

Elect Exiles Heading Home (1 Peter 1:1-12)

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 07 April 2024

Preacher: Sam Cutforth

[0 : 00] So 1 Peter chapter 1.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[1 : 35] Concerning the salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing, when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you, by those who have preached the gospel to you, by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Even angels long to look into these things. This is the word of God. Wow, good afternoon, everybody.

Good afternoon. Thanks, man. Having my back. Good afternoon. It's really good to be here. I know this is a bit of a one-off random sermon for you guys from 1 Peter, but it is connected in the sense that you're going to be thinking and looking about being the people of God, united together to serve, and hopefully this is just a reminder about what a privilege it is to be part of God's people, all that you have to look forward to, and so you'll be able to come together united to serve.

And also, how great that I get to preach after that little clip about how important God's word is and how life-giving and how from God, and so let's just pray as we come to his word. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for your word that is living and active and speaks into our life even today, that corrects us and guides us and encourages us.

[3 : 20] So please, Lord, help me and each person here to listen carefully, to submit to all that you say, and to know the power of your Holy Spirit working in us, that we may love you more, love one another, and be obedient to you.

I pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. There's nothing quite like home. I remember when I did one of my three-night Duke of Edinburgh tramps, my favorite thing about that whole experience was when I got home, and I took a 20-minute shower, and washed four days of sweat and dirt off me, then got into my own bed, clean sheets, and just fell asleep.

It felt like heaven. It made like walking for four days almost worth it for that glorious moment of being clean. Since then, I've not done another overnight walk anywhere, but I'd almost do it just to recapture that feeling.

We look forward to our home, particularly if we've traveled a little bit rough and ready, because home is a place where we are comfortable and safe. Home is a place where you relax and belong, where everything familiar and enjoyable is there for you.

Limitless Wi-Fi. Home is somewhere that you miss and you long to return to. I'm not sure where you feel most at home. Perhaps in New Zealand. Perhaps in another country that you've lived for a while.

[4 : 43] But we miss what is familiar and at home. And the book of 1 Peter in our chapter today reminds us of where our true home is and where we'll feel most comfortable, what we are looking forward to, and how we can head home.

The best place for us. The best place for us, Paul is saying, is offered to us in our future. When we get to go, be with the Lord Jesus Christ.

But Peter here, he wants to dress our future home, but he wants to help us as we live here now. He wants to encourage us as we live here now, as homeward bound Christians, sometimes uncomfortable, but having this glorious future that we head to.

And so as we look at 1 Peter 1 verse 12, keep your Bibles open there, because we're going to receive help from this word breathed out by God. First, Peter is going to remind us who we are, our Christian identity.

Second, he's going to remind us what our future has in store for us at home. And then lastly, he's going to talk about our Christian privilege. So first, the Christian identity, verses 1 to 3.

[5 : 55] Just look with me there. It says, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontius, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

1 Peter calls Christians here, gives you a name, gives you a label, gives you an identity, elect exiles in the dispersion. The word dispersion there means scattered, and so Paul is writing to Christians who have been scattered around the Roman Empire.

They perhaps, many feel alone and isolated, not at home. They were being persecuted, both physically and socially, by non-Christians, by the Roman Empire.

Everyone thought they were a weird cult. The world they were living in was hostile to them, and so they really weren't at home. It wasn't comfortable for them. They didn't belong. They weren't like everybody else.

And that's the idea behind the word exile there. Exiles, that can be translated often as strangers. Instead, the idea is that you're a foreigner, and you don't quite belong where you're living.

[7 : 03] You are away from home, and they were exiles because they were Christians. And so Peter is writing to these persecuted, exiled Christians, not at home.

And still now, as Christians, we can say we are exiles. If you're a Christian, there'll be times when you feel like you don't belong, that this world, whatever country you feel comfortable in, isn't home.

And those feelings and those experiences, as difficult as they may be sometimes, are actually good and right, even though they're not easy. We are strangers and exiles.

Our identity is that we are on our way home and currently in a foreign land. And that is hard. I think particularly the younger you are, because when you're younger, you're kind of still figuring out where you belong in life and what you will be.

And so I wonder where you get your sense of identity and purpose, your sense of belonging, your confidence. What makes you who you are?

[8 : 10] For most, you feel like you belong and have a sense of identity based maybe on what your friends think or how many you have.

So if they're like you, if you have lots of them, you feel comfortable and safe at home. Perhaps as you get older, you grow out of that, you kind of get your friends. But now what the opposite sex thinks of you is really, really important.

Can you get a relationship with someone? Am I good enough looking to date this person? Will they stay with me? And if they aren't, or if you're not dating, you can feel alone and isolated and worthless.

There's a sense in which who you are will be tied up with a romantic relationship. For some, university grades can be such an important part of your life that it's kind of who you are.

If you can get that university degree, you'll feel successful, like you're doing well, and then you'll be looking forward to a future where you can provide, get a good job, and that's kind of a sense of who you are.

[9 : 11] And I say these things kind of not to be down on you, but just to help you think about what is the best place for you to place your identity and worth. Because it's not easy being young, you're kind of figuring out in a myriad of ways are who you are going to be.

