

The Chosen Sojourner – 1 Peter 1:1-2

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

Union Baptist Church – 2/17/2019

INTRODUCTION

Do you ever worry about the future? About the what-ifs...things you fear could possibly happen someday? Do you get anxious thinking about how you'll handle different types of pain, suffering and loss should they ever happen to you? I'm certain we've all gone down this road before. We've wondered and worried about what the future will hold and if we'll be able to handle whatever comes and stay strong in our faith through it all. We've wondered if God will give us what we need to have endurance and patience with joy no matter what comes. And when we're in the hard times, we wonder: *Will we make it through? Will God come through again this time?*

Well, I have good news. He will. He's set on it. He's got a plan and the power to provide for all of us who are in Christ and give us everything we need no matter what comes. And unlike us God knows all the details of the future. He knows everything that's to come in your life and he's known it since before time began. And not only has he known it, he's formulated a plan to walk with you through it, providing grace and peace for each moment, and making you more and more like his Son in the process. What's your role in all this? Keep your eyes on Jesus and on your heavenly home with him. Choose to trust him and keep living his Word. And God will give you what you need one day at a time. You can count on it.

I have a beautiful example from God's Word of him doing this for one specific person. Not many of us, I hope, have stoning in our future. But this example is of a godly man, full of faith and the Holy Spirit, who had in his future being stoned to death for his bold proclamation of God's truth. But I want you to notice how God provided for him even in the midst of some of the worst pain we could ever experience in this life. Listen to this account of Stephen's stoning found in Acts chapter 7, verses 51 to 60. Listen as God speaks his words through Stephen to the Jewish religious leaders who were still trying to suppress the resurrection of Jesus and the miraculous signs being performed through his disciples. And listen as he walks Stephen through the pain and suffering that resulted.

Stephen said:

51 "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. 52 Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, 53 you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." 54 Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. 55 But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. 58 Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

God abundantly provided for Stephen in terrible pain and suffering, didn't he? He got to see a glorious revelation of Jesus and of heaven...of his true home that was waiting eagerly to receive him after the pain and suffering he was about to endure. And through the pain Stephen kept his eyes on Jesus and was even empowered to forgive the very people who were angrily, brutally and unjustly murdering him.

You see, God knows what's coming for each of us and no matter what it is, he will provide for us as we keep our eyes on him and choose to keep trusting. This is the message of 1 Peter and even in the first two verses we begin to see these truths unfolding. Let's read verses 1 and 2 of 1 Peter chapter 1 to begin our study of this life-changing book:

1 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.

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word and guide us by his Spirit to understand it this morning.

FROM PETER TO GOD'S PEOPLE SCATTERED ABROAD

Before we dig into two of the central truths in these verses, let's notice a few basic facts about this letter. First, obviously it was written by Simon Peter, one of the 12 disciples of Jesus who spent 3 intense years walking around with him and learning from him. Peter was a man who knew Jesus as well as anyone every had and was an eyewitness of all his teachings and miracles and his death and resurrection.

Second, Peter introduces himself as an *apostle* of Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated, apostle, means *someone sent; a messenger*. We get the idea of men sent out by Jesus to proclaim his message and do it with his authority and power. And we certainly see this taking place in the work of the apostles recorded for us in the book of Acts. We see the apostles powerfully speaking God's truth and confirming it with miraculous signs and wonders. So as Peter opened this letter, he began by emphasizing that he was a man commissioned by Jesus Christ himself to speak on his behalf and proclaim his message. What Peter was about to say would not be his own message, but rather the message of Jesus Christ.

