

Ministry of Grace Church

1 Peter 1:1-5 - Speaker Notes

Background

Today we are going to begin our look into 1 Peter. If you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for your sins, then this letter was written for you. Since the subject matter of this letter specifically deals with suffering in the Christian life, one may wonder why we are studying it today when there is very little persecution of Christians in our country today. This may be true, but there is growing evidence that persecution of Christians is coming, and it could be very soon, yes even in this country.

Who Wrote this Letter?

Throughout history there has been little doubt that this letter was written by Simon Peter, the apostle. Whereas there are some who doubt that 2 Peter was written by him, history presents an unwavering testimony that this letter was written by Peter. There is probably no book of the New Testament for which there is more certainty of authorship.

We know more about Peter than any of the other apostles due to his prominence in the Gospels and in the first fifteen chapters of the book of Acts. It is evident from scripture that Simon Peter was one of the first of those whom our Lord called to be his disciple and follower. He was always ready to testify of his Lord (with the exception of the night of Jesus' trials), quick to understand his Lord's teaching, and even quicker to perform whatever he knew to be his duty.

This letter, or epistle (Greek *epistolē*), is called his general epistle, because it was not written to any particular person, or to any particular church, but in general, to a number of Christians dispersed in several places.

When Was this Letter Written?

The time when this epistle was written is not certain; some place it in AD 44 or 45, about the time of James' letter, thus believing that it is among the earliest of all the epistles. It appears to have been written before the persecution of Christians in the later years of Nero. However, its contents give evidence of it's having been written after Paul's Epistles, even those written during his imprisonment at Rome, ending in AD 63. This is attested to by the acquaintance which Peter shows he has with Paul's writings in this letter. However, there are no marks of time in the Epistle itself, and there is no specific information from which we can determine when it was composed. Based on what little concrete evidence we have; it seems most likely that it was written sometime around the year AD 64.

Where Was Peter When He Wrote It?

Peter appears to have been in Babylon when writing this letter. This is evident from:

*She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark.
(1Peter 5:13)*

Whether this was Chaldean Babylon on the Euphrates River, a city named Babylon in Egypt, or the capitol city of Rome (possibly referred to as Babylon to hide Peter's presence there) has long been debated. Since this is a most matter-of-fact treatise by Peter, it seems unreasonable that he would use Babylon as a code

name for Rome. Therefore, the simplest and most reasonable explanation is that Peter wrote this from Babylon on the Euphrates. The Jewish historian Josephus states that there were a great many Jews in Chaldean Babylon. And, since Peter was clearly the Apostle to the circumcision it is not unreasonable to expect that he might have travelled there.

Why Was This Letter Written?

It is possible that Peter met up with Sylvanus (who had been a companion of the Apostle Paul) while in Babylon. Knowing that Sylvanus was returning to the areas where he and Paul had ministered, Peter seems to have taken this opportunity to send a letter by him to the converted Jews, dispersed among the Gentile countries.

As I said earlier, the subject matter of this letter specifically deals with suffering in the Christian life. It appears that his readers had already experienced slander and ridicule for Christ. The Roman Emperor, Nero was intent on ridding Rome of the Christians because of their refusal to worship any of the Roman Gods including the emperor himself. He later even blamed the burning of Rome, apparently started by Nero himself, on Christians. Scandalous rumors about obscene Christian rituals circulated at an early date, and we know that they were accused of disloyalty because of their refusal to perform the token ritual acknowledging the divine status of the emperor. Therefore, it is not unusual that Peter's main theme in this letter has to do with suffering and submission to authority.

But - suffering is not the only theme of this great Letter. The blessings inherited by accepting the gospel, the proper relationships of believers with the world, the state, the family, and the church, and instruction on elders and discipline are all included. With its basic doctrinal teaching and instructions on humbly submitting to all authorities even in the midst of persecution, this is truly a letter to Christians of all times.

