

Elect Exiles of the Triune God

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[0 : 00] So we're starting a new sermon series today in the book of 1 Peter, and that's page 953 in the Pew Bible. Let me invite you to turn there. If you're new to Trinity, what we typically do on Sundays is we walk sequentially through an entire book of the Bible, or at least an entire section of a book if it's a longer one.

And we do it this way because we want to make sure that we're hearing all of what God wants us to hear through his word and the scriptures. If we were to simply kind of pick or choose or just go here or there, the danger is that we would miss the fullness of God's word to us and all that he wants to do in and through us.

So for the next few months, we're going to do that with the book of 1 Peter. Let me read the opening verses. We're just going to look at the first two verses this morning, and then I'll pray for us.

So 1 Peter 1, verses 1 and 2. Peter starts his letter this way. Let's pray together.

Father, we ask as we come now to your word, we pray for your grace and for your peace. Lord, would you grant us the grace to understand what this word is saying to us today?

[1 : 37] God, we thank you for the word of the apostles preserved for us in scriptures and mightily used by your spirit to impart your grace and to bring us into your peace.

So Jesus, do that today, we ask for your namesake. Amen. Amen. Okay, so 1 Peter. 1 Peter is a pretty relevant book for us because it was written to Christians who were having this experience. They were finding that their conversion to Christianity had made them increasingly out of step and at times unwelcome in their surrounding community. In other words, their newfound identity was creating all sorts of difficulties.

Again and again in this letter, Peter will talk about how they're being grieved by various trials. That's chapter 1, verse 6. That's chapter 2, verse 19.

But then we want to ask, what specifically does Peter have in mind? What kind of trials? What kind of difficulties? Well, he actually goes on to say, in chapter 3, for example, he says, I see how you're being slandered and reviled for your good godly behavior.

[2 : 49] And then in chapter 4, he'll say, I see how your neighbors are surprised when you don't join in the same things they're doing and then they malign you for it. That's chapter 4, verse 4.

Or a little later in chapter 4, he says, I see how they're insulting you at times for the name of Christ. So Peter sees how their newfound identity in Christ is creating all sorts of painful newfound difficulties in their workplace, in their neighborhoods, even in their own families.

Now, I don't think it's hard for us to relate to Peter's audience, is it? But the question is, how do we live in light of this? How do we respond?

You know, on the one hand, do we deconstruct our faith and winnow it down to something that maybe won't cause offense to our neighbors or our fellow workers or our families?

Do we kind of get rid of the parts that are countercultural and only keep the bits that are socially acceptable? Well, that can't be the answer, can it? That can't be the way to respond. I mean, after all, Christianity, right?

[3 : 53] Christianity is supposed to be good news. Christianity is meant to be like a window that gets thrown open and lets a fresh breeze into the stuffy house, right?

But if we just kind of deconstruct the faith and only keep the socially acceptable bits and get rid of the countercultural parts, then we don't have any good news anymore, do we? Maybe we just have an echo of what people already think.

You know, we kind of keep the window closed and we just keep breathing the same old stuffy air. So that can't be the way, right? So how then do we live when our newfound identity is creating all sorts of newfound difficulties?

Well, okay, maybe we don't kind of deconstruct our faith. Maybe we just withdraw from our surroundings altogether. Maybe we just have less and less interaction with our neighbors. Well, you know, that looks and feels easier at first.

You know, you will certainly hear less criticism if you're not around to listen to it, right? But again, as we know, Christianity is good news.

[5 : 02] It's something we're meant to make known. We want people to see it and hear it. And if we withdraw, well, maybe we become more comfortable in the short term that we don't become more faithful.

So how do we live? Maybe we don't withdraw, but, well, maybe we just fire back. If we receive ridicule, maybe we give some ridicule in return.

If we face opposition, maybe we give some opposition back. Now, of course, there's nothing wrong with standing courageously for our faith, but you can see that ridiculing or maligning in return, it doesn't take long to realize that that can't be the way either.

Peter will say in chapter three of this letter, So this is what Peter's going to tell us in this book.

In the midst of increasing social alienation and opposition, he says, stay present. Don't withdraw.

Don't deconstruct. Stay present and do what might be the most countercultural thing of all.

[6 : 28] Live holy lives. Love one another and bless. But to be able to do that, to be able to live that way, we're going to need to reach more deeply into the resources of the gospel than ever before.

If you're going to live that way, a surface nominal faith won't get you there. A just casual acquaintance with the things of Christ aren't going to do it. We need to behold the reality of God in Christ and who we are in Christ and the story of God that we're a part of.

