

Sojourners
1 Peter 1:1-2

Take your Bibles and turn to 1 Peter 1. As you're turning, I want to tell you the story of Sam Dean, who left America to go to China as a missionary in 1914, shortly before WWI. While in China, he spent decades teaching engineering at Yenching University to young Chinese men who shared his belief that "a hand dirtied by honest toil was the most honorable badge a man could wear." Under his tutelage, students designed and supervised the construction of modern buildings all over China, from schools to hospitals to churches.

Things could not have been much better for Sam until the Communists rose to power after WWII and the People's Republic of China was established. Around 1950, as the Korean War was commencing, Sam began to get the sense that all was not well. The head of the university called Sam in to tell him that his title would have to go to a Chinese national. What's more, the money for his work that had come from America dried up when funds for Red China were frozen. He was asked whether he would accept the same salary as an ordinary Chinese professor, \$60 American dollars a month.

One day, he was ordered to attend a meeting in a small auditorium. When he came into the hall, he could not help but notice it had the appearance of a courtroom. He was told to sit in the dock, not realizing that he was now on trial. Another professor stood up and began to accuse Sam of training subversives to sabotage Chinese industry. Sam was not permitted to speak.

A few days later, Chinese police swept into Sam's home while he and his wife were eating dinner, and placed him under house arrest. Five days after that, he was summoned to the Bureau of Public Safety, a fancy name for the police station, where he was accused of being a very bad man and treating people very badly. He was commanded to go home and write out his confessions to his crimes.

Sam was eventually extradited to Hong Kong for his so-called crimes against China. He was probably fortunate to escape with his life, but he carried the trauma of these events with him the rest of his life. I tell you Sam's story because it is the story of an exile, a man who lived in a place where he didn't belong. It is a story of persecution. The country and people he sought to serve for so many years eventually turned against him, falsely accusing him of terrible crimes against humanity.

We are living in a day when our own country has been turned against us. Christians have now become the enemies of America. We are now considered a threat to democracy by our own "Department of Justice." In light of this, the day may be coming, and may already be here, when we are accused of being very bad people who treat people very badly. Which brings us to 1 Peter. 1 Peter is a letter to a persecuted people. It is a letter to exiles and sojourners. I believe it is a letter that has much to say to us today about our situation in this world. With that introduction, let's get into the text.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:
May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1 Peter 1:1-2)

In these opening verses, we have God's author, God's audience, and God's announcement.

Let's begin with God's author. Who is this Peter? He introduces himself as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. That is a word that carries a great deal of weight in the New Testament. It was a title given to Peter by none other than the Lord Himself. Peter did not give himself this title. The word itself means literally "commissioned messenger," or "one who has been sent with a message."

The title, as ascribed to Peter, carries with it the mark of authority. It carries authority because of the one who has commissioned Peter. Mark that carefully. Peter did not possess authority inherently; he was granted authority by the grace of His Lord and Savior. His authority came from the One who gave Him the message he had been commissioned to declare. He possessed unique authority as an apostle due to the fact that he had been an eye-witness to the events of Jesus' life and ministry, His death, resurrection, and ascension. That is what gives his written words canonical authority. He was given authority by the Lord Himself to declare a message that was divine.

It is important as we consider Peter that we have a full view of his life as it is presented to us in the Scriptures. We have a good deal of information about this man's life. We not only know him as Peter the Apostle, we also know him as Simon the fisherman. In other words, we not only know who Peter became, we know who he was before he met Jesus. We have the privilege of being witnesses to the changed life of this man Peter. Peter's life itself is a lesson about the power of God. Knowing the testimony of this man Peter helps us appreciate all the more the words he has to share with us in this letter.

So, let's remember together who this man Peter was before Jesus changed him. He was Simon, the fisherman from Galilee. Before Jesus met him, he was basically a nobody by the world's standards. Have you ever felt like a nobody? Have you felt like you don't matter? Have you questioned whether your life really has significance? Simon might have struggled with the same questions and doubts before Jesus came along on the shores of Galilee. Here's the thing: without Jesus, we all wrestle with those doubts. One of the great lies of the enemy is to whisper to us that we are nobodies, that we don't matter, and that no one, not even God, really cares about us. But when Jesus meets us, He tells us the glorious truth that our lives are so important to God that Jesus came to us from the courts of Heaven and sought us out in this world. Remember how this happened to Peter?

