

Peter and the Pilgrims

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[0 : 00] Amen. Open up your Bibles to the book of 1 Peter.! Peter's recollection of the life and ministry of Jesus.

Mark was an assistant to Peter, was a co-worker with Peter in the city of Rome when Peter was there. And Mark wrote down what we know as the Gospel of Mark as Peter recounted for him the things that he remembered that the Lord brought to his mind about the teachings and the ministry of Jesus.

And so just having spent all of that time learning from Peter's remembrance of the ministry of Jesus, we now turn to Peter's words to believers in the first century who were facing difficult days.

In fact, we can, as we spend our time walking through this letter, we will over and over hear echoes of the teachings of Jesus throughout this letter. And hopefully our time in Mark will have prepared us for those echoes so that we can hear them and don't just pass them by.

But this morning we're going to start really simply with just the, we're going to take a look at the first two verses of Peter and just kind of get ourselves oriented so that we can understand who this letter was written to, what this letter is about, and what Peter was doing at the time.

[1 : 42] So I want you to take a look at me with the first two verses and I want to ask you guys to stand as we read together. First Peter chapter one, verse one, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.

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.

Father, we ask you to send your Spirit now to open our eyes to see the great truths of your word. It's in Jesus' name that we pray. Amen.

You guys take a seat. Nobody really likes to be the outcast. Nobody likes to be the odd man out.

Nobody likes to be the kid on the playground that gets picked on by everybody else. Nobody likes to be the kid that gets picked last when teams are being chosen. I've been the kid that gets picked last. When you follow your older brother around and you play with his friends, you get picked last.

[3 : 01] And I didn't like it. Nobody likes to be that sort of person out on the fringes. The person who doesn't quite fit in with everybody else around us. And yet, as Peter opens this letter, that's exactly how he describes the believers to whom he is writing.

And the description that he gives to them applies to all believers in all places and at all times. I want you to take a look real quickly here at how Peter addresses these people.

He addresses them in the middle of verse 1. He addresses this letter to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion. Elect exiles of the dispersion.

Now those two words, exiles and dispersion, tell us a whole lot about the people to whom Peter is writing this letter. The word exiles is used all throughout the Old Testament, particularly in the prophets of the Old Testament, to describe those Jews, to describe the people of Israel who had been forcibly removed from the land of Israel by their enemies.

So that when King Nebuchadnezzar came and destroyed the city of Jerusalem, he didn't simply destroy the city. He put the people in chains, especially those who were well-educated and those who were from more wealthy families.

[4 : 21] He put them in chains and he led them all the way to Babylon and he put them to work in Babylon. And many of them spent their entire lives in a foreign country.

They spent 70 years in exile in Babylon. Now we know, of course, that the exile was not simply due to the power and might of Nebuchadnezzar or the Babylonians, or earlier on with the northern part of the kingdom.

It wasn't simply due to the power and might of Sennacherib and the powers of the Assyrian army, as great as those may have been. Both kingdoms, the kingdom in the north and the kingdom in the south, both of them were sent into exile ultimately because of their sin.

Because they had broken the covenant that they made with God. They had disobeyed his law over and over and over. Repeatedly God had forgiven them. Repeatedly God had allowed them to turn back to him.

Until finally their disobedience, their rejection of him had grown so great that he literally spit them out of the land. He expelled them from the land and they were in exile in Babylon for 70 years.

[5 : 30] So when Peter uses this term to describe the Christians who were scattered throughout the regions of Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia, when he uses this word to describe them, they understand what it means.

They understand that it means that they are a displaced people. They are not in their homeland. Now there's a turn of phrase here because these people are not displaced because of their sin.

They are not displaced because they have been disobedient to the word. In fact, we're told that they are the elect exiles.

So if you ask, why are they exiles? Why are they a people living in a place they cannot rightfully call their home? Because they are elect. Because they have been chosen by God.

Now we're going to spend next week unpacking that word elect. And we're going to unpack these phrases in verse 2 that modify the word elect. You can look at them. They're elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

[6 : 36] They're elect in the sanctification of the Spirit. And they're elect for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling with His blood. We'll unpack that next week. What I want you to see this morning is this very simple fact that they are, in a very real sense, exiles.

Strangers. Foreigners. That's who they are. And the word dispersion only emphasizes that more. That comes from the Greek word diaspora, which we get the word diaspora from.

It's not complicated stuff. And the diaspora referred to the Jews who were scattered and living outside of Israel, outside of Palestine. And during the first century, there were actually more Jewish people living in other parts of the Roman Empire than there were living actually in the land of Israel, in Palestine.