We need to hold and internalize those things more deeply, perhaps, than ever before. And that's why Peter starts his letter the way he does in verses one and two.

Most ancient letters began by simply sort of stating the sender and then stating the recipient and then giving a real brief, like, I hope you're doing okay. And you see some of that pattern here. But what you also see is that Peter has kind of packed his opening with such rich theological content that you have to pause and slow down just to take it in.

And what Peter is doing here is he's reminding these Christians who are facing trials, he's reminding them right off the bat who they are. If you want to understand your newfound identity and the newfound difficulties, if you want to begin to understand how to live in light of that, then you have to start by knowing who you are.

[8 : 02] And you are, Peter says, you are the elect exiles of the triune God. Now, I want to take the rest of our time unpacking these first two verses, and hopefully we can see who we are as the church and how we can live lives of blessing and holiness, even in the midst of trial.

And we're going to consider first, then, what it means to be the elect of the triune God. And then second, we'll consider what it means to be the exiles of the triune God. Okay, so first, if we're going to live rightly in the face of trials, if we're going to bless instead of curse, we have to know ourselves as the elect of the triune God.

Look again at verse one. After introducing himself as the sender of the letter and as an apostle of Jesus Christ, now when Peter says, I'm an apostle of Jesus Christ, what we should hear in that is, okay, well, this just isn't some guy giving us good advice, right?

This is someone that Jesus himself appointed to teach in his name for the church for the rest of the church age. So we have to slow down and listen to what Peter says, because these are the words that Jesus gave him for the church.

And then Peter writes to those who are, he says, to those who are elect. And the word elect simply means chosen. They're chosen.

[9 : 21] Now, in the rest of verse one, we see that Peter is writing to Christians in what was then called Asia Minor, in what is today basically the country of Turkey. These five provinces or regions were located kind of in the north-central part of modern-day Turkey.

And these areas, you know, this area, they probably had some Jewish presence. So some of the Christians Peter's writing to were possibly from a Jewish background. But it's most likely that these churches were predominantly Gentile.

As we read through first Peter, you'll see that when Peter starts to talk about their lives before coming to Christ, it sounds a lot more like a Gentile background than a Jewish background. So Peter isn't writing to people.

He's not writing to Christians who had a nice moral religious upbringing. He's writing to former pagans, polytheists, pragmatists, prostitutes, you name it.

Just like a lot of us. But now he says, you are God's chosen. God has set his saving love on you and made you his own.

[10:28] Now the Old Testament pictures this choosing love of God in many ways. Pictures it like the love between a parent and child.

It pictures it like the love between husband and wife. Like the love between a benevolent king and his beloved people. Peter's saying, you are God's prize.

You're God's treasure. I wonder if you've ever had the experience of having kind of a prized possession. You know, the sort of like stereotypical guy who has the like vintage Mustang in his garage that he like doesn't even let his kids like breathe on.

You know, that kind of thing. Or maybe if you're a book lover, you've got like a first edition signed by the author of some favorite book of yours. Some prized possession.

You know, how do you feel around that thing? That thing that you chose and you love and maybe you even had to sacrifice for. Sometimes you just like beholding it, don't you?

[11:29] Kind of seeing it there on the shelf or taking a look at it in the garage. Sometimes you get joy showing it off to your friends, right? Letting them go for a ride with you or letting them page through it and see the signature on the title page.

Friends, that's how God feels about his people, about his chosen, about his elect. And if that's true of us, then we can face trials both with great dignity and with great humility.

Now consider the dignity that comes from knowing ourselves as God's chosen, loved people. With this word elect, Peter is actually connecting the New Testament church to Old Testament Israel.

In the Old Testament, Israel was God's chosen people. And now Peter is saying, through faith in Jesus, you too, Gentiles, you're included in that chosen people. The renewed people of God around Jesus the Messiah.

Imagine what that must have meant to these first century Christians. It was showing them that being a member of the church, being a member of that group of followers of Jesus, this wasn't just some passing novel fad.

[12:50] Their conversion to Christianity wasn't like joining some social club that would be here today and gone tomorrow. No, they were part of a people, a movement that was as ancient and enduring as the one true God's promises to Abraham.

When God chose Abraham and said that he would bless all the nations through him. So they could hold their heads high with dignity, even when their neighbors ridiculed them or excluded them.

