

In the Land of our Sojourn: A Living Hope

1 Peter 1:1-5

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on July 13, 2014

Introduction

- ❖ I'm excited to introduce a new series that we'll be in through the rest of the summer and into the fall. We'll be studying the book of 1 Peter, and we're calling it "In the Land of our Sojourn". Now you may or may not be familiar with that particular term.
 - **Your *sojourn* means your place of temporary stay.** If you're on a journey, then any stop along the way to your final destination is your sojourn. **And so to be a *sojourner* means that you're a person who is in temporary residence.** You're not at home. You haven't reached your final destination. You're still in the land of your sojourn.

- ❖ This idea of sojourning is an apt metaphor for the book of 1 Peter. Peter starts off in the very first verse identifying his Christian readers as "*exiles*". In some translations they're called "*strangers*" (NIV, KJV), "*aliens*" (NASB), or "*temporary residents*" (HCSB). Later on in chapter 2:11, he addresses them as "*sojourners and exiles*".
 - So there's our word. Christians are sojourners and exiles. In this world we're not at home. We have yet to reach our final destination. **For Christians, this world is a foreign land and we are strangers in it.**

- ❖ Now I realize a past generation of believers would've disagreed with that sentiment. They would've argued that America is a Christian nation founded by Christians on Christian principles. We don't feel foreign. We don't feel strange or out of place. This is our land.
 - And there was good reason to feel that way. **In past generations, in our country, the Church held a firm place in the cultural center.** Even if you didn't believe or practice the faith, you probably had some roots in it. You still viewed the Bible as an authoritative book. You would've recognized its stories and characters. You probably shared similar moral values with Christians and held a common sexual ethic.
 - Now whether you actually followed the Bible or kept those values and ethics was an entirely different matter. The point is that Christians shared a common language and point of reference with non-Christians. We had a place in the cultural center.

- ❖ But clearly that's no longer the case. **Christians today who seek to be faithful to Christ and his Word are finding themselves more and more at odds with the dominant culture.** Our views on the exclusivity of salvation in Christ alone; on hell and divine judgment; on creation and the literal nature of stories about Adam and Eve, Noah's ark, or Jonah's whale; on marriage, sex, and sexuality; on saving yourself for marriage and not having premarital sex or living with your partner – all of these beliefs and values are considered strange.
 - And if you hold and practice these things, you're equally strange. **The Church is no longer in the cultural center. We're on the margins.** We're outliers in relation to mainstream culture.

- ❖ But it's in that sense that Christians today share a greater resemblance with the early Christians in Peter's day. First-century Christians were huge outliers in Roman society. They had a bad reputation. There were so many false rumors and accusations going around.

- ❖ For example, when the early church took the Lord's Supper, it was an actual supper that they called a love feast (Jude 1:12). As they regularly held their love feasts, these nasty rumors spread about these orgies being thrown by Christians, who apparently were incestuous since they kept calling each other brother and sister.
 - They were also accused of cannibalism since, in these feasts, they talked of eating the flesh and blood of their Master. And ironically, they were called atheists since they denied the Roman Pantheon of gods and goddesses. And of course, they were accused of sedition, of betraying Caesar, since they claimed to follow another king.
 - **So if you think Christians have a bad rap today, just remember that early Christians were viewed by the dominant culture of their day as a seditious, incestuous, blood-thirsty, atheistic cult.**

- ❖ Now how do you respond to that? That's the question Peter is helping his readers to answer. *What do you do when you find yourself out of step with the culture and pushed out to the margins? When your neighbors consider you and your views strange and freakish?*
 - Many people today will despair. They'll complain about the state of our culture. That it's in moral decline. And they'll do whatever it takes to reclaim the cultural center for Christ. For the Church to win back the influence and status we once held.

- ❖ But that's not Peter's advice. That's not what he calls his readers to do. **Instead of trying to reclaim the cultural center, he calls us to reclaim our Christian identity.** To remember who you are in Christ. You're a sojourner, a stranger. He says later on in chapter 4 that you shouldn't be surprised when you're insulted and persecuted, as though something strange were happening to you (4:12).
 - No, this is normal. It's to be expected once you understand who you are. And once you reclaim your identity in Christ, you realize that your situation is not hopeless. There's really no reason to despair. There's every reason for Christians to live in hope.
 - From this morning's passage, I want to give you three reasons not to despair but to have hope, even as the Church is being pushed further away from the cultural center and closer to the margins.

Don't Despair, You're an Elect Exile

- ❖ The first reason not to despair is because you're not just an exile – **you're an elect exile of the dispersion.** Look at v1. *“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.”*
 - Peter was one of Jesus' closest disciples. He was also an apostle in that he was an eyewitness to the Resurrection and commissioned by Christ to preach the gospel. In this letter, he's writing to a primarily Gentile Christian audience. Not to one church but to a number of them in Asia Minor within the five Roman provinces listed in v1.