And so most of the Jews of the day considered themselves to be of the dispersion. They were scattered all over the place. In fact, even as Peter writes this letter, Peter is in the city of Rome.

If you'll just turn to the end of this book, I'll show you real quickly. There in chapter 5, Peter tells us in verse 12, He says that he's sending this letter by Silvanus, a faithful brother, as I regard him.

[7 : 56] And he says, I've written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring to you that this is the true grace of God. He wants us to stand for a minute. And then he says, She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings.

And so does Mark, my son. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. So she who is at Babylon, the church at Babylon, and the word Babylon is used in the New Testament occasionally to describe the city of Rome.

It was a sort of code word. So that Peter could send this letter out, and if it were intercepted at any point along the way, the Roman authorities would not know that it had actually been sent from Rome.

He doesn't simply say, I'm sending this to you from Rome, and there's a reason for that. Because at the time that Peter was writing this letter, there had recently been an expulsion of Jews and Christians from the city of Rome by the Emperor Nero.

Nero had famously set fire to a major portion of the city, mostly because he was completely insane, but also because he loved to build things.

[9 : 06] And he was out of room to build things. And so if he was going to build something, he needed to tear down what was there. But you can't just tear down people's houses without a riot. You can't just tear down people's place of business without a riot.

And so Nero secretly set fire to a large portion of Rome, burned it down, blamed it on the Jews and the Christians, and then ran them out of town. So Peter's apparently still in Rome, and he uses this term Babylon so that he can't easily be identified.

There are some still here. We've got to find them. So we know he's in Rome. He's kind of secretly in Rome at this time. Peter himself knows what it is to be one of the Jews of the dispersion.

He knows what it is to be outside of his homeland. So when he addresses these believers, he addresses them with a term that they could understand, and they knew that he could relate to.

They are the exiles. Now, a lot of scholars think that because these two terms, exiles and dispersion, because these two terms are used, that Peter was actually writing to Jewish Christians who were living in these regions.

[10 : 18] Not Gentile Christians, but Jewish Christians. That may be the case, but I don't think so. I think probably like the majority of the churches in the first century at this point in time were probably in the late 50s or early 60s.

By this time, the majority of the churches were made up primarily of Gentiles with a handful of Jews in every church. And that was probably the case here. And I say that because of the way that Peter talks to these people.

If you just sort of glance your eyes down in chapter 1, down to verse 18, he says that these people to whom he is writing, he says that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers.

That's not the way that a Jew would describe other Jews. From the futile way of your forefathers. That's very normal, common language in the first century for how a Jew would speak about a Gentile.

Their ways are futile that come from their forefathers. That's exactly how a Jew would talk about a Gentile in those days. So most likely, Peter's writing to a group of churches that are scattered in this region, made up mostly of Gentiles with some Jews in them.

[11 : 32] That's who he's writing to. Now, you have to ask the question, were they literally exiles? Were they literally foreigners in these areas? And we really don't know.

He names the areas Pontius, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. All these regions are in modern-day Turkey, the country that we call Turkey, that they called in the ancient world Asia Minor.

And these were different Roman provinces in Asia Minor in Turkey. And so Peter is writing this letter to probably a whole group of churches scattered throughout this area because the towns were very spread out in Asia Minor and all these regions of the towns are very spread out.

They're not as largely populated as in other areas of the Roman Empire. And so he just kind of sends this letter out to be copied and spread around this very large area with sort of a dispersed population.

And we don't know if the people to whom he wrote were born and raised there in Asia Minor or whether they migrated there later on. We have no idea. Some people have speculated that maybe the people that Peter is writing to are those Jews and Christians who've been kicked out of Rome.

[12 : 42] Maybe. We don't know. Maybe there's some of the Jewish Christians who were kicked out of Jerusalem when Paul was persecuting the church after Pentecost and after the death of Stephen. We don't really know how these people came to be believers in this region.

We know that Paul didn't go as far north as Pontia and Cappadocia. But then Paul didn't go to those regions and start these churches. There's no record of Peter ever having been there. And Peter doesn't write this letter as if he has a personal relationship with these people.

So honestly, we have no idea how they got there, whether they really were foreigners, literally foreigners there, or whether they were born and raised there. But none of that is the point.

The point here is that from a spiritual perspective, these people are exiles. They are aliens. They are foreigners in the world in which they live.

And we're not any different. If we are to be faithful to Christ, if we are to follow Christ faithfully, then we will look differently than other people around us.

[13 : 48] That doesn't necessarily mean that we will dress differently. It doesn't necessarily mean that we will have different accents or anything like that. It doesn't mean that we will have different kinds of jobs, okay?