Summary of This Letter

This letter opens with a typical salutation by the Peter indicating the intended audience (the chosen ones scattered throughout the Roman provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.) Peter takes a few verses stating the blessedness of our having been chosen and the blessings that result from it. He does not shy away from the doctrines of election and eternal security, rather states them matter-of-factly and pronounces a blessing to God for them.

In these two foundational doctrines of Christianity, election and eternal security, Peter says that we greatly rejoice in spite of the fact that we have to endure trials. These trials, which in themselves become praiseworthy, are the very things which increase and refine our faith. And that praise belongs to the author and finisher of our faith, Jesus Christ, who we have not seen, but the end result of that faith is the salvation of our souls. This is such an amazing thing that even the Prophets of the Old Testament searched and studied diligently to understand it. Not only did the Prophets want to know more about this salvation, Peter tells us that even the angels in heaven look at this faith-salvation relationship we have with God with intense interest.

Peter then tells us that we need to prepare our minds for action, to stop being conformed to our former lusts, and to set ourselves apart unto holiness because our God is holy. We are to pass our time on this earth in reverential fear because we have been purchased and taken out of the slave market to be sold no more. The price of our purchase was not things we consider precious (gold and silver) but the blood of Christ. He was chosen for this sacrifice before time began. Because we believe in and accept this sacrifice, we have spiritual life.

Our inheritance, as born-again children of God, is guaranteed for us, and it will never be taken away from us.

This is a quick summary of Peter's first letter to the church. Now, for some details.

1 Peter 1:1-2

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as exiles, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to the obedience of Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of His blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Peter opens this letter with a typical salutation indicating, first off, who the letter is from. Historically, there never has been any doubt as to who this letter was from. The unvarying testimony of history, and the uniform belief of the church, both ascribe this Epistle to Peter. In fact, Eusebius (c. 263 – c. 339) who is often referred to as the Father of Church History because of his work in recording the history of the early Christian church, said that it was attested by everyone as having been penned by Peter and without reservation early church fathers referred to it in their writings. There is probably no ancient writing whatever of which there is more certainty in regard to its authorship.

Having identified who the letter is from, Peter now identifies who the letter is to. He tells us that it is written to those “**who reside as exiles.**” This expression is translated from the Greek word *parepidēmois*, which is a double compound word made up of *para*, meaning “beside,” “near,” or “close to,” *epi*, meaning “over, upon, or among,” and *dēmos*, meaning “a people.” This word literally refers to someone who has become integrated among a foreign nation of people. Therefore, its full meaning is “a foreigner who has settled down among the native people.”

Notice that this description also applies to Christians of all time. We are people who have become integrated among a foreign nation of people. Let's see what other Scripture says about our residency.

“If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. (John 15:19)

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, (Philippians 3:20)

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13)

He now tells us that the people to whom he is writing are scattered. Some translations have this as “**of the dispersion.**” The problem with this translation is that the word “**dispersion**” traditionally refers specifically to Jews. So, we have to ask ourselves, “Was this letter written to Jews or to Christians?” As the book of Acts makes it clear, most early converts to Christianity were Jews. Because of this, many people in the first century, especially Jews, considered Christianity simply a sect of Judaism. **1 Peter 1:3** makes it clear, however, that he is writing to those who are also believers in the resurrection of Christ (... **caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**)

The next thing Peter tells us is that these scattered believers are “**chosen according to the foreknowledge of God.**” “**Chosen**” is translated from the Greek word *eklectos*, meaning “one who is selected or chosen.” It is from the verb *eklegō*, which means “to select or chose through thoughtful and deliberate consideration.” Therefore, consider that your election was not just some passing thought by God, but a choice that is the result of thoughtful consideration. This is the doctrine of election.

