

Text: 1 Peter 1:1-12
Theme: Precious Salvation
Minister: Reverend Dele Agbelusi
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A greeting from the Apostle Peter

Peter was not merely *an apostle*, but an important and influential man in the early church. This letter would have been received with a sense of importance.

Peter's name is mentioned in the gospels more than anyone else's, except the name of Jesus. No one speaks as often as Peter, and Jesus speaks more to Peter than to any other individual.

Jesus rebuked Peter more than any other disciple. Peter was the only disciple who dared to rebuke Jesus. Peter confessed Jesus more boldly and accurately than any other disciple. Peter denied Jesus more forcefully and publicly than any other disciple. Jesus praised Peter more than any other disciple. Peter alone among the disciples was addressed by Jesus as Satan.

When we come to the first letter of Peter we find that Peter talks of Christians in verse 1 as being "elect", "strangers in the world".

"The opening characterization of the readers as elect was meant to strengthen and encourage them in their affliction. The doctrine of election is a 'family truth' intended to foster the welfare of believers." (Hiebert)

Charles Haddon Spurgeon is purported to have said something to that effect. He said: *"I'm so glad that God elected me before the foundation of the world, because he never would have elected me after I was born." (CH Spurgeon)*

Spurgeon, who was a Baptist, was known for his humorous quips. It is amazing how much Spurgeon could say in one little comment. Underneath this one, Spurgeon meant that the orchestration of God, which involves His electing purpose, is not an experience that anyone has earned a right to have. It is not like electing a politician. God's election is not based upon being a good candidate. Nobody can do anything to be electable, like for example, "by being humble," or making themselves "fear God" - both things that God requires from the elect. The biblically consistent fact is that God elects all the elect before they were conceived in sin, and before they did anything good or bad. So, we look at it this way: God elected people He foreknew, and He elected them so that He would make them good enough, humble enough, and fearful of Him enough in His rescuing work.

Furthermore, Peter is saying that Christians are not residents of this world, but are actually citizens of a different country. And in fact, that sums up much of what Peter is saying in this letter. He is writing, you will notice in verse 1, to a group of Christians scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia,

Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These were Roman provincial areas in what we now know as Turkey. The most important thing about these Christians is what comes next in verse 2: *“We have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.”* These Christians, like all Christians, are incredibly privileged. They have been chosen by God the Father, they are being changed to become more like him by the Spirit and their lives have a wonderful purpose in obeying their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. All three members of the Trinity are involved in our salvation. That is why Christians are to be strangers in the world. Because we are citizens of another world, God’s world, heading for heaven as chosen and forgiven people.

But these Christians were living in difficult times. Peter was writing from Rome, what he calls Babylon in chapter 5, in times when the Roman Empire was starting actively to persecute Christians. It would not be long before the Emperor Nero would use Christians as human torches in his gardens and Peter himself would be crucified upside down on the main road out of Rome. These were tough times. These Christians were going through trials and persecutions. Some were troubled at work; others were having difficulties in the home with unbelieving spouses; some were wondering how they should deal with the authorities. And Peter writes to tell them that they are citizens of another country, heaven, and that they must act in a godly way to everything that this world throws at them. He writes both to encourage them that they are God’s people and also to challenge them to live accordingly in this difficult alien world in which we live.

Now we may think, ‘well we are not living in such times’. What does this letter have to say to us? Well as we look through this letter, we’ll find ourselves receiving both encouragement and challenge. Many of us will need encouraging. Whilst we in Britain are not persecuted in the way these Christians were, (although in Turkey nothing has changed in 2000 years) yet some of us do struggle as Christians at work; some of us do face difficulties with unbelieving spouses or relatives; and each one of us could find ourselves in a situation in the not too distant future where the authorities frown upon public, uncompromising gospel preaching and teaching. These are live issues for us. And we need to hear Peter’s encouragement to us as God’s people to press on and remember all God’s blessing to us. But on the flip side, each of us will need also to hear Peter’s challenge to us to live as strangers in the world, resident aliens - people of a different country. It is very easy in this day and age to be comfortable in the world in which we live and to resent that fact that as Christians we are to be strangers in the world. We will need to hear again Peter’s challenge to live different lives, to have different ethical and moral standards and to be willing to pay for it. So 1 Peter will have much to teach us.

But this morning, Peter begins with encouragement. He begins by reminding his hard-pressed readers that there is great blessing in being a Christian. It’s worth suffering for and even dying for. And I want to pick out from Peter’s first twelve verses, three encouragements for us:

- 1) The Christian’s Hope (verses 3-5)
- 2) The Purpose of trials (verses 6-9)
- 3) The Christian’s Foundation (verses 10-12)

The Christian's Hope (verses 3-5)

When Peter considered the salvation of God, all he could do is praise Him. This is especially because the motive for God's work is found in Him, not in us (according to His abundant mercy). All His goodness to us begins with mercy. *"No other attribute could have helped us had mercy refused. As we are by nature, justice condemns us, holiness frowns upon us, power crushes us, truth confirms the threatening of the law, and wrath fulfils it. It is from the mercy of our God that all our hopes begin."* (Spurgeon)

We are born again to a living hope, because we have eternal life in a Saviour who has conquered death Himself. The hope lives because it is set on an inheritance incorruptible, which can never fade away because it is reserved in heaven. This is a significant contrast to any inheritance on this earth. We have been born again from sinful rebels to renewed people. And that is all through God's mercy. It is nothing we can earn or achieve on our own merit. We are new people through God's mercy.