They didn't need to respond with anger or fear. And friends, neither do we. Knowing ourselves is chosen by God, loved by him, included in his ancient and forever people.

That brings us dignity in the face of trials. But it also brings humility. Now, I don't know about you, but maybe all this talk about being elect or being chosen, maybe it kind of makes you a little uncomfortable, right?

I mean, talk about something that could go to your head in all the wrong ways, right? It sounds incredibly pompous to say that you're the chosen, right? How could that not make you insufferably proud?

[14:05] But here's the thing. A biblical understanding of election does just the opposite. It is the thing that creates deep and true humility.

Why? There's a great scene in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. In Deuteronomy, Moses is reminding the people of their story before they enter the promised land.

And he's talking about how God chose them and liberated them from slavery in Egypt. And he says in chapter 7, verse 6 of Deuteronomy, Moses says, The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you. For you were the fewest of all peoples. But it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers.

You see, election, it can only produce pride if we think that God chooses people based on something in them.

[15:17] But what does God say to Israel? Does he say, I chose you because you were so numerous, so great, so strong, so faithful? No! God says, I didn't choose you because of anything in

you.

I chose you because I love you. And I'm keeping my promise to love you. You see, God doesn't choose us because of the abundance of our merits.

He chooses us because of the abundance of his mercy. Consider verse 2 of our text here in 1 Peter. If you look down at verse 2, you see a bunch of clauses kind of stacked up.

And the clauses in verse 2 modify this idea of election in verse 1. And they speak of the Father, the Spirit, and the Son. Peter here, this is Peter speaking of the reality of God in ways that would eventually be articulated in the doctrine of the Trinity.

That the one God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Spirit, Son. And notice, notice what Peter says. First, he says, our election isn't because of anything in us.

[16:31] Our election is according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Now, when the Bible says that God knows someone, it means more than God simply observes certain facts about someone.

Right? Rather, biblical knowing is intimate relational love of another person. So when Peter says our election is according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, Peter's saying that the source of our election, the plan behind it, the cause of it, is God's eternal love.

God the Father set his knowing love on us from eternity past before we had done anything good to deserve it. In eternity past, God the Father saw us when we were dead in sin, fallen and condemned in Adam, without God and without hope in the world, and he knew us.

And he set a saving love on us. But how did this eternal love that caused our election become real in time, in history?

How did we come to experience it? Well, let's keep reading verse 2. Peter says, in the sanctification of the Spirit. Now, in the New Testament, the word in can often mean the instrument whereby something happens.

[17:51] So our election comes in or by or through the sanctification of the Spirit. Now, the word sanctification can sometimes mean, you know, when we use the word sanctification, we can sometimes refer to the kind of ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life, whereby he makes us more and more holy, more and more like Jesus.

But in the New Testament, sanctification can also mean not just this progressive work, but our position before God, sort of a one-time act whereby the Holy Spirit sets us apart for God.

That's literally what sanctify means. It means to set something apart as holy. And it's that kind of sanctification that Peter's talking about here, not our progressive sanctification after belief, but our positional sanctification that happens when we become believers.

The sovereign act of the Holy Spirit setting us apart, cleansing us as holy, translating us from death to life, calling us out of darkness into God's marvelous light, as Peter will later say in chapter 2.

So you see, what God the Father planned before the creation of the world, the Holy Spirit has now actualized in history. The Spirit applies what the Father has planned.

[19:09] So you can begin to see how our election, how our identity as God's beloved chosen people, isn't something that creates selfish pride.

Is it something we planned? No, God the Father planned it. Is it something that we sort of actualized in our own life? No, the Holy Spirit did that. It's holy God's work, not our own.

And that ought to humble us. But Peter actually then saves the best for last. The Father planned it. The Spirit applied it. But what did the Father foreknow us for, we might say?

What did the Spirit sanctify us for? Peter says, For obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.

The purpose of God's sovereign, loving election is that we would bow to Jesus and know the full forgiveness of our sins through his blood.

[20:17] When Peter mentions obedience here, you know, it's pretty obvious he's not saying that our obedience in any way contributes to our salvation or our election, right?

Notice, any obedience that we render to Jesus is a result of God's prior work. Through the Father's eternal love, through the Spirit's renewal of our hearts, our rebellious hearts are softened, and we gladly bow to Jesus as our Lord, and we live for him.

In other words, we aren't saved by our good works. We're saved for good works. But then again, Peter comes to the very best part.

He's saving the best for last. And he says, we've been planned and set apart for, for what? For the sprinkling with his blood.