- ❖ If you read this letter, you can't miss the running theme of suffering. These early Christians were having to endure a good share of suffering. **It was coming at the hands of neighbors and colleagues and usually in the form of verbal abuse and discrimination.**

- ❖ In chapter 4:4, Peter mentions how your neighbors will be surprised when you stand out and don't join them to do what they do, to condone what they condone, to celebrate what they celebrate, and for that, Peter says, "*they malign you.*" They'll insult you (4:14). They'll call you strange and freakish. But Peter says that what you are. **In the eyes of the world, you are strange because you're a stranger in it.** You're an *exile of the dispersion*.
- ❖ Now that's a loaded term. Besides chapter 2:11, that word *exile* shows up only once more in **Hebrews 11:13**. There the author describes Israel's forefathers as "*strangers and exiles on earth*" who were "*seeking a homeland*" desiring "*a better country, that is, a heavenly one.*" (Heb. 11:13-16). **The point is to be an exile means you're currently not living in your homeland. You're in a foreign land.**
 - That's also implied by calling us exiles *of the dispersion*. The Greek is *the diaspora*, which means 'the scattering' and it was applied to any Jewish community existing outside of Palestine (cf. John 7:35). Diaspora Jews were Jews scattered about the known world, living away from the homeland away in a foreign land.
 - Now the way Peter uses the terms *exile* and *dispersion* is different than the Old Testament when applied to Jews. Israel was scattered as a consequence of their sin and idolatry. But when Peter applies these labels to the Church, he's not drawing the analogy that far. **Believers are scattered all over the world away from home but not because of our sin for the sake of punishment – but rather because of our election for the sake of our mission.**
- ❖ This is why you should be hopeful even though you're an exile. Because you're an *elect* exile, a *chosen* refugee, a *beloved* sojourner. **Peter is bringing together two seemingly incompatible realities – our present sufferings on earth and our exalted status in Christ.**
 - On one hand we're exiles. We're away from home and suffering for the faith at the hands of those who find us strange and freakish. But on the other, we're elect. We're chosen. We're special objects of God's electing love.
- ❖ Peter continues in v2 to say that you're elect, "*according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.*" That means you're chosen as a result of the Father's foreknowledge. **The basis of your election is all God.** Some people think God only foreknows the elect in that he only knows in advance who will be saved. But the idea of election in Scripture means more than that – more than just foreknowing – but also foreordaining.
 - Just look over at chapter 1:20. This verse is talking about Jesus. It says, "*He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you.*" Here it's clear that Peter is not teaching that God only knew in advance that Jesus would come and be incarnate as a man.
- ❖ He's saying God *foreordained* that Jesus would come. He planned it. He predestined it. All of that is involved in God's foreknowledge. **So bottom line, if you're a Christian, you can take hope in the knowledge that though you're a stranger to this world, you are personally known and chosen by God the Father.**

- He knows you by name. He chose you in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Before anything in creation was, the Father had you in mind to be a special object of his love. You were foreknown and foreordained to be his.
- ❖ Peter goes on to say that your election was, “*in the sanctification of the Spirit.*” He’s referring here to your conversion and not your spiritual growth. I know when you typically see the word you think of your progressive sanctification, your growth in holiness.
 - But in context, Peter is describing your **positional sanctification**. The work of the Spirit in setting apart God’s elect, removing them from the realm of the world and translating them into the realm of the holy. Entrance into this sphere of holiness is what we call conversion. It happens that moment you become a Christian.
 - No one walks into that sphere on his own. **No one converts himself. You have to be set apart and brought in by the Spirit of God.**
 - ❖ Peter concludes by saying your election unto salvation was, “*for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.*” Here he’s telling you the purpose behind your election. It’s to be obedient to Christ and cleansed by his shed blood on the cross.
 - **Conversion is not merely an intellectual matter where you assent to truth claims found in the gospel.** It involves that, but it also involves the submission of your will to Christ. You submit yourself under those truth claims and especially the Claimer. You are elect unto salvation for obedience to Jesus who redeemed you by blood.
 - ❖ ***Do you see how hope-giving it is to reclaim your identity as an elect exile?*** You may be rejected by the world, but you’re chosen by the Father! You may be tossed aside by the culture, but you’re set apart by the Spirit! You may be discarded by others, but you’re purchased by the blood of Christ! Don’t despair, you’re an *elect* exile of the dispersion.
 - ❖ We mustn't forget our election in Christ. When we do, we tend to react to being exiles in one of two ways. **Some Christians move towards cultural accommodation.** They struggle to embrace the identity of an exile. So they end up adjusting biblical teaching to such a degree as to remove its offense or strangeness. They think they're making Christianity more palatable, but all it does is make it more irrelevant.
 - **Some of us may never go so far as to compromise beliefs, but we might compensate for our alien status by trying to be cool and well-versed in pop culture.** To prove that Christians aren't really that strange. But we are! We're square pegs in a round world.
 - ❖ Now that can get you really depressed unless you remember that you're a square peg *chosen by God*. When you rest in your identity as God's elect, then you begin to draw your status and worth – not from being hip and culturally accepted – but from God's sovereign grace by which you were chosen. That truth can strengthen your resolve to live counter-culturally even if it means incurring our culture’s scorn. Don’t lose sight of your election.

