

Sermon Brief

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Text: 1 Peter 1:1-2

Title: “Alien Living in a Chaotic World”

Subject: Peter addresses struggling believers in Asia Minor.

Complement: He reminds them of who they are in Christ.

Textual Idea: Peter addresses struggling believers in Asia Minor by reminding them of who they are in Christ.

Sermon Idea: Struggling believers need to know they are eternally home in God.

Interrogative: God deals in futures.

Key Points:

1. The people of God are “temporary aliens” in this world.
2. The people of God find security in their identity as God’s chosen people.

What do I want people to know? I want people to know that our true home is with God. This world is only a temporary place for us. Our security comes from knowing we are in Christ through His mighty power both now and forever.

What do I want people to do? I want people to (1) trust Christ as Lord and Savior, (2) not get wrapped up in earthly concerns, and (3) remember that God deals in futures.

What need am I addressing? I am addressing the need to find hope in the midst of suffering.

“Alien Living in a Chaotic World”

1 Peter 1:1-2

February 6, 2022

We're going to be starting a study of the first letter of Peter today and to begin with, I'd like to read another letter. It was written to a pastor friend of one of the commentators I read. *“Eighteen years ago the Lord blessed my wife and me with a child born with multiple birth defects. When he was born, the doctor came to me and said, “Don't hope, he will not live out the day.” I got on my knees and said, “God, I don't know why you sent me this little boy with so many problems—three and one half pounds, three months premature, only a portion of a left leg, malformed right hand, possible lung damage, etc.; but please don't take him back now.” That evening when I came to the hospital the doctor greeted me by saying, “I just examined your son again. I don't believe it's the same boy. I think he's going to make it.” My son stayed five weeks in that hospital. He came home and then for years it was in and out of hospitals for one operation after another. Each time his little stump would grow, the bone would push through the tip of his stump and would have to be sawed off. Seeing the pain that boy went through, I thought I was going insane. I cursed God and turned my back on him.*

I crawled into a bourbon bottle for fifteen years. The more I drank, the deeper into hell I went. Sometimes, waking up hungover, I would be confronted with horrible things I had done that I didn't even remember doing. One morning I awoke with a broken right hand and discovered 22 holes in my wall that I had punched. I didn't remember doing it.

One Sunday morning I laid in bed and reflected on what a lousy husband and father I was and decided I would [take my own life.] The radio was on, and you were speaking. I had never heard you before. You said that Jesus loved me. It had no impact because I had heard it all before. Only then you said, “THE LORD DEALS IN FUTURES.” I don't know, to this day, why that phrase hit me like a ton of bricks. It saved my life. I started crying and said, “God, if you deal in futures, then take this wretched life and make something of it before I give it to Satan.” Of course, God answered.

And my boy? In the eighth grade he was third on the east coast in a math competition and received a certificate from our governor and a mini scholarship from John Hopkins University in Baltimore. In his freshman year of high school, he was the number 1 world geography student in the nation. Today he is a junior in high school and continues to astound us with his brilliance. My lovely wife stayed with me through all the hell I put her through. When I asked her why, she just said, “The Lord deals in futures, and so do I.”

What a testimony! Aren't you glad that the Lord deals in futures?! We may not all face the kinds of difficulties that this man did, but all of us suffer in a variety of ways. Suffering is part of human experience. It's not optional. The question is not “Will I suffer,” but “How will I handle suffering.” Will I focus on the present circumstances, or will I remember that the Lord deals in futures? That's what the first letter of Peter is all about.

So to start off this morning, I'd like to first of all do an overview of the letter. This will be a bit dry but it's important that we have a good grasp of the overall context. **(LCD) The author is the Apostle Peter**, the disciple of Jesus. I'll say more about him in a moment. The date is most likely somewhere between A.D. 60-64 right before Peter's martyrdom at the hands of the Emperor Nero. I'll say more about that in a moment too. The occasion of the letter is the fact that believers in Jesus were suffering in a pagan society and needed to know how to endure. Peter's audience is a mix of Gentile and Jewish converts, but it seems to be addressing mostly Gentile believers. The focus of the letter is Jesus! Who is called many titles in this letter: "a lamb," "the living Stone," "the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls," "Chief Shepherd." He's our Savior and Our Lord and the model of godly behavior in the face of suffering. Some key words are "Suffer" – 12x, "Submit" – 6x, "Hope" – 5x, "Do good" – 4x. It leaves us with the idea of trusting God our Living Hope by enduring suffering and doing good like Jesus did.

