

A Word from God

1 Peter 1:1

I wonder what you would think of me if I said I had a word from God for you. Because I do. I have a message from God. I'm not suggesting that I believe in continuing revelation, nor that I have any ability to speak infallibly for God, but as I stressed last week, I am here to declare to you nothing less than the testimony of God. The message of God. And as we saw in 1 Corinthians 2, that proclamation does not require "superiority of speech or of wisdom" from a man. Paul's own commitment was simple, "my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

So here I am again this week, that elephant in the room, trying to avoid any dependence upon my own wisdom or eloquence, telling you I have a word from God. And the point is that as I determine to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified, I come to declare to you what God has said in his word.

And it really is that simple. God speaks to his people, through his written word. That's the whole idea of revelation. The author is God. But wait a minute, we're reading a letter written by Peter, Peter the man, not God. And that is where I want to start this morning as we begin a series of sermons on this letter of 1 Peter. Peter is the author, he says so himself in the very first word of the book.

And we know all about Peter. His impulsiveness and impetuosity. He is rash, bold, provocative, emotional. He often speaks before he thinks, quick to blurt out whatever is on his mind. He drew a sword to defend Jesus and then, not much later, he denied even knowing Jesus. He is so human, we often

say, because he is so flawed. But here he is writing a letter to the Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor, with...

I. A MESSAGE FROM GOD.

And we know that is his intention because he identifies himself as an apostle. And that means something. Specifically, it means that he was writing on behalf of someone else. So what is an apostle? He is a messenger.

Literally, the word means one who is sent, sent with a purpose. Sent with a commission. And sent with the authority of the sender. An apostle is, then, an ambassador, much like the men and women in countries around the world appointed by our President. Our ambassador to France, for example, speaks to the rulers of France as the official representative of the United States of America, the official spokesman of our President. Same with the Ambassador to every other country.

Peter is just such an ambassador, writing with,

A. The self-consciousness of an apostle.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Therefore, he writes with,

B. The authority of Jesus Christ.

He is not writing on his own authority. He is not proclaiming his own message. Everything has reference to God's own revelation, God's own word. Peter notes in his second letter, 2 Peter 1:20 "But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

Peter includes himself in that group; he is speaking from God, moved by the Holy Spirit. And when that happens, he is writing

Scripture. “No prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation.”

Similarly, the familiar passage of,

2 Tim. 3:16 “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”

Those verse speak about the origin of Scripture, which is God. And just to reinforce that point of God’s authority in Scripture, turn to,

2 Peter 3:15 “...just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.”

“The rest of Scriptures.” Along with this particular letter. So this letter is a revealed word from God, from the authorized apostle of Jesus Christ.

Just a note about the context, an interlude before we look at the identity of the recipients of this letter. The people to whom Peter wrote needed encouragement. Times were difficult. Most likely the book was written shortly before the pivotal year of AD 64, when the Roman Emperor Nero intensified his persecution of Christians after the great fire of Rome. He had done nothing to stop the fire and was blamed for the extensive destruction. With increasing anger directed at him, he used the Christians as a convenient scapegoat.

Peter writes in that context, to Jewish believers it seems, though perhaps it was a mixed Jew and Gentile audience. He writes with a great awareness of the promise of the gospel, and,

like Paul, he writes with an emphasis upon the necessary connection between that promise of the gospel and the applications of the gospel to our daily lives. When you read book like Ephesians, or Romans, you see a overall structure that is essentially in two parts, for lack of better words, doctrine and application. The first half of the book is a doctrinal foundation. The gospel. The second half, practical applications. The application of the gospel to daily life. The transition is obvious, including the English word “therefore.”

So we read,

Eph. 4:1 “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, 2 with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, 3 endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

Or,

Rom. 12:1 “I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”

Peter writes a little differently. This book does not have two distinct sections, one of doctrine and the other application. Instead, the two are intertwined, and he goes back and forth from one to the other quite often. The promise of the gospel is just as clear as it is with Paul, and so is the application. But as we study through the chapters of this book, we will go back and forth between the two, back and forth between the promise of grace and the real-life responsibilities of those who are saved by that grace. And Peter does that to give encouragement. So that is my

plan as well, with repeated emphasis upon the grace of God shown to us in Jesus Christ. And repeated emphasis upon what that grace means for us in our day to day existence, especially in the awareness of our need for encouragement as well.

So who are the recipients of the letter? The simple answer is that they are God's people, and that would include us today. Certainly. This letter has direct reference and application to us, and to all of God's people. This is,

II. A MESSAGE FOR GOD'S PEOPLE.

But how does Peter himself define his readers?

v.1-2

We will look at verse 2 next week, but let me show you Peter's emphasis. It's the word I read, "elect." The NKJV has the word at the beginning of verse 2; the NASB sticks it in right at the end of verse 1, with the words "who are chosen." Both of those translations are trying to translate using correct English grammar. But in doing so, they miss the emphasis of the original language. The Greek language just doesn't conform to the rules of English grammar, because in Greek, emphasis is established by word placement in the sentence. English usually requires a more straightforward subject-verb-predicate.