And so if you think of your parents, all of them are now, or most of them will be husbands or wives, fathers or mothers. They already have a career that they've been going through for many years. They might own a home.

They've settled down. Who they are is kind of together. And so they don't have to worry about other identity issues. Many of you still have to work through all those things.

You don't know what you want to do or who you want to marry or where you'll live or if you'll be fathers and mothers. So these younger years, they're a time of lots of growth and learning and direction setting.

And in that time of figuring out who you are, sometimes being a Christian can throw something else in the mix. As a Christian, you're different.

[10 : 17] And lots of people think Christianity is weird or wrong. Some of your friends maybe. So if you're really holding on to friendship as identity, then you're going to feel that tension a lot more than someone who's kind of settled in with family.

If a romantic relationship is really important to you, you'll come across a non-Christian. You'll think, I really want to go out with them, but there'll be this tug of your Christian identity.

And so you're really wrestling. So feeling like an exile can just carry a whole lot of extra weight. It can be a lot more difficult than when you get older.

You can be more isolated and alone and wonder, is faith really worth it? I feel like a stranger in so many ways. Should I be a stranger as a Christian as well?

And Peter's reply to that, should you be a stranger, should you be in exile as a Christian, is yes. Yes, you should. Because you are not just an exile. That is not the only way you should think of yourself.

[11 : 18] But you are also elect. You are an elect exile. So on one hand, Christian identity is exiles, but on the other, it is being elect or chosen by God.

We don't use the word elect that much anymore, but you might have at your studies elective courses at the university. Your favorite course, because you got to pick it, and it's easy, because you picked the easy one.

Well, Christians have been specially selected by God. Verse 2 says, look with me there, elect according to his foreknowledge, so before the foundation of the world, to be sanctified by the Spirit, that is to be set apart, sanctified as holy and different, for obedience to Jesus and forgiveness by his blood.

Wonderful forgiveness for us and a new life to be lived for him. So we have the whole Trinity working together in you and for you. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, working together to elect you, choose you, save you, love you, be with you, and that's pretty amazing.

That is something worth building your identity around, that God looked upon you and God loves you. Imagine if you were at, doing a youth group game, and it was a cooking game, you had \$30, it was a challenge, \$30 down to the supermarket, and put together a dinner.

[12 : 39] And so your team goes down there, goes to the supermarket, kind of all the thousands of items that are in the shopping aisle. You choose just a few, you put them in your trolley. Now those items in the trolley, they may seem insignificant.

If you just put them back on the shelf, no one would know any different, but they're important to you. You have specially chosen them for a purpose, and that's God. That is Christians.

Of all the people in the world, God wants you. God loves you. You are special, chosen by God, that he may use you. And so I do encourage you, if you are here, and you aren't a Christian, that God may have brought you to this church, because he has chosen and loves you, and wants to show you that love.

So be open to God calling out to you at church, so you can build your life, and your whole identity, on a God who loves you. Now Peter, in these opening verses, has presented to us our Christian identity.

Christians are elect exiles. And there's a real tension there, isn't there? Elect meaning kind of chosen and special, but exiles meaning not at home, potentially facing suffering and difficulty.

[13 : 50] And Peter addresses that tension kind of in the rest of the book, but here he says, you are elect exiles. What a blessing. A friend of mine was asked by a teacher at primary school, if you could be anyone in the world, who would you want to be?

And he replied, innocent young answer, myself. And I thought that was a really cool answer, because he was sure of who he was, he was comfortable with who he was. And if Peter had asked, who do you want to be, who does he want to be, he would have said, above everything, I want to be an elect exile of God.

And this message is good news to Christians scattered around the empire, feeling alone. Perhaps good news to you, if you're struggling in your faith, feeling alone. You are not just in exile, but you are precious in the sight of God.

So I want you to know the encouragement of being an elect exile. And that's the first way Peter helps homeward bound Christians, by showing us our identity, who we are.

But next he helps homeward bound Christians, he reminds us of our wonderful future as Christians. This Christian identity comes with an awesome new life, hope, privilege.

[14 : 59] And we see that in verse 3 to 12. Let me just read a few verses there. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith, for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

Christians have been born again there. It says, given this new life and a hopeful future. And the idea of hope, if you have hope, it means that you anticipate, with certainty, a better, brighter future.

And hope is really an important thing in life. We have a really high rate of depression and suicide in New Zealand. And one of the things that makes depression horrible to deal with, is that it feels like there's nothing in your future, that you have to look forward to.

You just wake up and think, there's nothing good on my horizon. There's nothing worth living for. It's not going to get any better. And that's a really hard place to be.

A really hard illness of depression to fight. But the Christian identity and life offers hope. It doesn't completely do away or fix all depression, but it offers a living hope and a better, brighter future, because we trust Jesus, and that he was raised from the dead, and that we will have life, and life eternal with him.

[16 : 37] We talked about not just life like we have now, that's hard, as exiles, but he talks about a living, wonderful hope with an inheritance. He says, Peter here is saying that we're born as rich kids.