Now the title I've given the series is **(LCD) alien living in a chaotic world**. There is a theme of "this is not our world" throughout the letter. We'll see that this morning. There is also the theme that "stuff happens" in this chaotic world we live in. It's not our home and it's very messy! How do we live here especially when it involves suffering. That question is relevant to all of us whether related to personal tragedy like the man I read about earlier, or to those who deal with organized evil like our brothers and sisters in Kenya who since January 3rd have dealt with multiple killings by Muslim terrorists because they believe in Jesus. We are not of this world as believers in Jesus and the affects of that are devastating and painful. How do we deal with that? Peter tells us.

As for an **(LCD) outline of the letter**, there is no consensus, but I look at it this way: the first two chapters give us reasons why we're aliens in this world in the first place; specifically, it's because we've been chosen by God as His people. The middle of the letter talks about how we witness to the reality of God by submitting to authorities now and entrusting justice to the God who deals in futures. Finally, the letter ends with several exhortations to stand firm in joyful hope.

Now this kind of "endure suffering, God is in control" advice could be cliché or even insensitive from just anyone; but all this comes from Peter. **(LCD) Remember Peter?** He'd met Jesus thirty years before writing this letter. He was a regular guy like you and me trying to make ends meet when one day Jesus came along and invited him to follow Him. What an adventure Peter was in for! Here's a quick look at his **(LCD) resume**:

- **Jewish Fisherman from Galilee named Simon**
- **Called and renamed by Jesus**
- **First to perceive Jesus as Messiah**
- **One of the three "inner circle" friends of Jesus**
- **Walked on water**
- **Denied knowing Jesus 3x**
- **Restored by Jesus – "Feed my sheep"**
- **Bold preacher of the Gospel**
- **Miraculously released from prison**
- **Martyred – tradition says crucified upside-down**

Think of all the experiences that Peter brings to the writing of this letter near the end of his life. I want you to keep what you know about Peter in mind as we walk through it over the next several months. In particular, as I said, **(LCD) pretty reliable early church tradition states that Peter was crucified upside-down.** Supposedly it was because he didn't believe he was worthy of dying as His Savior did. Wow. **(LCD) What a journey** Peter made from an impetuous, prideful, ambitious young man to a wise, humble, sacrificial servant of the Lord Jesus. Transformation. Peter's union with Jesus transformed him completely and enabled him to fulfill his kingdom calling on earth.

After Jesus predicted Peter's betrayal, He gave him his kingdom calling. **(LCD) "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."** Notice Jesus said, "when you have turned back." Jesus knew that Peter would be restored. Why? Because the Lord deals in futures. Say that with me, **(LCD) "The Lord deals in futures."** Peter's betrayal would not be the end of God's plans for him. God told Peter to strengthen his brothers and that's what he did for decades culminating in this letter. His failures didn't define him, God did. Let's now look at this letter and be strengthened in knowing that the Lord deals in futures.

This morning, we're just going to look at Peter's opening greeting, 1 Peter 1:1, "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, 2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*" As I said earlier, Peter was an apostle of Jesus Christ. An apostle was an official representative who was appointed and authorized by the one sending them. There was authority connected with this title. Peter's words here are the words of Jesus because He is Jesus' apostle. This letter isn't just some helpful tips for successful living. It is the wisdom of God Himself mediated through Peter.

The letter is written to "*God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.*" Let's look at a **(LCD) map of the Roman Empire** at the time. Rome, where Peter most likely was when he wrote this letter, is here. All the way over here are the five Roman provinces Peter is writing to. They are in Asia Minor which today is modern-day Turkey. Down here is Jerusalem, the center of the Christian and Jewish communities which means that up here, far from Jerusalem, the gatherings were most likely small, maybe 10-30 in house churches. We do know from second century Roman sources that the Christians were very active in these provinces and seen as a problem by Rome. Pliny the Younger, a Roman governor in this region, wrote a letter to the Emperor in A.D. 112 where he said this about the Christians there, **(LCD) "It seems to me to be necessary to get advice, because many in every age group, every status of life, and both male and female are now in danger and will be in the future. This plague of superstition has spread over the cities and over the fields and villages, but I believe that its advance can be stopped."** Christians were not viewed favorably by the Romans...or anyone for that matter.

Which is why Peter called them “exiles.” Actually, that’s not a great translation. The word here in Greek was a very specific term for a temporary resident. Kind of like someone who comes to America without a permanent visa – only here for a time and without the rights of citizenship. The New American Standard translation says, “*to those who reside as aliens.*” That’s better. That’s where I’m getting my **(LCD) sermon series title from: Alien Living in a Chaotic World.** Exiles assumes some kind of forced departure. I believe Peter is not talking about their political status but they’re spiritual one. They are not citizens of this world, they are “God’s elect,” chosen by God and citizens of His Kingdom.