He had been fishing all night with his friends James and John, and they had caught nothing. Jesus came along in the morning and told them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat.

Simon protested that they had fished all night to no avail, but at the word of Jesus he said he would let down the nets. Sure enough, when they tried to bring up the nets, so great was the weight of the catch that the nets began to break. They filled two boats so full of fish that they began to sink. Watch what happened next.

⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." ⁹ For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." ¹¹ And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. (Luke 5:8-11)

Notice Simon's deep sense of his own unworthiness. In the presence of Jesus, he knew he was a sinful man. That is always the starting place of true discipleship. Simon did not become a disciple until he had been utterly broken in the presence of the Christ. Our first approach to Jesus must be the same humble approach of an unworthy sinner in need of forgiveness and grace.

Notice also how Jesus responded to Simon's confession. "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men." Jesus spoke the words that would forever change the course of Simon's life. He gave him a new identity. I love those words, "from now on," because they speak to the conversion that took place in Simon's life, and which takes place in every believer's life. Jesus Himself says these words to us when we come to Him for salvation. Do not be afraid, *from now on* you will be utterly different. *From now on* your life will have renewed purpose. Whereas once you were a nobody, blindly living in the kingdom of darkness for yourself, now you will be a child of the King of kings in the Kingdom of light, living for His glory.

He takes common fishermen and makes them fishers of men. He takes what is common or unclean and raises it into the rarified air of having a share in the glory of God. As Paul said, "God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God." (1 Corinthians 1:28-29) Have you heard Jesus speak the words "from now on" to you? "From now on, hence forth and forevermore, you are changed because you have come to Me and you will now follow Me."

In connection with this change, Jesus also gave Simon a new name, which is why we call this book 1 Peter, and not 1 Simon. Jesus named Simon Cephas in Aramaic, or Petros in Greek, which in English we translate as Peter. It means "rock." Jesus gave Peter the identity of a man who was solid, steadfast, and immovable in his faith and trust in the Lord. The name is connected with his confession that Jesus is the Christ. We see that in Matthew 16. ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:15-18) He is Peter, the rock, because he was the first to make this confession upon which salvation

hinges. The church is built on the foundation of that one confession, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

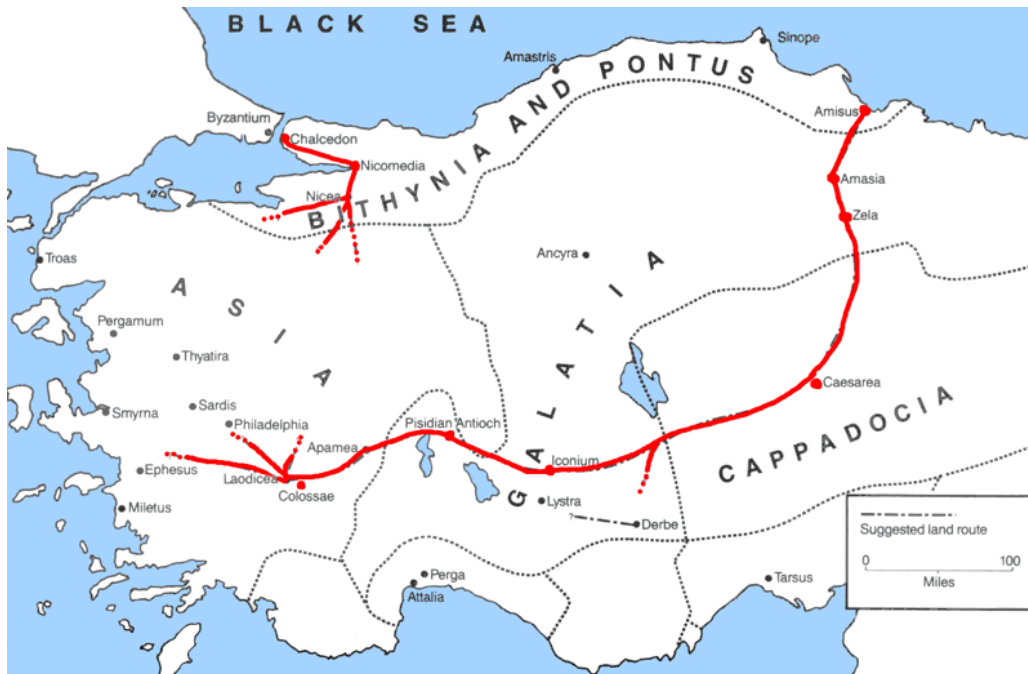
This name likely created a sense of lack and tension in Peter's life. Over time, I think it did. The Peter we know in the gospel accounts is often impulsive, erratic, abrasive, and unrestrained. Immediately after he made the great confession, Jesus had to turn to him and say, "Get behind me, Satan." In the course of one night, he vowed he would lay his life down for the Lord, and he subsequently denied three times that he even knew Him. Before Peter could grow up into his new identity as a rock, he had to learn some hard lessons through life experience. But the letter we are studying now is evidence that Peter grew up into the Lord, and thus, he grew up into the identity that the Lord gave him. He became a pastor. He became a servant. He became a man of rock-solid faith. His rock-solid faith made him rock-solid, unafraid, unashamed, and immovable.