It says you have, verse 4, you have been born to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

We all have, or maybe you have, friends whose parents are loaded. Life just seems easy for them, fun for them. They don't have to worry about money, food, clothes, house.

They don't have to do like chores to get pocket money. I had a friend, and every time we went there, this is like ages ago, this is like 20 years ago, he got \$20 a week pocket money, which would be pretty good like now even, when you're like 13, 14, but this is, I'm quite old, so this is a long time ago, and his parents bought him anything anyway, so we'd rock up there, and he'd be like, oh, I haven't had my pocket money in like five weeks.

So we're just walking around with a clean hundred dollars, going to the dairy, spending it up, and I was like, oh, I love having a rich friend. Peter says, hey, you have an inheritance.

[17 : 50] You are loaded. Wait until you enter your living hope. Wait until you're born again like Jesus is, and you go to receive that inheritance from your father.

It's going to be wonderful. You have a very bright future, and I want you to notice just how Peter talks about salvation. His way of speaking about it is actually quite unique.

I don't know, you've done 1 Corinthians, A, with Paul. He, Paul talks about salvation as like justified now. Everything's here now, whereas Peter, he talks about salvation as something to be revealed.

We're experiencing it now, he says, enjoy, but there's actually more to come. So verse 4, our inheritance is kept in heaven for us when we get there. Verse 5, our salvation is ready to be revealed in the future.

And then verse 9 says, we are still to obtain the outcome of our faith. So the idea is that salvation is only going to get better for us. There's more for us.

[18 : 51] We are saved now. God will keep us, but our salvation will be complete when Jesus returns. Christians. And so Christians are, and can always be, hopeful of a better future, a more glorious future.

And that's really important, particularly because, once again, we're called exiles, who will suffer and struggle because we're Christians. And Paul addresses that in verse 6 and 7, that the suffering produces a strong faith.

And so for now, we may go through trials of various kinds, but we have that future. And the good thing about those trials is that it strengthens the faith that guarantees our future.

So if you really want that glorious future, spoken about, that inheritance, and faith in Jesus is the thing that gets you that future, then you really want a strong faith.

You want that faith tested to make sure it is true and pure and will last. And so suffering, though, is hard. Suffering is an exile. We know that that suffering is strengthening our faith, guaranteeing more and more each and every day our future.

[20 : 02] So if you feel like an exile, more like an exile than an elect Christian, then know your faith is being strengthened. And this future hope can get you through suffering and hardship.

It's like the end of university term. You're a bit tired of studying. Exams are there in the future, but then just after that is holidays and rest and a break and gaming and friends.

And the anticipation of that end of those holidays can help you get through that final week of uni. Our future hope does that. The fact that we're elect and heading towards a glorious future helps us live now as exiles in this world.

And then Peter ends by showing us what a privilege it is to be a Christian. So we have this identity. We have this glorious future. And then I keep saying poor maybe, but Peter says, man, wow, you are so privileged to have this future.

He says there of the prophets and just briefly that in the Old Testament, all these people who spoke on behalf of God, they were looking for Jesus. They were inquiring about when he was going to come and trying to figure out when he would bring this wonderful salvation they anticipated, but they didn't get to see him.

[21 : 21] And all their prophecies, all their anticipation was for our sake. They were showing us who Jesus truly was and why he came. Now, so prophets, they look to try and see what we get to enjoy now.

And so do the angels there at the end of verse 12. They long to look because fallen angels, they disobeyed God, but they were never offered salvation like us.

And so the angels look at us and think, wow, you guys are privileged. You sin all the time. And yet despite that, you've been elect and loved by God for this glorious future.

You are rich kids. You have so much to enjoy in the present. You have so much blessing coming for you in the future. And that's the point Peter makes at the beginning of this letter.

He says, Christians, you are elect exiles. I know it's hard, but you have this glorious future. You're privileged. And so I want to encourage you because sometimes the Christian life can be difficult.

[22 : 24] I think over the last 10, 15 years, being a Christian and holding to some of Christian beliefs has become more difficult, more unwanted.

But I want to encourage you. You are chosen and precious to God. Remember, you are exiles here. You will be strange or a stranger. Remember, this place where we live isn't home.

But remember, you are elect. You are loved and cherished by God. You do have a glorious future that you will enter into. So be encouraged as you head home.

And if you aren't a Christian, I hope you'll see that the life and the future offered to those who believe in Jesus is filled with hope and filled with deep love from the God of this universe.

So do consider following him as someone who is an elect exile with a wonderful future. Let's pray together. Our gracious heavenly father, we thank you for this encouragement from your word.

[23 : 30] Sometimes we do struggle and know suffering, hardship. Sometimes we feel left out or strange because of our faith, our commitments in this life.

I pray you would impress upon each one of us your love and heart and care for us. I pray you would enable us to lift our eyes above some of the challenges of this life to our glorious future.

And I pray you would make known to each one of us how privileged we are to have your love be over us, to have an inheritance kept for us, and that even as we go through suffering and struggle, all that is for our good and to secure that future.

So please do encourage us, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen.