**1 Peter 1:1-12**

This morning, we are going to begin a new series of sermons

* on the first letter of Peter
* it’s a series that will take us through to August
* except on Parade Sundays, of course

And it is good for us to be studying 1 Peter together

* because it really is such an important book in the New Testament

It is a short book, intensely practical, with some beautiful spiritual insights

* and I hope that, as we study it together over the coming weeks
* we will continue to learn deep things about God
* and how we are to live out our destiny as his children

But before we launch into the text

* a short bit of background to set the scene:

It was probably written by the Apostle Peter

* in the mid- to late 60s AD – probably about AD 67 or 68
* and he wrote it from Rome, just before he was martyred there
* for being a follower of Jesus Christ

Peter mentions in his letter the trials and tribulations that Christians will go through

* and if it was written by him in the mid- to late 60s AD
* that would fit in with the reign of the Emperor Nero
* who, we know, persecuted Christians at the time

But who was Peter writing this letter to?

Again, there is some debate about this

* because at first reading, it seems to be a very ‘Jewish’ letter
* so one would assume that it was written to Jewish Christians

And that would make sense because we know

* that Paul was missionary predominantly to the Gentiles
* and that Peter was missionary predominantly to the Jews

But, for reasons that will become clear over the next few weeks

* there is very strong evidence to suggest that Peter was actually writing to Gentile Christians:
* new converts to the Christian faith
* who were trying to discover what it meant for them to be followers of Jesus
* in a religious tradition that had ben born out of Judaism

So this letter has a lot to say about identity and Christian practice:

* it addresses the fundamental questions
* of who we are in Christ and how we are to live our lives as Christians

And so, for that reason, it has as much to say to us today

* as it did to those first Christians almost 2,000 years ago

OK, let’s get to the text itself

* and if you want to follow it with me
* you’ll find it on page 249 in the second half, the New Testament section, of the pew Bibles

Peter begins in verse 1 by addressing the Christians he is writing to

* as “the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia”

So this is clearly a cyclical letter:

* one letter that was being sent to a group of churches
* scattered across a geographical area

Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia were 5 Roman Provinces

* covering 300,000 square miles
* so this one letter was covering a vast distance; many churches, many believers:
* so it was clearly very important indeed

And these five provinces were in the northern part of Asia Minor, which is now Turkey

The churches the letter went to would not have been set up by either Peter or Paul

* but would have developed independently
* and it is highly unlikely that either Peter or Paul had visited them

But there is a logic to how the churches are listed:

* Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia –
* is the order a messenger would have visited the churches
* if he had entered the region by sea through the port city of Amastris

And Peter begins his letter with a greeting in which he says,

* “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with his blood: May grace and peace be yours in abundance.”

Here is an immediate claim to authority

* because he refers to himself as Peter, not Simon
* and that is the name that Jesus gave him, of course
* and then he confirms his authority over them with the phrase ‘apostle of Jesus Christ’

The recipients of this letter knew immediately that here was a spiritual father to be listened to

* and we would do well to take that same attitude today
* as we read his words to this church

And he begins by describing them as a people, “chosen and destined by God”

* and that description is at the heart of who we are as Christians

You and I have been chosen by God:

* that is an act of his from all eternity but more importantly
* it is a choosing that takes us into a secure future

We are chosen by God for a secure future in him

* but that choosing by God has a massive ramification for us:
* it means that, as a result, we live as strangers in this world:
* we are, as Peter says here, “exiles of the Dispersion”

The Greek word Peter uses here for ‘exiles’

* finds its root in the idea of a person temporarily living in a foreign land

And so this world is, for us as Christians, a temporary home, a foreign place

* as we journey from God and back to God

Chosen by God: that is your identity

Living as an exile in the world: that is the social implication of what it means to have been chosen

And we all know, to one extent or another

* the pressures and stresses and strains of what it means to live out our calling by God
* as we seek to be faithful to the Christian life

There is a constant tension for us in that as we seek to be in the world but not of it

* and that tension works itself out differently for each one of us

And as Peter begins to work this out in a little more detail,

* he uses three interesting phrases in verse 2:

Destined by God the Father

Sanctified by the Spirit for obedience

Sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ

God determined for each one of us from all eternity

* and, as a result we have been consecrated by the Spirit for obedience
* which is a New Testament phrase for willingly accepting the Gospel message
* and, as a result of that willing acceptance,
* we are sprinkled by the blood of Jesus for salvation

And, since this is Trinity Sunday

* it is good for us to be reminded today
* that the process of our salvation involves the Trinitarian God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit
* and each person of the Trinity has a specific role to play in our salvation

And, as a result of this act of salvation

* we are the recipients of grace and peace
* as Peter says here, “in abundance”

Grace and peace: that is the future we have in store for us and which we look forward to

* grace and peace in abundance, for all eternity

Not because we deserve it or have earned it

* but because it is the gift of God to us from all eternity

And how has that grace and peace been won for us?

