

## Sermon 28/02/20

**Where Do I Belong?** By Ben S

**Reading John 21:1-17**

1 Peter 1:1-2

We are starting a new series of sermons from 1 Peter. Notice Peter's letter is written, "To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, 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:"

### **Three reasons why we should read Peter's letter**

In chapter 5:1 Peter introduces himself as a fellow elder<sup>1</sup>, who witnessed<sup>2</sup> first-hand the sufferings of Christ and who will share<sup>3</sup> in the glory that will be revealed.

<sup>1</sup>Peter understands what it means to sin against Christ and to be restored. He had told the Lord that he would never let him down, he would die for him but hours later he denied him three times. After the resurrection Jesus cooked his disciples a breakfast on the beach. He restored his relationship with Peter. Three times he asked Peter if he loved him and three times he told Peter to feed his sheep. Peter has a pastor's heart. He understands what it means to be broken and restored. I hope we can discover Christ's restoring power through Peter's letter.

<sup>2</sup>Peter is an eye-witness. He is an Apostle with a capital A. Apostle means sent one. Some churches use that title for people who are pioneering a gospel movement. But Apostleship is a unique office never to be repeated. These men had known the dying and risen Christ. The Christian church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." (Ephesians . 2:20) Their work was accompanied by signs and miracles. Their ministry was marked by suffering, hardship and persecution. All the Apostles were martyred for their faith. Peter explains why he wrote this letter in chapter 5:12. His motivation is to encourage the church by his testimony to the true grace of God. He wants to encourage them to stand firm in what God has done for them. Not what they have done for God.

<sup>3</sup>This letter is the counsel of a man who is deeply assured that he will share in the glory that is to come. Peter is not a man of doom and gloom. Peter's heart is full of hope in Jesus Christ. He always encourages us to see the glory that is coming. Peter is a fellow sufferer who is realistic but who counsels us to hope. This is a letter written by a pastor who was directly commissioned to feed God's sheep and is deeply assured that he will share in the future glory that is to come because of the grace of Jesus Christ. As we look at 1 Peter together let's open our hearts to the Holy Spirit so he will do good and powerful things in our hearts and lives as we receive his counsel.

Peter is writing to the church, the elect exiles, Jew and Gentile scattered across Northern Turkey. The word scattered is the word diaspora, that is used to describe the Jewish people who were scattered throughout the world during the exile in 600BC. This is a huge theme. Christians are exiles, wayfaring strangers, pilgrims and foreigners, sojourners and aliens living in exile. We don't fit in, we don't belong here. Our home is in glory with Jesus. Our citizenship is in heaven in the coming kingdom of God. Peter is writing to Christians who are not suffering direct physical persecution yet. That will come under Nero. But at this time they are facing social

pressure, pressure to conform to the worship of all the Roman gods. They worship Jesus Christ as the only true God. They were accused of being enemies of the empire, not being good for society. They were insulted and laughed at for the name of Christ. The Christians were confused by the teasing and criticism because they thought Christianity was a good thing, Why were people looking at them as misfits and oddballs? It's not easy living as a foreigner and a stranger in the world. This is relevant to us today. As a Christian today you will know what that feels like. We know what it is to stand out and to behave differently, to feel like, 'I don't know where I belong.' This letter speaks into that situation.

Peter starts with your identity, with who you are in Christ. When life gets hard we suffer from identity amnesia. We forget who we are. We need to remember our true identity. Peter reminds us 'you are chosen according to foreknowledge (or fore love) by the Father' (v2) Be encouraged. Remember 'God has loved me even before the foundation of the world was laid. This is all grace. I am his precious child.'

We are set apart by the Holy Spirit for Jesus. He came, turned our heart to Jesus and gave us the gift of faith. He lives in us to help, strengthen and lead us on our pilgrimage through this world. We are not alone. We have a helper who transforms us powerfully from the inside to help us obey Jesus especially when times are tough.

Lastly we are cleansed deeply by the Son. (v2) We are in a covenant relationship sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ where there is endless forgiveness; set apart for Jesus. That's our identity. Washed cleansed and set apart for Jesus.

"There is a fountain filled with blood/  
Drawn from Immanuel's veins;  
And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,  
Lose all their guilty stains"

Be encouraged in your struggle to stand firm in the true grace of God. Remember where you belong. A new creation is coming and you are passing through this age to be part of that new creation. Remember to whom you belong. You belong to God and his coming kingdom of eternal glory. Remember how the Father looked down the corridors of time and said to the Holy Spirit, "I want him/her to be mine." Remember how the Holy Spirit turned your heart to Jesus. Remember the blood of Jesus shed for you. All your guilt and sin is taken away forever. Remember how the triune God welcomes and embraces you and receives you to himself with joy and delight: all of this for you and for me. We are exiles and refugees but chosen and loved by God. We are strangers in this world but known to your heavenly Father.

"I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger travelling through this world of woe  
Yet there's no sickness, toil or danger In that bright land to which I go  
I'm going there to see my Father I'm going there no more to roam  
I'm only goin' over Jordan I'm only goin' over home."