Now, obviously, this is a reference to the cross, right? But the metaphor of sprinkling comes from Exodus 24. Remember, in Exodus 24, we read about how Moses sprinkled blood on the, on the, on the altar and on all these sorts of things.

[21 : 25] When the people were gathered at Mount Sinai, when God made his covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, the people there, remember, they pledged their obedience to the Lord. But God knew that they were a sinful people.

He knew that they wouldn't be able to keep their end of the covenant. So in that, that decisive moment in Exodus 24, when the people are being constituted as God's people, and they said, yes, we'll follow you, Lord.

God knows they're sinful. So what does he do when he knows they aren't going to be able to keep their end of the covenant? He makes a sacrifice. Rather than make the people bear the penalty for their inevitable sin, God offers a substitute.

The wages of sin is death. But God allows another to die in their place. And in Exodus 24, the blood is sprinkled around to show that this sacrifice is for them and for their forgiveness.

But of course, the animal sacrifices were just a sign. They were just a picture pointing ahead to the real sacrifice that God would make. Because after all, animals can't really pay for human sin, can they?

[22 : 39] And that's why God takes human nature into himself in the incarnation. That's why he comes to earth in the person of Jesus, so that after living the perfect life that we ought to have lived, he might die in our place as the perfect substitute for our sins.

And because Jesus was fully God, that sacrifice was perfect and complete for absolutely everyone who would turn from sin and place their trust in him. And God actually raised Jesus on the third day to show that that sacrifice, that perfect sacrifice was complete, that it was finished, that sin and death had been utterly defeated, and that now new life could be had through the risen Lord Jesus. So you see, this is what God's election is all about. It's about gathering a people from every tribe and tongue and nation who would know the unbelievable grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, bow before him and worship him in love for all eternity, knowing that all of their sins have been forgiven forever.

Now here's the good news. If you sense your need for a savior, if you see that your sins separate you from a holy God, and if you see that God has lovingly set forth Jesus as the perfect sacrifice for you, that you might be reconciled to God and included in his people, if you see those things, if your heart's drawn out to those things, then friends, you don't need to worry about whether God has elected you or not.

You don't need to wring your hands wondering if you're part of the chosen people. If the spirit's already doing that work in your heart, place your trust in the risen Jesus and know that God promises to receive all who come to him and will never cast them out.

[24 : 37] You see, above the family of God, it's as if there's this great sign that reads to everyone, come to me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

That is the banner above the family of God, the banner above the kingdom of God. Come to me, everyone, and I will give you rest. Everyone is welcome to come. But here's the wonder.

As you step through and you turn around and you read what the sign says on the back, it says, I've known you before the foundation of the world. So friends, don't let the mystery and wonder of election keep you from trusting in Christ.

Let it be one more incentive to step into this love that God has prepared before time for those who believe. So Peter wants us to see then that our election, being God's chosen people, is the work from beginning to end of Father and Spirit and Son.

So when trials come, when opposition or slander or malice are cast our way, we respond actually with deep humility because we know our sins are great.

[25 : 59] We know we don't deserve this wonderful grace in which we stand. For we ourselves, we were once foolish and disobedient and led astray and slaves to various passions and pleasures.

We passed our days in malice and envy, being hated by others and hating one another. But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us.

Not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

That's the book of Titus. So this is what Peter wants us to know first. When you face opposition, when you face trials, remember that you're God's chosen, beloved, is elect.

But there's more. Peter goes on to say that we aren't just elect, but we're also exiles. So if we're going to live rightly in the face of trials, if we're going to bless instead of curse, we have to know ourselves, yes, as the elect of the triune God, but also as the exiles of the triune God.

[27 : 22] Look again at verse 1. Peter says this pretty clearly. To those who are elect, exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Okay, so now this word dispersion was literally used in the first century to talk about how the Jewish people had been dispersed throughout the Roman Empire.

So the Jews who lived outside of Palestine were often called the dispersion or the diaspora. But Peter here is using the term metaphorically. He's using it spiritually.

You see, the New Testament people of God, because we're at home with God through his loving election, we are now often strangers in the world. We're exiles, living far from home in what feels like a foreign land.

You know, I think half of our difficulty when facing trials is that we don't expect it. We expect life to be comfortable or easy. We expect things to go our way.

But that's not the New Testament picture. You know, we get upset when we're misunderstood for our faith or we get discouraged or we get tempted to quit when maybe our friends are ridiculous or our co-workers say mean things about us or whatever it is.

