

A Letter to Aliens, part 3

1 Peter 1:1-2

(preached Pine Grove 7/21/19 Sun PM)

Introduction

Though a great blessing of God in many areas of life, the internet is also a great curse.

I grew up in the age of encyclopedias and libraries.

If you wanted to know something, it required a little effort..

You had to go the book shelf or go to the library.

Today, you simply take your phone or laptop out, and all the information in the world is at your fingertips.

Now, that is trouble if you are someone who is incredibly curious..

Well, I have someone in my family like that.

He day starts and ends with questions.

So we just pick up the computer and find out because I usually don't have an answer...

A recent question was what is the slowest animal in the world?

#3 - The garden snail moves only .13 miles per hour and can sleep for 3 years at a time.

#2 - The starfish moves at only .06 miles per hour and usually just floats with the ocean currents.

#1 - The 3 toed sloth moves at .03 miles per hour and often takes so long getting from place to place that algae often grows on it.

Yet, all those creatures move faster than me over the past 2 weeks in 1 Peter 1..

We have really been crawling through these opening verses over the past few Sunday nights, but these verses are critical to getting the message of 1 Peter right.

WE have to understand the nature of Peter.

Yes, God through His Spirit inspired every word that Peter wrote, but Peter's personality is still here..

And we must also understand the nature of the people to whom Peter wrote.

Yes, he was writing to every believer who were ever be part of the church, but he was also writing to a specific group of believers as well..

And we need to understand their situation as well in order to arrive at a proper interpretation as well..

Therefore, let's jump back into these first 2 verses again tonight..

We have called this introduction A Letter to Aliens..

Let's read these 2 verses to get us going..

***1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To those who reside as aliens, scattered
throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia,
and Bithynia, who are chosen 2 according to the
foreknowledge of God the Father, by the
sanctifying work of the Spirit, [a]to obey Jesus
Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace
and peace [b]be yours in the fullest measure.***

We began two weeks ago with a short biography of Peter..

I. The Author (1a)

Peter was the leader of the disciples, but after Jesus' departure, Peter became a leader of the church..

Peter headed up the replacement of Judas.

Peter preached the first sermon of the church age.

Peter was the central figure in the opening chapters of the book of Acts..

But we also noted that Peter was not the first pope as the Catholic Church claims.

In fact, Peter was not anything special other than what the Holy Spirit did in his heart to fit him to lead the church in those early years..

And to fit him to write these two letters to the church that we find in the NT..

II. The Aliens (1b-2a)

So, we know about Peter, and then we spent some time looking at the people to whom he was writing..

The date was probably the fall of 64 AD.

Rome has just been destroyed by a fire.

The fire was set by Nero, who was the Roman emperor but also a mad man.

He wanted to build stuff to show off his brilliance, so he burnt Rome down in order to build it again.

The only problem is that the people were outraged when word got out that he was the one responsible for it.

They had lost family and friend in the fire, not to mention their homes and businesses and way of life.

So Nero shifted the blame to a small group of people in Rome who called themselves Christians..

He pointed to the fact that they spoke of fire as judgment.

He pointed to the fact that they followed man named Jesus who reportedly resisted Roman authority.

In the end, he was successful in throwing the blame on Christians.

History records the persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire.

Nero even used Christians as lamps for outdoor parties..

Needless to say, this letter was written to Christians who were feeling the heat of hatred.

So what do you write to a group of people to encourage them to stand firm in their affliction?

Well, that is really what follows in this letter, and I remind you that 1 Peter is so appropriate for believers today.

There has always been persecution of Christians around the world, but today in this country, suffering is coming to those who claim to follow Christ.

Just turn on the news and you will stories of supposed intolerance of Christians in this country.

Just pick up a newspaper and you will read of the supposed arrogance of Christians who are simply living by a biblical standard.

No, we don't face physical persecution yet, but there is plenty of spiritual persecution to be found..

So what do we do?

Well, Peter is going to help us out..

And the first way to help us out is to point our minds to the salvation that we enjoy..

I played basketball in high school but I was never very good.

Our team was never very good either except my sophomore year..

That year I played JV, but our varsity team was outstanding.

They only lost 3 games out of 24 for the entire year.

We got to travel with them for most of the year since our games were before theirs.

One particular night, we were playing at a rival school and we were losing by 20 points or more with one quarter to go.

Their crowd was loud.

Our team was down and out.

Some were quitting already.

So as we began the last quarter, our coach simply told the players..

I want you to look at your jersey.

It says Whitmire Wolverines.

It stands for the town, the school, the players that came before us.

Our town doesn't quit.

The people that live there don't quit.

The players that have this jersey before don't quit, and you ain't quitting either.

After the huddle, we came out and play better, and even ended up winning the game..

Sometimes, people just need to be reminded of who they are.