- ❖ **Now on the other end of the spectrum, some of us take pride in being countercultural.** We're proud of the way we've resisted liberalizing trends. We look down on those Christians who cave in theologically or those who try to win the culture's approval. We take pride in being an exile that stands apart and against the dominant culture.
 - We don't worry about cultural accommodation. But our issue is **countercultural arrogance**. We think we're exiles because of our conservative values and our ability to resist compromise. But we've got it all wrong. The only reason we're exiles is because God chose us in the beginning and set us apart as a new people in Christ.
 - **You have no reason to boast in being a countercultural exile.** The only reason that's who you are is because of mercy. Because God mercifully chose you before the foundation of the world.

- ❖ There are always those who will argue that all this talk about being elect and being chosen will only make Christians more arrogant. But they couldn't be more wrong. **God's sovereign choosing of a people is never a ground for boasting but a call to missions. The doctrine of divine election is never intended to compliment the chosen ones but rather to humble them and compel them to action on behalf of others.**
 - Christians are no better than non-Christians. The Church is no better than the world. But we differ in the unexplainable fact that God has chosen the Church to be his channel of blessing to the world through the proclamation of the gospel.

Don't Despair, You're Born Again

- ❖ So that's the first reason you shouldn't despair because you're an elect exile. The second reason not to despair over your alien status in this world is because **you're born again to a living hope**. Look at v3, "*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*".

- ❖ So you were blessed when chosen that you might be a blessing to other, but first of all, turn that blessing upwards towards the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because Peter says he caused us to be born again. By his great mercy and power, God has made you into a new person with a new life and new hope to live for.
 - *How is this hope-giving?* Think about it. **If this life is all you have, if this world is your only home, then it would be depressing to live as a stranger in it.** That wouldn't be worth it. You might as well fit in.
 - But if you knew that you have a new life, a new family, and a new home, then you have new hope – a living, growing, enduring hope.

- ❖ And that's exactly what you get when you're born again. Now I think there's still a lot of confusion about that term. A lot of people see "born-again" as just a way of distinguishing one kind of Christian from another. You have liberal Christians, fundamentalist Christians, conservative Christians, born-again Christians, etc.

- But that's not how Scripture uses the term. Born-again doesn't describe just another class of Christians. **To be born-again is to be a Christian, and to be a Christian is to be born-again.**

- ❖ According to Scripture, in our first birth we are all born into sin. David sang in Psalm 51 of how he was birthed in iniquity (Ps. 51:5). And therefore, all we deserve from God the Father is judgment and wrath.
 - And yet, he chose us in the beginning and now shows us great mercy, causing us to be born again. Giving us a second birth by which we become Christians. Later on in chapter 1:23, Peter explains that this miracle happens in conjunction with the preaching of the gospel. **Just as God, in the beginning, used a spoken word to create all of physical life, he continues to use a spoken word to create spiritual life within the dead hearts of his elect.**

- ❖ So for anyone to become a Christian, it does call for us to be active in evangelism, in preaching the gospel, but the whole point is that becoming a Christian – being born again – is something that God ultimately causes.
 - No one can take credit for their salvation. No one can cause himself to be born again. You did not cause yourself to be born the first time. You didn't come out when you decided you were good and ready. It just happened to you. It's no different for the second birth. It's not something you bring about on your own.

- ❖ **It's God's initiative and prerogative to save, to create new life in you. And that new life gives birth to living hope.** Now it's described as "living" in the sense that it's a growing hope as opposed to a stale or shrinking hope.
 - You can easily look out at our culture and see how its moving in a troubling direction. And any hope of a turnaround seems to be shrinking fast. But born-again people don't have to despair. Jesus taught those who are born again of the Spirit will enter the kingdom of God (Jn. 3:5). That gives us a living, growing hope for our future – a future that is firmly grounded in what God has done for us in the past.
 - Notice how Peter says our living hope is "*through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*". Jesus Christ accomplished our salvation through his death and resurrection. He bore the Father's wrath for us. He made atonement for sin for us. He took the punishment for us. He accomplished our salvation.