Before we get into election, however, let's look at another word that Peter uses here. It is the word translated “**foreknowledge.**” This word is translated from *prognōsis*, a compound word made up of *pro*,

meaning “before” and a form of *ginōskō*, which means “to know.” Obviously, this is the word from which we get the medical term prognosis. This verb *ginōskō*, can refer to a beginning knowledge, but it most often refers to a thorough knowledge. Foreknowledge means “to have complete knowledge of something before it occurs.” To get a better understanding of God’s foreknowledge, let’s look at what Paul said about it in the book of Romans.

Because those whom He foreknew, He also ... (Romans 8:29a)

God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew. ... (Romans 11:2a)

Notice that it was people that God foreknew, not their actions! That is a very important distinction for us to make. Let me use our current president as an example. Many of us know that he mumbles at times. We also know that he stumbles and even falls at times. He also likes to eat ice cream cones. But – do we know him? I’m sure none of us would claim to know him even though we know a lot about his actions. Foreknowledge refers to God’s complete intimate knowledge of those He chooses.

Now, I’m going to take a risky walk across some thorny ground, not because I believe this verse is unclear or not corroborated by the rest of scripture (which it most certainly is), but because the whole doctrine of election, of God’s choosing us to be saved, is much argued. The Biblical Scholar Albert Barnes once said the following in reference to the Apostle Paul’s teaching on election:

There is no doctrine that is usually so unpopular; none that is so much reproached; none that is so much abused. There is none that people desire so much to disbelieve or avoid; none that they are so unwilling to have preached; and none that they are so reluctant to find in the Scriptures. Even many Christians turn away from it with dread; or if they “tolerate” it, they yet feel that there is something about it that is especially dark and forbidding. Not so felt Paul. He felt that it laid the foundation for eternal praise; that it presented glorious views of God; that it was the ground of confidence and hope; and that it was desirable that Christians should dwell upon it and praise God for it.

There is a false belief about the doctrine of election that says that God foreknew who would accept Christ as Lord and Savior and these are the ones whom He chose. But, as I just said, it was **people** that God foreknew, not actions. Besides, if God chose only those whom he knew would accept Christ as Lord and Savior, then God did not do the choosing.

OK, back to Peter’s letter ... The specific Christians Peter is writing to (those residing as exiles), were those who lived in the areas of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. These were all Roman provinces of Asia Minor which are in present day Turkey, the area of the world first evangelized by the Apostle Paul and his associates.

1 Peter 1:3-5

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and unfading, having been kept in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Peter, you will remember from the Gospel accounts, was never one to beat around the bush, but believed in getting right to the point. The opening of this letter is just another example of that.

“Blessed” is translated from *eulogētos*, which is an adjective form of the verb *eulogeō*, meaning “to say good words.” This is where we get our English word eulogy, which is a message of good words, or praise

about someone. *Eulogētos* means “well spoken of” or “honored.” In the New Testament this word is only applied to God.

He starts this verse with an expression of praise to God, declaring His blessedness. The reason for his praise of the Father is that He “caused us to be born again.” This is essentially the same as the expression that Christ used when He said to Nicodemus in **John 3:3**:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The expression “caused us to be born again” is translated from the Greek word *anagennaō*. This a compound word made up of *ano*, meaning “again” or “above” and *gennaō*, meaning “to give birth.” Therefore, it literally means “to give birth from above.” The verb is expressed here in the aorist tense, implying action that was performed at a point in time. An equally valid translation might be, “gave us birth from above.” In other words, we don’t earn our salvation, the spiritual new birth, gradually over time any more than we earned our physical birth by our own actions it was given to us from above.

We have talked before about the difference between mercy and grace. Mercy is God not giving us the condemnation and its associated penalty which we absolutely deserve. Grace, on the other hand, is God giving us the amazing things that we clearly don’t deserve. Peter is giving praise to God the Father for His mercy through which He has caused us to be born again (from above).