That is God's author of this letter. God chose Peter to be a fisher of men. That is what we see Peter become, and it is what Peter is doing in this letter. He is fishing for men. He is calling upon those who believe to remain faithful under persecution.

Which leads us to point two: God's audience. To whom is this letter addressed? See it again. **To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. (1 Peter 1:1b)** Who are these people? First, they are exiles. The Greek word here is *parepidémos*, which means literally someone residing in a strange country, a place to which they do not belong. It is someone dwelling in a land, taking up residence in a place, while at the same time being conscious of the fact that it is not their home. They are "passing through" the place in which they live. It is not their destination.

Who are the exiles or sojourners to whom Peter was writing? Well, they are exiles *of the Dispersion*. What does this mean? It refers to Jews who had been dispersed or scattered abroad into the lands and regions of the Gentiles. Understanding this term requires some knowledge of the Old Testament and the history of the Jewish nation. How is it that Israel became a nation of exiles dispersed among other nations? Well, long story short all of this happened according to the wisdom and plan of God on account of the sinfulness of the Jews. The Jews were taken out of their native land because they failed to remain faithful to God. First, the Assyrians took the Israelites of the northern Kingdom of Israel captive in 722 BC. Then, the Babylonians conquered the southern kingdom of Judah and around 586 BC took them as exiles into the land of Babylon. After the Babylonian captivity, some Jews returned to Jerusalem, but many remained scattered throughout the regions of Assyria and Babylon.

Eventually, the Greeks conquered those kingdoms under Alexander the Great, and then later the Romans conquered the Greeks. It is the Jewish exiles in Rome to whom Peter wrote. He specifically names the regions to which he intended this letter to be circulated. **To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, (1 Peter 1:1b)** Here is a map of those regions in Peter's day.



These five provinces of Rome covered most of what is modern-day Turkey in Asia Minor. Asia in the west contained several major cities, including the cities of the seven churches addressed by Jesus in the Revelation given to John, Galatia in the center, Cappadocia in the east, and Bithynia and Pontus in the north contained Byzantium, which would become Constantinople in the fourth Century, and is Istanbul today. This entire region was to the north of Judea and Jerusalem, which shows us how the church began to flourish and spread like a wildfire through the Roman Empire.

Many of these churches to which Peter wrote would have been founded by the Apostle Paul on his missionary journeys into these regions. There is much that we do not know about Peter's ministry after the earlier chapters of the book of Acts. He is not mentioned after the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. The latter half of Acts focuses entirely on Paul's missionary journeys and then his arrest in Jerusalem and the trials that eventually brought him to Rome. Based on the fact that Peter addresses the churches in these regions in his epistles, it is assumed by many that he traveled to these regions himself at some point. We can't be dogmatic about this, as the Scriptures are largely silent about it, but whether he traveled there or not, it is significant that Peter's influence spread abroad into these regions as well. This shows that the apostles cared for their brothers and sisters all over the world. As the church spread to the ends of the earth, the Apostles' care and concern for the church spread abroad as well.

