God we give thanks that as you bring your people to know you so you set them on that way that is homeward and we give thanks that there is a better country than we ever find in this life and we thank you for the prospect of entering into that better country in heaven that inheritance that is permanent and inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled and does not fade away we thank you Lord that you keep it that you have it in your own keeping for those of your people and that you are preparing them for it and may each of us here Lord this evening as your word has taught us of what it is to follow in the footsteps of those who have gone before us as spiritual pilgrims Lord may each of us here tonight truly seek for ourselves to be found amongst them so hear us now we pray and accept our worship cleansing us from all our sin for Jesus sake

Amen let's now conclude our worship we're singing to God's praise in Psalm 71 Psalm number 71 verses 1 to 5 and that's on page 310 tuneless Eric Steyn O Lord my hope and confidence is placed in thee alone then let thy servant never be put to confusion let me in thy righteousness from thee deliverance how cause me escape incline thine ear unto me and me save Psalm 71 verses 1 to 5 to God's praise O Lord my hope and confidence is placed in thee alone then let thy servant never be put to confusion and let me in thy righteousness from thee deliverance heart cause me escape incline thine ear unto me and me save be thou my dwelling rock to which I ever may resort thou gave command meant me to save for thou art my rock and fort free me my God from wicked hands hands cruel and unjust for thou O Lord God art my hope and from my youth my trust I'll go to this side door here this evening now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you now and evermore Amen