All of that is to say the emphatic word in the Greek sentence comes first, right after the first phrase: Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the elect. To those who are chosen. That is how he identifies his readers, it is how he defines God's people.

A. The elect.

That's how it is written.

Now, verse 2 gives a good description of the elect, with

reference to the work of the trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Again, we'll look at that verse next week. But this morning, I want to preserve and proclaim the emphasis of the apostle in identifying God's people as the elect.

A few cross references,

Mat. 24:24 "For false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."

Mat. 24:31 "And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Luke 18:7 "And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them."

Romans 8:33 "Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is he who condemns?"

Romans 11:7 "What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded."

Col. 3:12 "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering."

2 Tim. 2:10 "Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory."

Then,

1 Thes. 1:4 "...knowing, beloved brethren, your election by God."

2 Peter 1:10 “Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble.”

I read all of those for emphasis. This is a primary identity of ours as Christians. Sadly, usually this identification is used as the starting point for an argument or disagreement among Christians. Because of that, many Christians don't mention it. Many preachers don't speak about it. But it ought to be proclaimed, and emphasized. We are the elect, chosen by God!

Now, we can't get into all the details of that today, for that would distract us from the focus of First Peter. But we do need to grasp this concept, because it is central to the biblical definition of a Christian. Chosen by God!

Rather than answer all the questions that might arise if you struggle to understand this idea of election, let me stress this one thing to lay the proper foundation. Election is tied to love, God's love and God's election go hand in hand. They are inseparable. So before you ask any of the questions about, is it fair? And what about our choices and responsibilities?, let me simply emphasize that election is an act of God's love.

1 Thes. 1:4 “For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.”

Similarly, using the bigger and more comprehensive words “predestination,” we read,

Eph. 1:4 “...just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by

Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will.”

Paul adds there the necessary explanation of when God did his choosing, “before the foundation of the world.” He also defines God's motive. “In love he predestined us to adoption as sons...”

God chose us to be his children! God chose us to be adopted. That illustration or analogy often breaks down in our current, cultural experiences of adoption, because usually it is the adoptive parents who are chosen by a birthmother, rather than parents choosing which child to adopt. But still, adoption is a choice. A child who joins a family by adoption joins that family because of a conscious commitment, apart from biological necessity. A child born into a family is ordinarily, normally, obviously incorporated into the family. Not by choice, but by biological circumstance. Not so with adoption. A choice is made to love, a choice is made to love. And as Christians, that's who we are. Loved by God. Chosen by God. We are the elect.

2 Thes. 2:13 “But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”

I want you to see this connection. And I want you to feel it. To experience it. To understand it in your soul. Not as a mere doctrine, and certainly not as a doctrine to argue about. Election and love go hand in hand. To say we are loved by God is to say we are elect, or chosen by him. To say we are chosen is to say we are loved. And that is to be your security and your comfort. It is to be your help and your hope. If you are a Christian, it is because God chose to love you. If you are a Christian, you are

among the elect. At least, that's how the writers of the Bible would describe you.

You are something else, according to 1 Peter 1. Pilgrims, according to the NKJV. Aliens, according to the NASB.

B. Aliens.

And I can't really decide which English word I like better as a translation from the Greek. In my outline, I used aliens. But the idea Peter is expressing includes both English words.

The Greek word means rather simply, "one who lives alongside." As one commentator so wisely puts it, "The word emphasizes both alien nationality and temporary residents."

Alien means foreigner. A non-resident. With the implication of being around on a temporary basis, not permanently. So, I drove a truck up to Mount Airy this past week, and with Tony Childs' help rather late last Tuesday evening, we unloaded. I have furniture in the house I have rented, a bed and chairs. A table and desk. Bookcases, and clothes. Along with kitchen and bath furnishings. I'm pretty well set. But I'm only staying six months. We will actually maintain our home in Atlanta as well. I'm here temporarily.

Now, I'm not really an alien, since I spent 19 consecutive years of my adult life in North Carolina and Virginia. So living right on the border, actually 1/2 mile into Virginia, is something like coming home for me. But I'm not a permanent citizen of North Carolina or Virginia. I got a library card this week at the Mount Airy library. I'll get a local phone number next week. But I don't plan on changing my drivers license or my car registration. I'm working in North Carolina. I'm actually living in Virginia. But my permanent residence is still in Georgia.

There is something healthy about that! Because our identity as Christian is that we reside here as aliens. This is not our permanent home!

I'm struck by a number of you who have two homes as well, or have had in the recent past. You, too, understand what it is to be a visitor. A sojourner. A pilgrim. A temporary resident, living someplace other than your permanent home.