What an interesting contrast of these two words side by side, “God’s elect, exiles or aliens.” God’s elect speaks of being wanted, chosen, of heaven; exiles speaks of rejection, despised by the earth. We Christians live in the tension between these two realities. That was true for these ancient believers and it’s true of us too. But remember my opening illustration...God deals in futures. As real as our current struggle is, and the struggle is truly real, our future hope trumps it. In the tension between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of earth, the lasting, ultimate reality is the kingdom of God. That is why Paul, a man who went through unspeakable tortures, could say this, **(LCD) “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”** Resting in this truth, that our Father has chosen us for His good purpose, will bring us great strength and peace. The Lord deals in futures.

These ones are “scattered,” the Greek “diaspora.” It’s a term used to describe the scattering of Jews all over the world; but here Peter used it to describe those of us all over the world who are waiting to be gathered to our true home. In the letter of Hebrews, the writer talks about all these people who walked by faith in this world. He says this about them, **(LCD) “All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth...Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them.”** We are chosen by God, made citizens of heaven, and He is not ashamed to call us His people. And He has promised that He is preparing an eternal city for us that far outshines anything this world offers. My friends, know who you are! You are chosen by a God who is in total control and who is faithful to His promises. Your true home is with Him.

And that’s true because of what God has done for us as described in verse 2, “*who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*” What we have here is a **(LCD) three-fold description** of God’s incredible grace in making us His people. Let’s look at each of these. First, notice that our salvation is the product of all three members of the Trinity working together: Father, Spirit and Jesus Christ. We’re a product of their loving community and each of them has their role.

First, we've been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. The word here is **(LCD) prognosis – pro=before and gnosis=knowledge**. Now when a doctor gives a prognosis, he's taking a guess at what will happen based on what he knows presently. Now some say that God is more like our doctors, He only knows the possibilities of the future, not the actual outcomes – that's up to our choices. This is called Open Theism. Frankly, I understand the desire to protect human free will, but this is going too far. I believe that the Bible teaches that God isn't guessing about the future – He knows everything past, present and future because He is eternal. He just is and therefore all of time lays completed before Him. Of the many verses I could show you, one I love is from Psalm 139, **(LCD) “Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD...All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.”**

What are we to make of this then? Do we have any free will? Look at this cartoon, **(LCD) “He's opening the door,” “Oops! Gotcha'!” That's free will without God being sovereign. On the other hand, no free will at all means we're just puppets.** Yet the Bible affirms both. Though there are many attempts to explain how free will and God's sovereignty work together, the bottom line is that it is a mystery. They're both true in the Bible and because God's thoughts are way beyond ours, we shouldn't expect to understand the intricate inner-workings of the eternal ways of God. God knows all and that includes the future...which is why He can deal in futures! And that truth, far from being distressing, is meant as a comfort – and it is. I like what J.I. Packer said about God's sovereignty, **(LCD) “Men treat God's sovereignty as a theme for controversy, but in Scripture it is a matter for worship.”** Amen.

The sovereign Father God chose you by His foreknowledge. You are wanted, you belong to Him...IF you exercise your free will and say 'yes' to Him. Have you? Have you recognized that you have turned away from God, broken His will and are now destined for judgment? That's what the Bible tells us. God is just and He can't just ignore sin in our lives...and He doesn't. Instead, part two, **(LCD) through the sanctifying work of the Spirit**, he's made us His beloved children. This is speaking of the new birth, being born again from above. When we place our faith in Christ, God forgives us our sin, sends His Spirit into our hearts and we're given the power to live holy lives. It is the Spirit that does this. Sanctifying means being set apart, God sets us apart to be His chosen people.

Finally, we get **(LCD) the reason for this being chosen and it is to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled by His blood.** Our focus should not be on fulfilling our earthly dreams and desires, remember we're aliens, temporary residents, this isn't our home. Our purpose on earth is to glorify our Father in heaven and we do that by obeying Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. And we can do that because He has sprinkled us with His holy blood. This is an allusion to the ancient practice of sealing a covenant agreement by sprinkling each party with the blood of a sacrifice. Moses did this with the nation of Israel in Exodus 24. By the blood of Jesus, we are bound to God in mutual commitment: He cares for us, and we obey Him.

Peter is reminding these struggling believers who they are: chosen by God, empowered by the Spirit, obedient to Jesus Christ. They are secure...even in the midst of oppression and rejection. We are **(LCD) aliens living in a chaotic world**. We are not home yet; but we can live by faith and hope now because we have a God who deals in futures...and He will bring us home. With that, Peter blesses them, and I'd like us to close by have us all stand and bless each other by reading different versions of his closing benediction.

(LCD)

- **NIV “Grace and Peace be yours in abundance.”**
- **MSG “May everything good from God be yours!”**
- **CEV “I pray that God will be kind to you and will keep on giving you peace!”**
- **NASB “May grace and peace be yours to the fullest measure.”**