Peter says that the living hope Christians have is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Christian hope is rooted to an historical event, the resurrection of Jesus. So because he rose again, Christians like us will rise again too.

For many years people thought that there was no land to the west of Portugal and there was a big sign in the port of Lisbon which read, "Ne plus ultra" – '*Nothing more beyond here*'. That was until Columbus in 1492 set off to discover America. And when he came back successfully, the sign was then changed to, "Plus ultra" - '*There is more beyond*'. Well, someone has gone beyond the grave and come back. Don't be in any doubt. Jesus' resurrection shows that there is more beyond and that our hope is not in vain. That's how certain Christian hope is.

And if we need any more convincing then Peter continues in verse 4. He says that our hope will not be destroyed. We have *"an inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade...kept in heaven for you"* (verse 4). Literally, Peter writes that this inheritance is imperishable, un-spoilable, or unfading. This is not the sort of hope that will rot away with time. It is not like three week old milk which goes off. It is not like stocks and shares which depreciate in value when there is a stock market crash. And it is not like a piece of fine jewellery which begins to lose its beauty and shine as the years go by. No, our inheritance in heaven is certain.

And to cap it all, just in case someone says: "Well I know the inheritance is sure, but what about me?", Peter says in verse 5 that we, as well as the inheritance, are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the last time. We ourselves as Christians are kept by faith in the God who sustains. We can have confidence that he will keep us and our inheritance safe. That's the Christian's hope. It is a certain reality that will happen when Jesus returns and it is based on the historical truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Purpose of Trials for Those Who Are Saved (verses 6-9)

Our faith isn't tested because God doesn't know how much or what kind of faith we have. It is tested because we often are ignorant of how much or what kind of faith we have. God's purpose in testing is to display the enduring quality of our faith (v.7). We find that we fling ourselves on God in tough times and trust him, even when there seem to be no answers and very little encouragement. Like precious metals that need to be fired to be cleared of all impurities, so we need to be tested so that

the impurities of self-confidence and pride will be burnt off, and we rely solely on the God who made us and loves us.

Now we need to be careful here. We are certainly not encouraged in the Bible to think that God is punishing us or is angry for a particular sin that we have committed when difficult times come upon us. Often, we simply don't know why, or it may simply be because we live in a fallen world. Like Job, we are not often given the answer as to why we are suffering. But we do have the assurance that nothing in God's world is meaningless. Even our trials He can use for His purposes to make us more like Himself. And that is a great encouragement!

And what is the result? Peter tells us in verse 9. It is a greater and more joyful love for our Saviour. As we are changed to be more like him, so we love him with an inexpressible joy, as we realise we are receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls. That is the mark of the mature Christian. Someone who can trust God despite the very toughest of times, despite that fact that we might be at the end of our tether. Yet deep down, we hang on and trust that God will keep us and bring us through. In such people God is refining faith. Very often the godliest people I have met are those who have suffered the most.

The Christian's Foundation (verses 10-12)

Verse 10: *"Concerning this salvation"* - in other words the salvation that is the goal of faith in verse 9 – *"the prophets searched intently and with the greatest care"*. Now what were they looking for? Well, verse 11: *"they were trying to find out the times and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ"* - in other words the Holy Spirit – *"was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow."* So Peter is saying that the prophets tried to work out when the things they prophesied would come to fulfilment. They realised that what they were prophesying was not for them. What were they prophesying? They were prophesying about the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. Peter will quote one of those passages in chapter 2 from Isaiah 53. Now this is very significant. Because Peter is saying that the Old Testament is actually looking forward to Christ. And who was it written for? Well they are mentioned four times in these three verses: *"You."* Especially verse 12: *"It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven."*

It was important to Peter and all the New Testament writers to demonstrate that their teaching was no novelty, but that it was testified beforehand by the prophets. Understanding this made salvation so much greater in the mind of Peter's afflicted readers. The prophets of the Old Testament longed to see exactly the grace of the New Covenant to come. Prophesying by the Spirit of Christ, they knew something of His sufferings and glories, but far less than they longed to know.

One may only imagine how excited Isaiah would have been to read the Gospel of John. The Old Testament prophets knew so much yet much was hidden to them, including the character of the Church (Ephesians 3:4-6) and the very essence of life and immortality (2 Timothy 1:10).

So says Peter, all that was written in the Old Testament concerning this salvation through Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, has been fulfilled in you. It was all planned for you! We Christians this side of the cross receive the blessings that the prophets looked forward to. We are incredibly

blessed! It's no wonder even angels long to look into these things. The "*things*" they long to look into is God's amazing plan of salvation. They can't experience it because they don't need saving. They simply long to ponder more deeply the outworking of God's plan in people like you and me.

And it is those scriptures, our Old Testament and the fulfilment in the New Testament, that are the Christian's foundation. We have the resources we need to keep us going to heaven. We have a book written personally for us by the creator of the universe. The Bible tells us the whole story about Jesus. And it's this book that will help us to keep on the right track as strangers in the world. So read it, ponder it, apply it, do it. Praise be to the God and Saviour of our Lord Jesus Christ! Why? For the Christian's foundation.

Well, if we needed encouraging this evening, then we could not have done better than to turn to 1 Peter 1 and to find these three wonderful blessings the Christian has. Yes we are strangers in the world, and yet we are God's people heading for heaven. We have seen the Christian's hope which reminds us there is much more to come. We've seen the purposes of God in trials which remind us that God works in us through them. And we've seen the Christian's foundation which is God's word about Jesus which helps us on towards heaven. Praise be to God for his wonderful blessings to us!