Externally, things may look like everyone else around us. But the principles that guide our lives, the decisions that we make, the truths that we're willing to stand on and that we're willing to die for, they will distinguish us from the rest of the world, just as these people are distinguished from the rest of the world.

In fact, throughout this letter, we're going to see over and over, Peter's going to talk about the persecution that these believers are having to endure. Now, what's interesting is that at this point in time, there was no widespread, government-led persecution of Christians.

Some people get this image in their head that in the first century, that in the early days of the church, the Roman government was constantly tracking down Christians and throwing them to the lions.

And that just simply wasn't the case. Yes, that happened 100 to 200 years later. But when Peter was writing this letter, when all of the New Testament was written, that kind of systematic persecution wasn't happening.

[15 : 06] The kind of persecution that was taking place was localized. It was, well, there might be a governor in this region who's really sick of having to hear about the Jews complaining about the new Gentile Christian, or he's really tired of hearing complaints about the Christians in his city.

And so he might persecute them in some way. But they're not all being rounded up and thrown to the lions. They're just being treated and talked about and slandered as if they were outcasts of the society.

Because the people didn't understand them. They didn't understand, how in the world can you uphold a crucified man? A man condemned by Rome as a criminal.

How can you hold him up, not only as your teacher and leader and savior, how can you hold him up as your God? How can you do such a thing? In fact, one of the earliest archaeological finds that archaeologists have discovered and that we can see is a drawing of a Christian named Alexa Minos.

And this Christian, this drawing, it's got his name plastered on it, and then there's a figure of a man on a cross with a donkey's headlight. Because that's what they thought of Jesus in the world.

[16 : 23] That's what they thought of Christians. You worship a fool. You worship a criminal. That's how they saw that. They thought that Christians did strange things because when the early church partook of the Lord's Supper, when they would have communion, any non-believers who were present for worship would be asked to leave first because communion was reserved only for the church.

And so all they knew is that after they left, they did something, they drank blood and ate somebody's flesh. They were accused of being cannibals.

They were accused of all sorts of strange things. So the persecution that was most common in the first century, and that these people most likely would have experienced, was a kind of slander and social ostracism, being treated badly, being talked about badly by your neighbors, being looked at with suspicion by people around you, having a moral code that simply did not line up with everyone else's moral code around them, refusing to pay tribute to Caesar as a god, that's unheard of in the Roman world, refusing to worship at the local temples, refusing to follow the immoral practices of the Greco-Roman culture.

Those were the sorts of things that caused them to be outcasts, that caused them to be exiles. And that was true all over the Roman Empire, not just in Asian America, not just in these regions.

Christians were viewed as subversive people who might cause trouble and certainly, certainly did not fit in.

[18 : 04] I think that that's a fairly accurate description of how, at times, Christians were viewed today. Now, I say it that way, and it may not ring true to you.

And that's only because the word Christian has been corrupted in our society. Christian has been corrupted to refer to anyone who goes to church or anyone who was raised in church or anyone, if they have to fill out a form and identify some kind of religion, they check off Christianity.

And so you have this big sort of, this big just mixed bag of people who qualify as Christian. But if you look at people who are genuine followers of Christ, who lay aside everything for the sake of Christ and for the sake of the gospel, who do all that they do to bring honor and glory and praise to His name, then the things that those people do, genuine followers of Christ, that lifestyle live, does not make sense to much of our society.

It simply doesn't make sense. Why? Why would you oppose homosexuality? Why would you be so adamant about abortion issues? Why would you proselytize?

Why do you try to convince people that what you believe is right? Why not just let everybody believe what everybody wants to believe and leave everybody alone? Why do you have to preach?

[19 : 24] Why do you have to keep bringing up the Bible? Why do you care? Those things are off-putting to our culture. They're strange. They're off.

So when Peter addresses this letter to the exiles of the dispersion, I don't want us to see ourselves as disconnected from that. I want us to examine ourselves.

I want us to begin to ask questions. I want us to look at our lives and ask, is there anything about us that distinguishes us from everybody else? And again, I don't mean the way that you dress necessarily.

I don't mean necessarily the way that you speak, although that could be an issue in certain things. I mean, is there anything about the driving, motivating factors of your life?

Is there anything about the things that you take a stand upon? Is there anything about your general demeanor and the character of who you are that distinguishes you from the world around you?

[20 : 23] Is there anything at all? Or do you just blend in with everybody else because at the end of the day, you're not really any different from everybody else? Do you approach issues of honesty in a different way from everyone else in your office?

Where everyone else will cut a corner and lie about it in order to get ahead? Do you instead tell the truth even if it costs you? Are you willing to do that?