The history of the dispersion of the Jews is significant because it teaches us a great deal about how God has determined in His infinite wisdom to deal with mankind in this world. God sent the Savior to exiles. He sent Jesus in the fulness of times, which was after the Jews had every opportunity to save themselves through their obedience to the law. The fulness of times was when the Jews had become a people without an earthly home, dispersed among the nations in the futility of their sins. They were not exiles because God had failed them, but because they

had failed God. They utterly failed, just as we all have. They sinned and fell short of God's glory, and for those who were willing to confess it, that was precisely what prepared them to receive the gospel when the time had come.

God's audience, the people who have ears to hear the gospel, are exiles. They are sojourners. They are people who walk in darkness (Isaiah 9:1). They are people who know that they are lost, like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36). They are people who long for home in a world that cannot offer it to them. They are people who have been humbled and brought low by their sin. They are poor in spirit. These are the people whom God has chosen. That is what the word *elect* means. The audience He has chosen to hear His greatest message is these exiles of the dispersion.

What about you? Have you come to the realization that you are walking in darkness? Have you known that you are lost, far away from home? If you do not sense your need for a shepherd, then you do not have ears to hear what the Spirit of God is saying to you tonight. Peter addresses a people with a deeply felt need for the Shepherd who would lead them home. I pray that every one of us knows that need tonight. If you know that you are an exile, then you are ready to hear what God has to say to you tonight.

That leads us to verse two and our third point for tonight: God's announcement. Here is the announcement that God has made and is still making to the entire world today:

**² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:
May grace and peace be multiplied to you. (1 Peter 1:2)**

There is so much to unpack in this amazing verse. Time will certainly fail me tonight to even begin to scratch the surface of the depths of the riches of this announcement. This is an announcement of what God has done for His exiles. It is an announcement of salvation, and through it, multiplied grace and peace. Right off the bat, one can't help but notice that Peter presents a trinitarian view of God. The Trinity is held before us here in one neat and concise verse. God the Father, God the Spirit, and God the Son, Jesus Christ are all active in this announcement. They all have a particular role or function in connection with our salvation.

We can break this announcement down in terms of the functions of each of these three persons of the Godhead. Salvation begins with God the Father. He is the one who planned it, and it all flows from Him. That is what His foreknowledge is meant to speak to us. Foreknowledge implies a plan. Picture an architect's blueprints.



The blueprints are not the building itself, but they are the exact details of how the building will be constructed. The architect foreknows every detail of the house before the process of building it has even begun. In time, the builder will gather the resources and execute the plan by putting all the pieces together in exact accordance with the architect's design. That is a dim picture of God's foreknowledge. He put the plans together. In advance, He pinpointed the exact measures and details in the time and space of history for how this plan would unfold. Before these events occurred in time and space, it was God the Father, in His infinite wisdom, who foreknew them, down to the last detail. Everything flows from the Father's plans, and everything returns back to the Father as the one who designed and planned history. He gets the glory because the plan belongs to Him. All of our boasting is in Him.

Second, we have the sanctification of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit has sometimes been referred to as the Executive of the Trinity, meaning He is the one who carries forth God's plans into fruition. In creation, the Holy Spirit hovered over the face of the deep. He was there, present in all places as the executive agent of God's designs, bringing the plans of God into being. In the creation of man, God breathed the Holy Spirit into man's nostrils, and the man became a living being. It was the in-breathed Holy Spirit who brought man, as a creature made in the image and likeness of God, into being. His presence in the very body of Adam was the life of God within Adam.

The sanctification of the Spirit, then, refers to the restoration of what Adam lost in his sin. It refers to a renewal of that God-breathed life into our souls. The Holy Spirit sanctifies everything that He indwells. If He is in something, it is God's, and it is therefore holy unto the Lord. Until the Spirit sanctifies us, we are unholy. We are not God's if His Spirit is not in us. We are sinners, and the Holy Spirit does not dwell in a sinful vessel. When the Holy Spirit sanctifies us, we are made new creatures, born again to a living hope because we have been washed.