* Peter goes on to tell us in verse 3:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

The resurrection of Jesus is the absolute cornerstone of our faith

* and it is through his resurrection that we have a future to look forward to
* a future of grace and peace

But how secure is that future? How confident can we be in that future?

We have every confidence, as we read in verse 4:

“He brought us into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”

This isn’t a description of what we enjoy here on earth

* but a description of what lies ahead of us in the future

This is our inheritance, reserved in heaven for us

* something that we can hope for in real confidence

And this is, as we are told in verse 5,

* “a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Salvation is the final display of God’s power through which we are vindicated

* that will be revealed in the last time

Interestingly, there are two different Greek words used for ‘time’ in the New Testament:

* ‘chronos’, which refers to the type of time that is measured in hours and days
* and ‘kairos’, which refers to an eternal quality in a particular moment

Well, the word used here for the ‘last time’ is ‘kairos’

* so it is not a reference to a particular day that can be marked on a calendar
* but a reference to the fact that, at one decisive eternal moment
* God will vindicate us and reveal our salvation

And so, looking to that beautiful moment in the future, when we will be vindicated

* as Peter says in verse 6, “In this you rejoice”

But before the rejoicing happens

* there is the reality of living in this world that must be endured first…

Verses 6 and 7: “Even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith – being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

That is the reality of our earthly life, isn’t it? That we suffer…

* and that suffering is made manifest in so many different ways;
* not just through persecution, which is the reality for so many Christians
* but through death and sickness and broken relationships
* and economic suffering and broken dreams and so much more…

And it is important that we pick up on a nuance of Peter’s words here:

* when he says, “for a little while you have had to suffer various trials”
* he is not saying that our sufferings will only last a little while;
* we know from bitter experience that often our sufferings can go on for years and years

What Peter is doing is drawing a comparison between the length of our earthly sufferings

* in comparison with the eternity of grace and peace that is our living hope for the future

Becoming a Christian is not a pathway to an easy life on earth

* but it does mean that we have an amazing future with God waiting for us
* and whatever we suffer here on earth will, one day, fade in comparison
* to the weight of the future glory…

And that, of course, has always been the way in the journey of faith

* and has been recognised since the beginning of the witness of faith
* as Peter acknowledges in verse 10:
* “Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry.”

And when he goes on to say in verse 11, “They inquired about the person and time…”

* again, the word used for ‘time’ is ‘kairos’ not ‘chronos’
* so Peter is not saying that the prophets were trying to work out the date
* of when the Messiah would come
* but that they studied and prayed hard to determine the circumstances
* that would need to be in place when the Messiah would come

But all that was revealed to the reader through those who came to evangelise the region

* in this part of Turkey all those years ago
* where these churches were established
* and now, despite whatever their sufferings and trials
* they have a real and living hope for the future

So here is the introduction that Peter wants to give to this beautiful letter of his

He wants to reassure these first Christians

* that they are chosen by God from all eternity to salvation
* and that they had a very real hope for the future
* even though the downside, if you like, is that they were living like strangers on the earth

And their experience is our experience too:

We too – each one of us – have been chosen by God

* we too are living in the world as strangers passing through it
* and that can bring about all sorts of misunderstandings and trials and sufferings

But just like those early Christians

* we live out the Christian life
* in the sure knowledge that, one day, our sufferings will end
* and that we have waiting for us in heaven
* a perfect, indestructible glory – the gift of God himself to us

Yes, we may suffer and life might be difficult for us

* and our struggles may go on for many years

But we need to put those struggles into the broader context of eternity

* and realise that our current difficulties are nothing in comparison
* to the weight of glory that awaits us
* when Christ is finally revealed on the last day

So if you are struggling this morning;

* if you are filled with doubts, if your life seems full of difficulties
* if you feel lost and are struggling to find God in the midst of a chaotic life…

Peter’s message to each one of us is simple: hold on – hold fast to the faith

* because our sufferings and struggles are temporary
* but the future glory that awaits each one of us is eternal
* and far outweighs anything we currently experience

Hold fast to the faith

* in the sure knowledge that God, in his love, is holding fast to you

And he will never let you go: not in this life, or in the next…