Do you refuse and turn away from gossip or are you in the middle of it and involved of it or at least on the fringes of it encouraging it and receiving it? Where are you in that?

Is there anything in your life that distinguishes you from the general culture at large? Would you look at your core values and your core commitments and say, when those are seen and when those are known by others, I'm an outcast in the very place in which I live.

I'm a foreigner. in the place where I was born. What distinguishes you? And when you begin to live your life in such a way that you are distinguished from the culture and when you begin to live your life in such a way that people begin to notice that there is something different about you, there is something distinct about you, how do you maintain that?

[21 : 54] How do you stay that course? How do you remain faithful to Christ? Because it's easy to begin, it's exciting to begin something different sometimes, but how do you stay the course when everything around you is pulling you back to where you used to be and who you used to be?

How do you stay the course? I think the very opening of this letter can help us to see where our strength can come from. You may not see it because we pass over the openings of these letters all the time, but it begins with a very simple phrase.

Peter identifies himself Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.

The first time that we meet Peter in the New Testament, we find him down in Judea at the Jordan River where John the Baptist was baptizing people. That's where Peter at the urging of his brother Andrew first met Jesus, but it's not where he began to follow Jesus and be a disciple of Jesus.

That happened later on after they went back to Galilee. And you may remember the famous story where Jesus comes to Peter and he says to him, follow me. Stop fishing, Peter.

[23 : 15] Let go of your nets, Peter. Walk away from that life, Peter, and I'll make you a fisher of men. Follow me. And from that moment on, Peter's life takes on a different kind of trajectory.

And Peter not only becomes a disciple of Jesus, Peter becomes the leading disciple of Jesus. When you look at all the various lists in the four gospels and in the book of Acts, there are these different lists of the names of the twelve disciples.

And they're all a little bit different. The names are in different orders. Most of the men had at least two names and some of them three names, and so the names are not always the exact same name.

It may be their Greek name or maybe their Aramaic name, their given name. It changes up here and there. The lists have some differences in them, but there's one thing that is consistent in every single list of the twelve disciples.

Peter is always first on the list. Every single time. Always first. He is a leader among the disciples. Peter and James and John are the three that are singled out by Jesus.

[24 : 19] When Jesus has some important task, he'll send Peter and usually James or John to take care of it. When Jesus goes up on the mountain to pray and you have the moment of the transfiguration in which the glory of Jesus is revealed in that moment, Peter and James and John are there.

Peter's there for that. When Jesus needs someone to find an upper room kind of in secret for them to celebrate the Passover, he sends Peter and John to find that room. Peter's always at the forefront of things.

When Jesus asks his disciples, who do you say that I am? It's Peter who speaks up and Peter says, you are the Christ, the Son of the living God. Peter makes that great confession. And because of that confession, it's to Peter that Jesus says, your name, you will be called Peter, which is a Greek word for rock.

Because upon this rock, I will build my church. Peter is significant. I think sometimes in our attempts to distance ourselves from Roman Catholicism.

Because Roman Catholicism teaches that Peter was the first pope and all the other popes have their authority because Peter passed down his authority with what's called apostolic succession to all these other bishops of Rome.

[25 : 33] And so the pope has supreme authority. And we want to rightfully distance ourselves from that because it's not found in the New Testament. It's not even found in early church history. It's a later development in church history that the bishop of Rome becomes this exalted figure in parts of the church.

So we want to distance ourselves from that because that's not right and that's not true. But sometimes in our attempts to distance ourselves from that error we commit another error and we don't recognize the significance of this man in the establishment of the church.

He's incredibly significant in the establishment of the church. But not simply because he is Peter the Rock. He's significant in the establishment of the church because of what he appends to his name here.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. He is an apostle. He's an apostle. The apostles were not just anyone who wanted to claim the name apostle.

I know today there are preachers claiming all sorts of weird titles for themselves. So you get some preacher who just decides out of nowhere he's no longer Pastor Jones he's Bishop Jones and nobody made him a bishop he just made himself a bishop one day because it comes with a pay raise usually.

[26 : 43] I know that people claim all kinds of titles and you can see on church signs and got apostle so and so coming to town to preach or whatever. I get that. People are naming themselves apostles today but that's not the way that it worked in the New Testament.

The apostles were not just anyone with a special title. The apostles were men specifically chosen by Christ and appointed personally by Christ to be his representatives after he ascended into heaven.

So that the apostles speak not with the authority of great teachers the apostles speak and write with the authority of Christ himself. It is the most significant office of all the offices of the church in the New Testament.