And thirdly, this letter was written to followers of Christ living as aliens, strangers, exiles, pilgrims – scattered abroad in the specific area of northern Asia Minor, or modern-day Turkey. Notice that Peter, in verse 1 of our passage, describes the recipients of his letter as “exiles of the Dispersion,” a phrase historically used for the scattering of Jews throughout the nations after their home country was taken away from them due to their rebellion against God. Some have taken this to mean that Peter was writing specifically to Jewish Christians, as opposed to Gentile Christians. However, other language Peter uses later in the book, argues against that idea; specifically in chapter 2 where Peter references how the Jewish people as a whole rejected their Messiah in their disobedience. Then he says, in verses 9-10 of chapter 2:

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Verse 10, especially, gives us a picture of Gentiles who were once on the outside looking in at God's special relationship with the people of Israel. But now they've actually become God's people themselves in fulfillment of Scripture. No longer is there a distinction between Jew and Gentile. All who are in Christ are one people without reference to their nationality or background or social status. So Peter was writing to God's people of all nationalities who had been scattered throughout Asia Minor and were living as sojourners, people just passing through, both physically and spiritually.

So with that background, let's begin looking at two of the central truths Peter introduces as he opens this letter. I'm going to state them together to begin, and then we'll examine each individually. These two truths are tied up in this short phrase: *The Chosen Sojourner*...or to use the *ESV* translation: *The Elect Exile*. And some of you are already getting excited or perhaps anxious to see what I'm going to do with the controversial topic of election and foreknowledge! And should we add predestination just for fun?! But I'll remind you to take the advice of Scripture and *be anxious for nothing*. Try to relax and don't expect to have the full mystery of the inner workings of God's foreknowledge, choosing and predestination, fully cleared up this morning.

Theologians and believers of all shapes and sizes have debated these concepts – which are in the Bible, by the way – for around 2,000 years at least, and still there's a mystery that in the end we must trust to God and his goodness. And let me assure you, we can trust him. What we will focus on today is what we can know for sure. And this will hopefully keep us from getting sucked into endless debates and arguments that only bring division and don't contribute to our personal growth or the growth of God's kingdom and church. The danger is that we get so distracted with the controversy that we miss the wonderful and comforting and life-changing truths that are bound up in these mysterious concepts. And a second danger is that we raise ourselves up to sit in judgment of God and his goodness. Let's never let either of these things happen!

TO THE SOJOURNERS – FOREIGNERS TEMPORARILY RESIDING

Well, before we get to election and foreknowledge, let's consider the concept of exiles, sojourners, strangers, pilgrims, aliens. These are all different translations of the same Greek word: *parepidaymos*. Strong's defines the word as *a resident foreigner – a pilgrim or stranger*. As we mentioned last week, the idea is of a person temporarily living in a nation not their own and not getting too comfortable or seeking to become like the people around them...a person just passing through, but who knows their true home is elsewhere...a foreigner temporarily residing.

And this idea of living as a foreigner, a sojourner, with our eyes and heart set on our true heavenly home is central to 1st Peter and will resurface throughout the book. In fact, believing we're just a temporary resident in this world that's not our home, and living with that perspective, is crucial to being able to endure and thrive in the midst of the trials, testing, suffering and persecution we're certain to face as a true follower of Christ seeking to live life like him. And until we embrace our identity as a sojourner and relate to the world in as such...until we stop setting our hope in this world and on enjoying everything it has to offer...until we stop trying to fit in and look like everyone else and keep up with the people around us. Until then, we will struggle to trust God and experience joy and contentment in the hard times of life.

I picture this as a lot like my experience as a short-term missionary in Egypt back in my college days. My home, the place where I'd grown up and where I fit in and spoke the same language and looked like everybody else, the place where my family lived, where I had a house I could come home to, and where I felt comfortable, and where I hoped to return one day was Alaska. And just imagine how well a white-skinned, blonde-haired, blue-eyed, English-speaking Alaskan blended in in Cairo, Egypt. As I walked down the street, I looked like a neon sign flashing: *Tourist, American, Foreigner, Easy-target, Possible ticket to America*. I didn't fit in. I was obviously a sojourner. And if I opened my mouth to speak, any remaining doubt was completely erased. And, if you think about it, this is what it should be like for us as followers of Christ. We should stick out and be easily identifiable as a stranger, a foreigner, an outsider...someone not from around here.