[28 : 35] But Peter will say in this letter, look, don't be surprised when these things happen. After all, you're not home yet. You are strangers.

You're exiles. You're pilgrims of the heavenly city. Now imagine, imagine if you, if you moved to a foreign country and in that country you, you, you would, you spoke a different language, you ate different foods, you wore different clothes and all of the people of that place.

You know, of course you wouldn't be surprised if the people of that new country looked at you a little funny, right? And maybe even at times teased you or even ridiculed you. You'd probably expect that to happen from time to time.

And you see, Peter is saying, that's going to be somewhat true of Christians no matter where we live. Whether you're from Pontus or Galatia or Cappadocia or Asia or Bithynia or New Haven, you're always going to be a bit of a stranger in this fallen world.

So expect it. Don't try to live for the approval of your neighbors or your friends or your coworkers because you'll never ultimately get it.

[29 : 46] We're always going to be a little strange and a little different. Why? Well, because we know the saving love of God, the Father, Spirit, and Son.

The same reality that makes us God's beloved chosen people is the same reality that makes us exiles in the world because now we live not for the things of this world but for the triune God. And that means we simply can't live like the world any longer.

So the way that we approach things like how we spend our money or sex or how we use our privilege or how we approach marriage or how we think about justice, it's all going to be shaped by the reality of the triune God and his word.

So there's always going to be a bit of an exile quality to our life in this world. But that doesn't mean that we simply reject the world.

The world may reject us at times but that's not how we're meant to live in return. You see this language of exile that Peter is using it's also an Old Testament idea just like the idea of election.

[30 : 57] God's people in the Old Testament you remember ended up in exile. For them it was because of their sin. Because of their sin God scattered them among the nations carried them off to captivity in Babylon. Now today we aren't living in this sort of spiritual exile because of our sin but still there's a parallel.

When God's Old Testament people were in exile how did he tell them to live? We read some of those instructions earlier in our service from Jeremiah 29. The temptation would have been to just reject their surroundings and look out for themselves.

But what does God say? He says put down roots buy homes raise families and try to bless the city in which you live.

Seek the peace of the people around you. They won't understand you. They might ridicule you. They might persecute you. But this is your mission in exile. Be a new people in the midst of the old. Be a counterculture of grace in the midst of a culture obsessed with performance. Be a people of the triune God in the midst of a world captivated by idols.

[32 : 06] This is how Peter puts it in chapter 2 verses 11-12. He says Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul and keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that even if they speak against you as evildoers they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day Christ returns.

So remembering our identity as exiles is very important. First, so we're not surprised when we experience trials and second, so we remember our mission but third, it's important because in the biblical story as Peter just alluded to in that verse I just read in the biblical story the exile is not forever.

We're not always going to be strangers and sojourners. Remember the story. In the Old Testament God made a promise that after 70 years of exile he would act powerfully and miraculously to bring them home and indeed that's exactly what God did.

The exile ends and God's Old Testament people, they go home and that's true for us. God's New Testament people as well except this time he's going to make his glory cover the earth like the waters cover the sea.

When the exile ends the second time around God's bringing home down to us when Christ returns and he will judge evil and injustice once and for all and he will remake this broken creation and make it new again.

[33 : 41] You see to know yourself as an exile as a sojourner as a pilgrim is to live in hope. The trials won't last forever the sufferings won't endure the ridicule and slander they're not the last word.

This is what Peter will say in verse three and he'll say it over and over again throughout this book. This book that just resounds with hope. Look down at verse three.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy he's caused us to be born again to a living hope. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable undefiled unfading kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

So you see as elect exiles of the triune God we are people above all not just of dignity and humility not just of purpose and mission but we're a people of hope.

No matter what trials come we have this unshakable hope. Why? Because of God Father Spirit Son the Father who knew us before the worlds were made the Spirit who set us apart by his sanctifying work the Son who shed his own blood and won our glad obedience this is the God who keeps and guards not just our inheritance but us remember who you are Peter says this is who you are God's beloved chosen elect people yes exiles in the world but my beloved remember who you are so that even when the world gives you its worst you can turn and bless you can turn and seek their peace you turn and offer them the same good news that we have received the good news of the God who loves them and who died and rose again so that they too might live let's pray together our father in heaven help us in the coming weeks to listen to the apostles words in this book to believe and internalize them by your spirit and to live renewed lives of resilient hope and love and holiness through

[36 : 07] Jesus Christ our Lord we ask this in his name amen ...

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