That ties the work of the Holy Spirit to the work of the Son, even as it is tied to the plans of the Father. You cannot separate these things, just as the persons of the Godhead are one God, so the works of the three persons of the Godhead are perfectly one. We are sanctified, made holy again unto the Lord, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with His blood. This is essential to understanding salvation. God's purpose for saving us is that we would be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with His blood. Without this there is no holiness. Without Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of God's plan, there is no salvation. That's what Peter declared in Acts 4.

¹¹This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹²And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:11-12)

Now, what is the meaning of the sprinkling of Jesus' blood? This ties the gospel to the Old Testament, which Peter would have expected the readers to understand. Sprinkling blood was profoundly important to the Jews. It was something with which they would have been familiar. It goes all the way back to Exodus, when Moses first received the Law on Mount Sinai. Over a thousand years earlier, God had announced to His people when they were being constituted as a people set apart from all other nations, holy to the Lord, that they were to be sprinkled with blood. Here's what we read in Exodus 24.

⁷Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” ⁸And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.” (Exodus 24:7-8)

The blood of these animals was necessary on account of the sinfulness of the people. Even as they declared that that would be obedient, they still needed an atoning sacrifice for their sins. There was a price to be paid, for the wages of sin is death. A life is given in place of a life. It was a penal, substitutionary sacrifice. The blood God commanded to be shed in those days was the blood of animals, but it was not adequate to make atonement for the peoples' sin. If it had been, they would have only needed one offering, but as it was, they needed continual offerings. Throughout the centuries, the blood of animals flowed from the altar because those animals were not sufficient payment for the sins of the people. Why did God require them, then? Because the people needed continual reminders of their need. The sacrificial system was a gift from God to keep the people in remembrance of their need for the Lord's provision of a sacrifice. He who provided those animals for them would in due time provide a better sacrifice, which would once-for-all make atonement for sin, making those sacrifices obsolete.

Many people struggle with the idea that God needed an atoning sacrifice in order to forgive our sins. They wonder why God couldn't just say our sins were forgiven and be done with it. They think it takes away from the love of God to say that He needed blood to be shed in our place. I say it with reverence, but what they fail to realize is that the love of God is not diminished by

the need for Jesus' blood, but is rather revealed and infinitely magnified by it. Timothy Keller once said,

“The doctrine of the love of God is not that God does not need atoning sacrifice, but that He provides it Himself. Until you admit that you are bad enough that Jesus had to die for you, and until you admit that you are valuable enough to God that He wanted to, you are never going to have the peace that comes from knowing your sins are forgiven, that the barrier is down, that you are at one with God. You are psychologically out of touch with reality. You are living on borrowed time. Eventually, that unconscious knowledge that you are not right with your Creator, with the Father of your soul, is going to get you.” (Timothy Keller)

Don't you see that the fact that God needed to give His Son for you, and was willing to do so, reveals the depths of His love for you? He wants to be at one with you. He wants you to belong to Him. He wants you to be cleansed. He wants you to be His child. That's why He gave His Son to die in your place. Not because He's capricious, violent, and unpredictable, but because He loves you, and because that's the only way He could get you back.

This announcement means that grace and peace can be multiplied to you. Today, you can be the recipient of super-abounding grace and peace from God. Grace multiplied means unmerited favor and love. It means He lavishes His love on you, though you do not deserve it. It means sin has been overcome in your life by the grace of God. Not even your own sin can come between you and the Father's love because Christ died for you while you were still a sinner. Peace multiplied means rest in communion with God. It means being in the presence of God because His life is now in your soul. He comes to meet with you daily, and you are at one with Him. He multiplies this peace above and beyond all the sin that kept you from Him. Peter's prayer from the start for these exiles is that God would multiply that grace and peace to them.

As you live in a world that hates you, you can have grace and peace multiplied to you from God. As you are accused of being a threat to democracy for refusing to mindlessly repeat the lies of our culture about marriage and sexuality, you can have grace and peace multiplied to you. You do not need to live in fear of those who can harm your body. Stand firm, and know that God's announcement of salvation is the truth that sets men and women free. Be a herald of that truth to a world that is closing its ears to it. If God could use Peter, He can use you, too. If those exiles were chosen to be the audience of God, then you, too, can hear what God is saying today. If God's announcement could sweep through the Roman Empire as it did, changing lives one heart at a time, there's no reason to think that He couldn't continue multiplying His grace and peace in our world today.