What we can glean from this is that God’s grace flows out of his great mercy. This rebirth, the result of God’s mercy and His grace, is not a physical birth, but a spiritual birth. Peter is clearly connecting our election by God the Father with our spiritual birth. His point is that our spiritual birth is not something we caused any more than our physical birth was. God chose us and God gave us spiritual life.

And - just as Christ was raised from the dead and is living today, God promises us that we will also be raised from the dead physically and we have already been given life spiritually. So, not only do we have the hope of eternal life, but we have spiritual life and fellowship with the Father right now!

Peter tells us that one of the effects of this birth from above is “to obtain an inheritance.” The word translated “inheritance” is *klēronomia*, which is made up of *klēros*, referring to “a lot” or “a share” and a form of *nemō*, meaning “to hold” or “to have in one’s power.” It is a reference to being in possession of a share of someone’s estate (in this case, God’s estate).

And Peter says that our inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading. Let’s look at these three words. First of all, our inheritance is “Incorruptible,” which is from the Greek word that means, “something that does not waste away and cannot be destroyed by an outside force.” Next, Peter tells us that our inheritance is “undefiled.” This comes from a Greek word that means, “that which is pure, clean, and unpolluted.”

Finally, Peter tells us that our inheritance is “unfading,” which is translated from *amarantos*. This word is made up of the privative *a*, meaning “not” and a form of *marainō*, meaning “to extinguish, to go out, to dry up, or to fade away.” *Amarantos* refers to “something that is perpetual and does not diminish at all with time.”

I want you to get the full picture of what Peter is talking about here. We will receive an inheritance from our heavenly father. This means, all that is His, He will share with us, and it is incorruptible (won’t ever be destroyed), undefiled (it is pure, unspoiled and holy), and unfading (it will never be any less than it is when we first receive it!)

And this inheritance is a result of our having been adopted by God, according to the good pleasure of His will.

having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, (Ephesians 1:5)

So, are we born into God's family or are we adopted into His family. This confusion comes from the word translated adoption. It is *huiothesia*, which literally means "son placement." When you accepted Christ as your Savior, you were born from above and God placed you into His family as his son. So, being born from above includes our son placement. And, because we are His sons, we will receive an inheritance from our Heavenly Father.

But, what exactly is it that we will inherit? Before we answer that, let's see what God promised to the Israelites. According to Paul in his teaching to the people of Pisidian Antioch:

"The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and lifted up the people during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with an uplifted arm He led them out from it. "And for a period of about forty years He put up with them in the wilderness. "And when He destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, He distributed their land as an inheritance—all of which took about 450 years. (Acts 13:17-19)

The inheritance of the Israelites was their land and they have never fully received their inheritance. They will finally receive it during the millennial reign of Christ. So, what do we know about our inheritance? According to Peter, this inheritance can't be diminished by any outside forces, it is holy, and it will not fade away. And, according to Paul when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, the Lord told him:

... that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.' (Acts 26:18)

So, we see from this that our inheritance will be shared with all those who have been sanctified (set-apart) from sin unto God. We also know that the Holy Spirit has been given to us as a pledge that we will receive that inheritance:

who is given as a pledge of our inheritance ... (Ephesians 1:14a)

This inheritance will be eternal:

... those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. (Hebrews 9:15)

Finally, Peter tells us in verse 4 of today's text:

having been kept in heaven for you

Our inheritance is being kept in heaven waiting for us.

So, let's collect all those facts, our inheritance is incorruptible, undefiled (holy), unfading. It will be shared among all believers. Our right to it is protected by the Holy Spirit. It is eternal, and it is being kept in heaven for us.

As I put all these pieces together, it seems to me that our inheritance is New Jerusalem. It can't be corrupted (it's made of pure gold with diamond walls), It is holy (And nothing defiled, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. -Revelation 21:27), it is eternal and will never fade. And - it is being kept in heaven waiting for us.

So What?

