

1 Peter 1:1-2

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[0 : 0 0] God's word together. Father, we thank you again for bringing us here to worship and praise you.

Thank you for your word, for the truth and life it gives us. We pray now that you might speak through it by your spirit, that we might love you more for it, and that we might go and live boldly as your people in this world because of what we hear from you tonight.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. When we get to the New Testament, times are all of a sudden changing very rapidly for God's people.

In the Old Covenant, right, in the first half, more than half of the Bible, in Old Testament times, God's people, they were all concentrated in the nation of Israel.

All of God's people were in one place. And that means that everyone was more or less on the same page. Imagine living in a country where everyone is Christians.

[1 : 2 2] No one's going to think you're weird for going to church, are they? No one was going to make fun of you for being a Jew in ancient Israel.

It was still full of sinners, and so things were often pretty messed up. We see plenty of examples of that through the Old Testament. But no one was going to think you were weird for your faith.

You weren't going to stand out from the crowd. But when we get to the New Testament, the time that Peter is writing here in this letter, in the years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, times are changing.

The gospel is all of a sudden spreading far and wide. People across the ancient world are hearing about the good news of Jesus and putting their faith and trust in him.

It is really exciting times for the kingdom of God. But new frontiers also meant new challenges. Because God's people are now scattered across the ancient world, across the Mediterranean.

[2 : 3 5] And so they all of a sudden find themselves living amongst people who are absolutely not on the same page as them. This was a world in which you'd ask your friend what they're doing at the weekends.

And they'd say something like, I'm going to the Colosseum to watch slaves be mauled by lions. Aren't you coming? Aren't you coming? Christians all of a sudden find themselves living as outsiders in cultures that operated under completely different rules and assumptions.

And so in a world where gladiator battles were the equivalent of going to the football, it was the Christians who were invariably assumed to be the ethical delinquents.

The Roman world was quite content with the way that they lived. And it was these Christians who threatened to disrupt the social order.

There were all sorts of wild misconceptions about these Christians that were popping up across the Mediterranean. Some people thought they were atheists because they didn't worship the Roman gods.

[3 : 55] They were accused of insects because they married people they called their brothers and sisters. Rumors spread of them being cannibals because they ate and drank the body and blood of Jesus whenever they gathered together.

And so they were a people who would suffer, who would be mocked and persecuted, ridiculed for their faith, because the world they were living in didn't understand them at all.

The world they were living in didn't understand them at all. I wonder if that sounds familiar to you. That is the people Peter is writing to here.

God's people who all of a sudden find themselves cast aside to the fringes of society. Living in a messed up world that looks down in horror on the Bible-based beliefs of Christians.

That is the people Peter is writing to and he writes to them to encourage them. That is what he wants to do here. to keep on living for Christ in a world that didn't make it easy at all.

[5 : 18] Encouraging them to keep on fighting the good fight. To keep on living for Jesus. To keep on loving Jesus. To keep on making him known. Even when our workplaces, our friends, our families, maybe even our own homes, just don't quite know what to make of us.

That is where Peter will go with this letter. And I think the big application point from this evening I want you to take away is to go and read this letter. Because it is full of wonderful, incredibly helpful, practical instruction showing how to live well in this world.

But he doesn't begin there. He starts in these first two verses by making sure his audience know who they are. It is the big thing Peter wants to hammer home in these first two verses.

You will have noticed in the opening line Peter very briefly introduces himself. Doesn't he? Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. Apart from his name, there is only one other thing that Peter wants you to know about him.

And that is that he is writing to you. He has been sent on the authority of Jesus. Apostle literally just means sent one.

[6 : 50] There is loads more we could say about Peter. And if you go and study the man as we learn about him, the Gospels, it would be time well spent. But for this letter here, all Peter wants you to know about him is that he is writing this in the name of and under the authority of Jesus Christ.

So Peter doesn't say very much about himself, but he says a bit more, doesn't he, about the people that he is writing to. And that's what we're going to focus on this evening. What Peter says about the identity of his audience.

Because everything that Peter writes over the next five chapters, he writes in the confidence that his audience know who they are.