In fact let me just have you turn to a couple of places. Hold your place there in 1 Peter. I want you to turn all the way back to the book of Galatians. You can kind of get a flavor for how important this issue of who's an apostle and who's not an apostle is when you hear the apostle Paul talk about his rights that's an apostle.

In Galatians chapter 1 Paul introduced himself much like Peter Paul an apostle and then he says something else. He wants to make it clear that he's a genuine real apostle.

[27 : 57] This is what he says not from men nor through man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised him from the dead.

Paul says I'm an apostle not because a man named me an apostle not because I declared myself to be an apostle I have been appointed an apostle by Jesus Christ by no one less than God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead.

He is the one who has called me to be an apostle. I counted at least three times as I was just kind of perusing through Paul's letters this week at least three times and there may have been more where Paul refers to himself as an apostle by the will of God.

It's a significant significant title so much so that Paul devotes the half of chapter 1 and much of chapter 2 in the book of Galatians to explaining how he became an apostle if he wasn't part of the original 12 how did Paul become an apostle and he devotes a full chapter all told when you add it up to showing how he came to be rightfully called an apostle.

It's significant to be an apostle. The apostles carried the very authority of Christ. In fact turn over one more book from Galatians to the book of Ephesians in chapter 2 verse 20 you can see that Paul says that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets.

[29 : 27] The church is built on the foundation of the apostles. How so? How does that work? Because they were first and through their teachings which are preserved for us now in their writings they lay the groundwork they lay the foundation they give us the truth upon which the church itself will be built.

Why is Peter the rock upon whom the church will be built? Because he's an apostle. Why does Peter come to these believers who are suffering persecution exiles in the world?

Why does he come to them? And the first thing he says to them is I'm writing this letter to you as an apostle. Why does he do that? Because if they're going to endure they need an authoritative word for God to sustain them.

And that's what you and I need. If we're going to endure in this world if we're going to live lives that are honoring and pleasing to Christ we need an authoritative word from Christ and we have it for us preserved in the writings of the New Testament the writings of the apostles.

We have it here. What you need when you when you are desperately searching for encouragement on a day in which everything has been discouraging what you need is to hear this word spoken into your life.

[30 : 59] What you need when you get the phone call from the doctor and he says the word cancer what you need is this book. You need the words of the apostles.

What you need when your family begins to crumble and fall apart what you need is not a self-help book from Barnes and Noble. What you need are the words of the apostles preserved for you in the New Testament.

What we need to be faithful followers of Christ in the world is this word. We need the words of the apostles which are the words of Christ.

If you've been chosen by God and set apart in the world as an exile you're going to need this to endure. And you're going to need to be constantly reminded constantly reminded of the foundation upon which your faith is built.

And Peter does that for us. If you look in chapter 2 verse 24 Peter tells us about Jesus echoes of the gospel. He bore he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.

[32 : 20] By his wounds you have been healed. You need to hear that word from the apostles. You need to constantly hear he bore our sins on the cross.

He has taken them upon himself so that we might no longer be enslaved to sin but so that we might live to righteousness. Or if you turn over to chapter 3 verse 18 we hear the gospel echoed akin.

For Christ also suffered once for sins the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit.

We need to constantly hear Christ suffered once for sins the righteous in the place of the unrighteous. If I'm not reminded daily that Christ has died for me that the sinless son of God has taken my sin upon himself and suffered in my place and bore his father's wrath for me if I don't hear that every day if I'm not reminded of that I will drift away.

I will take the first step away by beginning to act and perhaps even to think that my hope is based upon what I do based upon my righteousness based upon my niceness and my goodness based upon the fact that I go to church based upon the fact that I read my Bible based upon the fact that I treat my wife kindly or I'm raising my kids in the way that seems right according to scripture I would begin to think that my hope lies in all the good that I do if I'm not reminded that the righteous one Jesus suffered for the unrighteous me and all of my hope is grounded in that suffering not my unrighteousness we need to hear these words we need the voices of the apostles to echo in our minds to call us back to faithfulness to Christ when everything else around us even the things that are within us and the thoughts that we have when all of those things would drag us slowly step by step away from

[34 : 48] Christ we need this word to come and pull us back to him and so I want to issue a very clear and very direct challenge to you for this week I want you this week to commit yourself to opening this word every day every day whether you're going to read through 1st Peter because that's what we're going through if you want to go back to the gospel of Mark and review Mark or if you want to open up to the gospel of John or one of Paul's letters my challenge for you is to pick a book and each day begin to read each day begin to see the truth and be drawn back into the truth and each day to have your thinking and your feeling and your doing shaped and molded by the word of Christ through his apostles let's pray!

Thank you.