OK, let's talk about the elephant in the room. At some time in the past, I recognized that I was a sinner and that I deserved to spend all of eternity in Hell. At that point, I learned that the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross, paid for all my sins. I then confessed my sinfulness and accepted the blood of Jesus as the

payment for all my sins (past, present, and future) and I proclaimed Jesus Christ as my Savior and the Lord of my life.

So, I chose to be saved, didn't I? Well then, what's the deal about God having chosen me before the foundation of the world (as Paul says.) Which is it, did I choose God or did He choose me? OK, let's take a look at the other side of this coin. Let's select a fictional character named Joe. Joe rejects all religion, especially Christianity, which he says is nothing more than a crutch for people who can't handle real life.

Joe believes that science is the real answer to all the questions of the universe. He whole-heartedly believes in the big bang which he says happened about 12 billion years ago. He refuses to believe that he is a sinner, he's a good upstanding person. Not only that, but he doesn't even believe that a person named Jesus ever existed, let alone that he died on a cross. And, since Joe doesn't believe that he needs to be saved, he rejects the whole notion that God will punish him. After all, if there really is a God and he really is a God of love, as all his Christian friends tell him, then He wouldn't send anyone to Hell. And even if He did, He would let people out after a period of time, right? That only makes logical sense, doesn't it? Joe reminds us that our God is supposedly a God of love! And, as all his Christian friends tell Joe, God is also a God of mercy. But wait! A loving God who is full of mercy is not going to send anyone to Hell. If He really loves everyone, then everyone will go to heaven, that's only fair!

But, according to Joe, that's all just Christian gobble-de-gook anyway. Joe tells me that there is no proof of God and there's no scientific proof that there is a heaven or a hell. All Christians have to go on is their blind faith in what Joe calls a fairy tale. (As an aside, consider this: it takes more faith to believe in the big bang, an event that occurred 12 billion years ago, had no witnesses, and for which there is no concrete evidence, than it does to believe in the God of the Bible. Therefore, Joe is a man of faith.) But, getting back to Joe and God's choosing. Does this mean that Joe was not chosen, and he will spend eternity in Hell. That doesn't seem at all fair for a loving, merciful God to send some people to Hell just because they don't believe in Jesus.

But, wait!

God doesn't send anyone to Hell simply because they don't believe what the Bible says. God sends unbelievers to Hell because they are sinners and, according to **Romans 6:23**:

... the wages of sin is death, ...

So, Joe isn't going to Hell because he doesn't believe the Bible, Joe isn't even going to Hell because he wasn't chosen. Joe is going to Hell because he is a sinner and that's what sinners justly deserve. God is not being mean because he sends Joe to Hell. God is being righteous and giving Joe exactly what he deserves.

(Aren't you glad that you are not going to get exactly what you deserve?)

Here in the first 5 verses of 1 Peter we are instructed that not only were we chosen by God to obtain this salvation, it's also a salvation that we don't deserve, and it is irrevocable and will never disappear (in other words, we can never lose our salvation!)

Now, let's talk about this inheritance. As we have discussed before, the fact that we are adopted by God (placed as His sons) has incredible significance. Because we are sons of God by this placement (yes, ladies, you are also sons of God), we will inherit all that the Father has to give.

Everyone in this room was born into this world. Even if you were born by cesarean section, you were nonetheless born. In the same manner, every Christian has been born again. We have been given spiritual birth.

When time is ended, at the end of the Millennium, the current heaven and earth will be destroyed (dissolved) and God will create a new heavens and a new earth. Then He will bring our inheritance, New Jerusalem, down from heaven to earth as our dwelling place forever!

No wonder Peter is so full of praise to God. We should be as well!

Nothing is so humbling and so motivating to service than the realization that God chose me to be His child, not because I deserved it, but simply because He decided to. Peter is proclaiming what should be the proclamation of every Christian today: though I am deserving of hell fire, God in his mercy and grace has chosen me and has given me spiritual life, and the assurance of life with Him for all eternity in an amazing place!

Praise God!

Let's pray.