You know, there's an interesting practice that happens in the diplomatic world...the world where ambassadors and diplomats live in other countries to work for U.S. interests abroad. What happens is that the U.S. Government never lets the diplomats stay too long in any one country. Usually every 3 years they're required to spend 1 year back in the U.S., and then they're sent off to a *different* country. Why do they do this? Well, they don't want them getting too comfortable in another country...they don't want them getting too sympathetic with that country's viewpoints...they don't want them switching allegiances and forgetting that they're representing the U.S. and working for U.S. interests. Because if any of these things happen, suddenly these diplomats are no longer working for the U.S. even though that's where their paycheck's coming from. Instead, they're actually working for the other country. They end up promoting the other country's interests and using their influence to try to get American support for what that country wants.

And this is the danger for us too. When we get too comfortable here...when we start loving this place and wanting to fit in and have what everybody else has...when we forget our true home and what our King has sent us to do here...when this happens, we end up subtly switching allegiances, and losing perspective, and working for the purposes of this world instead of God's. You see, if we're God's ambassadors in a foreign country – which God's Word tells us we are – we should look different, have different priorities, and people should be able to easily tell that we just don't fit in here. We should be getting picked on a little bit or a lot if we're really getting serious about God's purposes.

And when we embrace and accept this calling of God and release the need to fit in, to join in with what everybody else is doing, to have what everybody else has, to become an accepted citizen of a country not our own...only then are we freed to be about God's purposes in this world, and only then are we able to withstand the hard times of life, because our heart isn't set on this country that we're just temporarily passing through. So let's get comfortable as sojourners, exiles, pilgrims. Let's embrace that identity. That's what Peter calls us and that's what we are. This world is not our home.

TO THE CHOSEN - ELECT ACCORDING TO GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE

Well, let's move on now to the truth that we are *CHOSEN* sojourners... *ELECT* exiles. Because the idea of being a sojourner, a pilgrim, a stranger, in a foreign country for our entire lives on this earth, could be a little unsettling by itself. But add the truth that we are *CHOSEN* sojourners, and things are starting to look up. This means we're not on our own... That we're not just sent out as God's ambassadors without support... without direction... without a plan... without the full authority and power and resources of the King behind us... and without assurance that he knows what he's doing and has anticipated every challenge ahead. And it means also that he knows us inside and out, that he's set us apart for the task he's given us, and that he knows we can do what he's called us to do by his power and will be able to thrive through all the challenges that lie ahead.

Notice in verses 1 and 2 of 1 Peter that the choosing of these sojourners is *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*. Scripture is so clear that God knows completely all the details of the past, present and future. And his foreknowledge is a wonderful thing, because the future is assured. Nothing can surprise God or throw him off his balance or keep him from accomplishing his purposes. And he also knows ahead of time all the mistakes we'll make, all the times we'll get off track, or get ahead of him, or fall flat on our face. And still he's chosen those of us in Christ and has made sure we're going to make it to our true home as we trust and follow. Paul assured us of this in Romans chapter 8, verses 28-30:

28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

The future is clear and the future is bright for God's *CHOSEN* sojourners. Nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord! NOTHING! This is one of the wonderful truths that is so often missed and pushed to the side when we get hung up on foreknowledge, election and predestination.

My friends, take comfort, joy and peace from the astounding truth that if you're in Christ, if you've responded to him in repentance and faith, then God knew you before the foundation of the world, and knew that you would be his and that he would give you everything you need to make it to your heavenly home with him. And take seriously the truth that he has given you a key role to play in bringing others into his family as you share the grace, mercy, forgiveness and love he's given to you with others. If you're his child, then you're his ambassador in a foreign country whose mission is to represent him well and bring many others back to your homeland with you.

Now, how our good, loving, holy, just, all-knowing God works all this out in the midst of his sovereign choice and the free will of human beings is a mystery I'm going to trust to him. And I hope you will too. Because our God is good and just, and he's shown this over and over again in so many ways. And he knows just a bit more than you and I, to say the least, and has a much more expansive perspective than we do. As I said earlier, what we need to focus on is what we know to be true. And I want to share with you now some of these key truths:

1. Election and predestination according to the Father's mercy, grace and foreknowledge are in the Bible over and over again.
2. God is good. God is love. God is faithful. God is everything we want and more.
3. God knows all things and has an infinitely bigger perspective and understanding than us. He has perfect knowledge of all the details, past, present and future and before he even created the world, he knew every person and knew those who would be his.
4. God is sovereign – he can do anything that is consistent with his character and he doesn't need our permission or approval.
5. God desires that all people come to repentance and salvation (1 Timothy 2:4) and he takes no delight in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11).
6. God has gone and continues to go to the greatest lengths possible to make salvation available to all people and to continually offer it to them and call them to repentance and faith in Christ.
7. People have free will and can accept or reject God's offer of salvation. And I haven't met any non-believer yet who wants to give up their free will and be forced to accept Christ.

8. People are fully responsible for their choices and they freely make them. God doesn't force anyone to reject him or make sinful choices.
9. God is just. Whatever consequences he gives to people who reject him will be just and right. We can trust him with this.
10. We are not in a position to judge God, nor do we have the capacity or the information we would need to do so. We are each created and sustained by him daily and have a very small, cloudy window into eternity past and eternity future, and even into the brief history of the human race.
11. None of us deserve salvation and God's choice of us is according to his grace and mercy and has nothing to do with us being better or more worthy than other people.
12. You and I are called by God to vigorously share his good news of salvation from here to the ends of the earth. Today is the day of salvation for anyone who will simply come to him through repentance and faith in Christ. We get to play a part in God's plan to rescue lost people and bring them home with us.

I hope these 12 truths that are so clear in Scripture will help you trust the mystery of election, foreknowledge and predestination to the goodness of our great God. I'll close our discussion with this helpful wrap-up from *The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*:

Attempts to reconcile divine foreknowledge with human freedom and responsibility have occupied theologians and philosophers throughout church history. Some have argued that God's foreknowledge, whether construed as [just knowing the future] or [ordaining the future], entails the denial of human freedom. On such grounds some have denied that God knows the future, either because He has chosen not to know it, or, as the "open theists" have more recently argued, that He is unable to know it. [How unsettling that would be!] Others have tended to stress foreknowledge and foreordination to the near exclusion of human choice. *A better approach is to accept the biblical teaching that God foreknows and foreordains all things while not violating human free [will] and moral responsibility.* The biblical writers were not ashamed to place these truths together. In Acts 2:23 Peter proclaimed that the crucifixion of Jesus was according to God's foreknowledge and foreordained plan. Yet Peter held

Christ's tormenters accountable for their actions, seeing that they acted on their own malicious desires.

CONCLUSION

Let's trust our God, shall we? He's proven himself trustworthy over and over again in our lives and throughout history and shown his goodness and his perfect love. And we wouldn't even be here without him. He's also made the ultimate sacrifice of his only Son so that every person in the world has the opportunity to be reconciled with him and live in his love and forgiveness. Let's rejoice that in Christ we are his chosen people – he knows us and loves us and has since before the foundation of the world...he has a plan and purpose for our lives and will make sure we have what we need as we keep our eyes on him.

And let's embrace our identity as sojourners just passing through a world that's not our home... ambassadors whose citizenship is in heaven and whose purpose in life is representing the King and accomplishing his purposes. We know the one who holds the future and we can trust him with it! Amen?! Next week we'll dig a little deeper into his plans and purposes for us, his chosen sojourners, as we finish up with verse 2 of 1 Peter.