Peter begins his letter by simply reminding believers of who we are.

And last week, we look at 3 descriptions of the believer..

He is an alien, a stranger, a foreigner, an exile.

In other words, he lives in the world and he feels out of place.

He feels like he doesn't belong.

He feels like he is a salmon swimming upstream.

And the reason for that is that our citizenship is not in this world.

Our citizenship is in heaven.

We are heavenly citizens on an earthly mission.

This is why we have to be careful with our patriotism.

I am grateful to God to live in America.

I am grateful that God provided freedom to me through the sacrifice of men and women in the history of our nation.

But I assure you that I am a Christian before I am an American.

I would be a Christian if I lived in Brazil or China or Indonesia.

My Christianity supersedes my nationality.

I don't worship a nation.

I worship the God of all the nations.

My citizenship is in heaven.

I belong to the true King, and therefore I feel like a foreigner no matter where I live.

But Peter not describes believers as aliens, he also notes that we are scattered.

The church does not have a central office in the world.

We are simply scattered all over the face of the earth, and as we said last week, that is God's plan.

It increases our influence and effectiveness in calling people to Christ from every corner of the world.

So we are aliens scattered all over the world.

Now, those are not the most encouraging truths, but then Peter adds that we are chosen or elect as some Bibles translate this.

The Greek work is *eklektois*, and it simply means chosen out, or selected or elected..

Simply put, believers are those elected by God for salvation.

God chose His people for salvation.

Now as we said last week, this is one of the most disliked doctrines of the Bible.

For various reasons, people rejoice the notion that God chooses some for salvation.

In their minds, that seems so unfair, yet the Bible says that man is in no position to tell God what is fair.

Who are we to complain to God about being fair..

In fact, I would say this.

If God is fair, then everyone goes to hell because all have sinned.

All deserve hell.

All deserve eternal punishment for their sin.

But the good news is that God shows grace and mercy to some.

God opens the hearts and grants faith and repentance to some.

I also understand that the idea of God's election and choosing of some is hard to comprehend.

It takes time to work through some verses and think about some things, but ultimately I would say this..

The doctrine of election when rightly understood will be the greatest source of comfort in your life as a believer.

To know and understand that the God of heaven called you to salvation in eternity apart from anything that you did is incredible to consider.

It will bring you assurance when you sin.

It will encourage you when you are discouraged.

It will give hope in despair.

It will bring peace in the midst of chaos.

It will bring comfort in persecution.

This is why Peter is opening his letter to these persecuted believers with this truth.

God had chosen.

God had elected them.

He would see them through.

But Peter is not done with this important truth..

How does election work?

Well, let's move the next part of verse 2..

Peter writes that believers are chosen *according to the foreknowledge of God..*

So what does that mean?

Simply put, God knew you before you were even born and he elected to salvation apart from anything you had done.

A lot of people look and foreknowledge and wrongly explain election as this..

“God looked into the future and saw who would believe in Him and then elected them to salvation.”

Yet, that is not what this means.

Believers are not chosen according to foresight.

They are chosen according to foreknowledge.

God knew what he would do before it ever came to pass.

Now can god look into the future?

Sure, he can.

But if foreknowledge means that God looked into future and saw who would choose him and then chose them, that makes salvation fully dependent upon man.

In other words, God reacted to what a person did.

But that is not how salvation is described in the Bible.

God is sovereign over all.

He answer to no one and his decisions are his own, not a result of what others do.

Those who describe election as God looking into the future and seeing who would believe and then choosing them take sovereignty away from God.

That put salvation in the hands of people.

The claim that God chose them because they first chose Him.

But that gets salvation backwards.

God doesn't love me because I first loved him.

God loved me before I ever loved Him.

In the same way, God chose me for salvation before I ever chose him.

God knew me before I knew Him.

Now, why did people make foreknowledge into foresight.

Why did people explain election as God having the foresight and responding to what man is going to do?

Well, that is way of getting around the sovereign will of God, and putting man back in charge of his salvation, which is what most people like to think.

WE like to think that we are in charge so that we can save some glory for us in choosing the Lord.

But the reality is that God knew us, loved us, and chose us before the foundation of the world.

Now, let's balance this with what comes next in this verse..

who are chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit,

So in eternity past, God elected believers to salvation.

But how does he bring that to pass?

How does someone goes from elect to saved?

According to this verse, by a sanctifying work of the Spirit.

In other words, the elect are not born saved.

We are not robots or puppets on God's string.

No, God has chosen us for salvation but we aren't forced into the kingdom.

Instead, God in his time, sends His Spirit to call us to salvation.

The Spirit comes into our life.

He brings the faith to believe the gospel.

He gives us the gift of repentance.

He changes our lives.

He puts the gospel in front of us, and we repent and believe.