- ❖ **And at your conversion when you're born again, the Holy Spirit applies Jesus' accomplished salvation in your life.** Now you have the hope of heaven, the hope of a great inheritance. So don't despair if you're not respected or highly esteemed by our culture. Don't worry if the world doesn't understand you or misunderstands you. Don't be surprised.
 - For those of you who immigrated to the States more recently, you know what I mean. When you were a new immigrant here, a resident alien, you were misunderstood all the time. And you probably didn't get the same respect as you did back home. And that's exactly why – you weren't at home. You were in the land of your sojourn.

- ❖ **Born-again people need to embrace the posture of resident aliens who do their best to make a home here but never forget that this is not really home.** Our real home and thus our real hope lies in the future, secure for us in heaven.

Don't Despair, You're an Heir

- ❖ And that leads to our last point. The final reason you don't have to despair our present times is because **you, as a believer, are an heir to a great inheritance.** Let's read vv4-5. Peter says that God caused us to be born again, *"⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."*
- ❖ Here we see that our living hope is tied intimately to our inheritance as the children of God. When we are born again, we're born into a new family, the family of God, and we are his children. **And as his children we get an inheritance that's being kept for us in heaven.**
 - It's so glorious of an inheritance that Peter doesn't have words to describe it. It's indescribable. He can only tell you what it is not. He says it's *imperishable*. It's unable to be destroyed. It's *undefiled*. Nothing can pollute it. And it's *unfading*. Unlike everything else it's not subject to decay.
- ❖ This inheritance is yours, if you are born again, and it's kept secure for you in heaven. *If this is true, if this real, why would you despair? Why would you complain about the trials you're presently facing?*
 - **John Newton**, best known for writing the hymn *Amazing Grace*, gives this great illustration that perfectly describes us. He says suppose, a hundred years ago, a man is riding in a carriage in New York to receive a huge inheritance – a large estate worth millions of dollars. And imagine if a mile from the city, his carriage were to break down. He tries to fix it but can't, so he's forced to walk the rest of the way.
 - What would you say about the man if he spent that mile grumbling under his breath? Newton says, *"What a fool we should think him, if we saw him ringing his hands, and blubbing out all the remaining mile, "My [carriage] is broken! My [carriage] is broken!"*
- ❖ But isn't that the way most of us are? We gripe and complain that our home here on earth is going down the tube. The culture is broken! The culture is broken! But you have a glorious inheritance waiting for you in heaven.
 - V5 promises that you are being guarded by God's power for this salvation that will be revealed to you in the last time when Christ returns. Think about it. **God is actively guarding you, protecting you, preserving you until you get your inheritance.**
- ❖ Notice what this means. Many think that being God's chosen must mean he guards you from harm, from experiencing anything negative, difficult, or discouraging. But that couldn't be further from the truth. **The only promise of protection we have as God's chosen people is the promise that God's power will protect us from finally falling away.**

- ❖ I know it says we're being “guarded through faith”. That means, yes, you have to keep believing to the end if you expect that inheritance. But good news, it's God's power that sustains your faith. He empowers within you persevering faith.
 - So all of you who feel weak or small in faith, be encouraged and take hope in the promise that God will preserve your faith, especially through the trials and travails you'll have to go through in this world.

- ❖ As of now it looks to be a lot. It looks like our culture is going from bad to worse. Everyday it grows more and more hostile to Christianity. Christians once enjoyed the status of a **privileged majority** in this country. We can thank God for that and the positive impact Christianity has left on Western culture.
 - But now, like first-century Christians, we find ourselves in a much different context where we have to learn to embrace the identity of a **prophetic minority**. Where we don't have much influence. Where we don't hold an esteemed place in society. Where we're a minority that stands on the outside of the cultural center.
 - But we're still prophets with the call to speak into our culture a message of truth, of love, and of hope found in our Lord Jesus Christ.

- ❖ *Can we adapt and learn to operate from the margins of society? We have the necessary tools and the right Leader who has proved, through his life and death, that you can transform the world even as the world rejects you.* ²*For he grew up . . . like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him.* ³*He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.”* (Isa. 53:2-3)
 - **And yet this despised and rejected man ended up saving the world – even though he lacked the world's acceptance and approval.** That means losing the acceptance and approval of our culture will not derail the Church's ability to carry out our mission. Push us to the margins and we'll adapt, and from that position, with chastened confidence, we'll continue the work of the gospel to seek to save the very ones who reject us. That's what our Lord did and would do.