There are immediate practical applications of that, just look at, 1 Peter 2:11 "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul."

That's about as practical as it gets!

Think for a few moments about Abraham. Abraham understood his calling,

Gen. 12:1 "Now the LORD had said to Abram: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. 2 I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing."

Abraham is blessed, is he not, for this great and glorious understanding of his life.

Heb. 11:8 "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 "By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. 11 By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when

she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised. 12 Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude-- innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore. 13 These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. 14 For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. 15 And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.”

What difference does that make for you? That is to be your life. That is to be my life. We are all aliens and strangers. We are all pilgrims, seeking another homeland. As Christians, you are citizens of a heavenly kingdom, and that heavenly country, that city prepared by God, is your destination.

So why do we get so attached to our earthly lives here? This model of a pilgrimage ought to transform your very lives. It ought to transform how you look at the things you have, the material things. They belong to this world, don't they? They stay here, long after you have left.

What about your fears and insecurities, fears of change? Fears of death. Fears of trouble and hardship. Beloved, your security is not to be found in the security of your comfortable and stable existence. You are a pilgrim. Your life is a pilgrimage.

This will be a recurring theme for this whole book, and I have chosen to preach on 1 Peter with that very much in mind. We need this encouragement! For some people, the worst thing that

could come to them is change. The most stressful circumstance for some people is to lose the comfortable stability of the ordinary routines of their lives. To lose their sense of tradition. To violate their sentimental attractions to what is familiar and comfortable, to lose the sense of being safe and secure.

But beloved, if you are in Christ, you are on a pilgrimage. You are an alien and a stranger living in tents. The goal of your life ought not to be the attainment of peace and security in terms of the affairs of this world. The goal is not to stay in the same place and do the same thing, and that ought not to be where you find your strength nor your happiness.

But do you? Think about it? Do you? Do you fear that which is new? Do you fear that which is a change? Do you fear losing what you have attained, or suffering the loss of what is familiar, that which gives you your security?

Many years ago, when I was about to graduate from college, a good friend of mine said to me, “Your life is too planned.” Those words have stuck with me, and God would use them to shape the way I would begin to view life as an adult.

My friend wasn't praising me! She was telling me that I was superficial, that my strength was founded in my own plans and in my own pursuits. It seemed to her that I was unable to deviate from those plans, because that is were I found my stability and my security. And she was right.

I had had a happy and successful childhood, through college. I was a high achiever and excelled in many areas. My family life was stable. At age 21, I had succeeded at nearly at everything I had attempted. I had finished college, and had been offered an engineering job with a good company. I was walking faithfully

with the Lord, as I had for many years.

So what was so wrong with my life? Everything was in order. Well planned. Stable. Organized. But from the vantage point of my friend's own personal struggle, she looked at me and understood something I had yet to learn. When you find your strength in yourself, when you find your strength in your own stability and in your own security, when you find your strength in your ability to order and control the outward aspects of your life, then, actually, you are very, very weak.

I had to learn that lesson before I could respond to God's call to me to be a minister of the gospel. I had to learn that I was a pilgrim, before I could resign from that engineering job that had been the focal point of the previous ten years of my education and life. I had to learn that I was a pilgrim so that I would be able to leave behind the life I thought I had planned for myself in order to follow God. And I had to learn that I was a pilgrim so that I would be willing to come to Atlanta in response to God's calling upon my life.

People of God, you are called to be a pilgrim, and as Peter writes it, that is for your encouragement. That is to be your encouragement as you face the trials of this world, and for many of you today, this is as practical and as personal as it could possibly be.

One final definition of God's people. They are identified as the elect, as aliens, and then,

C. Scattered.

v.1

In other words, spread throughout the world! And that was

God's plan, wasn't it? For the gospel was to go to the whole world. It's called missions.

So what about you? That's always the million dollar question. How does this affect you? Do you see yourself and define yourself these ways, as the elect, aliens, and scattered around the world?

That's a tall order. Maybe you have lived here all your life. That's ok. This is a great place to live. But don't ever think that your home on this earth is actually a home. Don't ever think that this country in which you live is actually your permanent home. Don't think that the security that this world has to offer is ultimately of any value at all.

For there is a better country, that is, a heavenly one. God is preparing a city for his people, a permanent, eternal home. And until you reach that home, you are a sojourner living as an alien in a foreign land.

Today, the question is simply this, are you living as a pilgrim and a stranger, looking and waiting "for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God"?

That city is your home. This place is just a temporary residence, and the more you are able to grasp that and come to terms with it, the more you will be able to receive the encouragement Peter has to offer in this book. People of God, dear friends, never forget that you are strangers upon this earth. You are resident aliens and not permanent citizens, and that makes all the difference in the world.