This is the beauty of the doctrine of election.

God doesn't force Himself upon us.

He sends his Spirit and transforms our hearts to believe and repent and be saved..

This is exactly what had happened in the lives of Peter's readers.

They had been chosen by God in eternity past.

They had been changed by the work of the Spirit to repent and believe.

And now they were still under the work of the Spirit to help them endure the persecution they were seeing.

Look, this is true of everyone in here tonight who is saved.

God chose you.

God sent His Spirit to change you and call you.

You repented and believed, and the Spirit is still at work in you.

This is the Christian experience.

This is the plan of God.

It may hurt our head to think about, but the Bible speaks clearly about it..

So we see that we were chosen.

WE see how God completed that choosing.

But what impact does that choosing have upon our lives?

who are chosen 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, [a]to obey Jesus Christ

Now, a common complaint about the doctrine of election is that it discourages evangelism...

A lot of people say this..

Well, if God is going to save them, why do we even need to do evangelism?

Two answers..

The first is simple...

We do evangelism because we are commanded by Jesus to go into all the world to preach the gospel and make disciples, and Jesus' commands are not optional.

But #2, we do evangelism because I have no idea who is elect.

I preach to anyone who will and I call them to repent and believe..

But in the end, can we identify the elect?

In a sense yes because note what this verse says..

The elect are those who obey Jesus Christ.

In other words, the ones who God has chosen will be the ones who obey His words.

I couldn't tell you beforehand who God had chosen, but I can tell afterward because those He elects are the ones who obey Him..

And then Peter adds..

and be sprinkled with His blood

What does this mean that the elect are sprinkled with the blood of Jesus.

This gets to the heart of election.

God didn't choose believers to be a part of his kingdom without making a way for them to get in..

Yes, we repent and we believe?

But what do we believe?

WE believe that Jesus died for our sins.

WE believe that he was our substitute on that cross.

WE believe that his blood is sprinkled over our lives like the blood of the passover lamb in the book of Exodus.

You see, God chose us to be saved, but that salvation comes as the Spirit enables us to believe the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

We are chosen and therefore we believe that the blood of Christ has erased our sins.

And then there is one final note that Peter offers to his readers at the end of verse 2..

We will call this..

III. The Affection (2b)

May grace and peace [b]be yours in the fullest measure.

In a sense, only the elect can fully experience grace and peace.

One of the most difficult things to grasp about the doctrine of election is realizing the enormous grace of God seen in his election of you..

Yet, that is exactly what grace is.

It is God's undeserved favor.

Mercy is not getting what you do deserve and grace is getting what you don't deserve.

Look, I get the discomfort of thinking about election and choice and foreknowledge...

But in the end, my comfort is this.

God can do as He pleases, and if it was God's good pleasure to show grace to me, the chief of sinners, I am simply to rest in that...

And that leads to peace.

Simply put, Peter's audience needed peace.

They needed comfort.

They needed assurance and hope.

And the best way to bring peace to the believer is to remind him of the incredible grace that God has shown him..

Conclusion

Let's end this section with a couple thoughts...

#1 - The glory of salvation is the cure for the pain of persecution.

A lot of times we tell hurting believers that it is going to be okay.

I have said that before, but guess what?

That may a lie.

Sometimes the sickness gets worse.

Sometime the money get tighter.

Sometimes the insults gets worse.

Guess what?

Some of those who read this letter probably died from the persecution.

Look, the world is broken, and though we may hope a believer's situation improves, sometimes it doesn't.

Ultimately, we don't know the future, which makes it very hard to say that things will be okay.

Instead of pointing believers to the future that we don't know, we should point them to the past.

The reality of salvation is a rock for the believer.

Storms may come but nothing will separate us from the love of God if we are in Christ.

The Roman Empire wasn't going to slow down their persecution.

The future was not good, but past was sweet for those who had been chosen by the Lord.

#2 - The security of election is the comfort for the insecurity of believers.

Simply put, if God has chosen me, God will complete me and carry me to heaven.

He who began a good work in you will carry it to completion.

There you go.

That is the promise of God based upon his choice of you.

And look, that is great assurance when our assurance fades.

That is great comfort when our hope is under attack.

In fact, the doctrine of election gives us boldness in a world that hates us..

Let's end with Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher..

“No man will be so bold as he who believes that he is elect of God. What cares he for man if he is chosen of his maker? What will he care for the pitiful chirpings of some tiny sparrows when he knows he is an eagle of a royal race? Will he care when the beggar points at him, when the royal blood of heaven runs in his veins? Will he fear though the whole world stand against him? If earth be all in arms abroad, he dwells in perfect peace, for he is in the secret place of the tabernacle of the Most High, in the great pavilion of the almighty.”

When we embrace the sovereign election of God, we will care less for the intimidation of the world..

Let us pray.