You'll see there in verse one that he's writing specifically to people across what was called Asia Minor, right? It's modern day Turkey. That's where all those place names are.

And that's where this letter is going first. But he's addressing all Christians here. He is speaking to all of us. And he describes us, if you look there again in verse one, he describes us with two key adjectives.

[8 : 09] He says, to God's elect exiles. Scattered throughout the provinces. To God's elect exiles.

They're two pretty straightforward words, aren't they? But we're going to take them in turn this evening and just see the depth of meaning that Peter packs in to this very simple little phrase.

So, first of all, let us look at the word elect. It's a concept I'm sure we're all relatively familiar with. We elect people to parliament. Don't we?

We choose someone to be an MP or MSP. It's simply a process where you choose someone, where you choose something. So, Peter is saying to his readers, isn't he, that you have been chosen.

You have been chosen. What does that mean? In what sense have we been chosen? Who have we been chosen by?

[9 : 18] For what purpose? The good news is we aren't just left to offer up our best guess because verse 2 gives us the answer to all those questions.

Look at verse 2 with me. You, you are elect, you are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

through the sanctifying work of the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.

You are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in the sanctification of the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.

God. That is what it means to be chosen and let us, we are just going to break that down a little bit this evening. And the first obvious thing here isn't it, who have you been chosen by?

[10 : 26] You have been chosen by God. By the triune God, Father, Spirit and Son together have chosen you and each member of the Trinity plays their own part in this electing process.

So first of all, you are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. And again, there is so much, there is so much packed into this little phrase.

And we are going to take a bit of time here because I think it is important to get right and can be easily misunderstood because we can go and look up a word in the dictionary and that is good and helpful but don't think that immediately gives the whole picture of the way that a word is being used in the Bible because you could go and look up foreknowledge in the dictionary and it says to be aware of something or someone before their existence.

To be aware of something or someone before their existence. And you might think, great, that seems to kind of fit here, doesn't it? God knew about us before we existed.

That makes sense. But that cannot be what Peter means by the word foreknowledge. How do we know that?

[11 : 58] If you have a Bible, look down at verse 20 of 1 Peter 1. It's not quite so clear in the NIV but it says there that Jesus was chosen.

The word chosen there is exactly the same word as foreknowledge in verse 2. So the foreknowledge in verse 2 is the same as the chosen in verse 20.

So that means that Jesus was foreknown before the creation of the world. All of us on our dictionary definition doesn't fit anymore, does it?

Jesus can't have been known about before he existed. Because there was no such thing as before he existed. He is eternal, He is God, He is one with the Father.

So our understanding, our definition of foreknowledge must fit both God's choosing of us and the Father's relationship with the Son. If you go through this book of 1 Peter, and I would thoroughly recommend that you do, you'll notice that Peter uses loads of Old Testament quotes and language.

[13 : 23] Sometimes obviously, sometimes subtly. There is loads. The book is absolutely packed with Old Testament references and allusions. He is constantly using words in Old Testament ways.

And that is exactly, I think, what is going on with this word, foreknowledge. Because knowing someone in the Old Testament wasn't an awareness of the bare facts.

It was a relational term. So we read that Moses knew gods like no other prophet. not because he had a sort of secret encyclopedia on God, but because of the closeness of their relationship.

The problem with Eli's sons was that they did not know the Lord. They would have known everything that the law said about God, but they did not know him.

Adam knew his wife, and they had a baby. So knowing someone didn't just mean you knew about them. It meant you were in a personal, loving relationship with them.

[14 : 46] So when Peter says that you are elect according to the foreknowledge of the Father, he is saying God knew about you before you existed, but he is saying far more than that. he is saying that the creator of heaven and earth sovereignly determined to set the fullness of his love upon you from before the beginning of time.

God determined, he decided, he chose to set the fullness of his love upon you from before time began.

So foreknowing God is absolutely not God saying I'm going to choose Anne based on my foresight of her good behaviour.

God didn't choose you because he looked into the future and saw that you would make the right decision about the gospel or anything like that. But let me just try and give a quick illustration of the kind of thing that's going on here.

Most of us will have been to a wedding at some point in our lives. And when you go to a wedding ceremony, the bride and the groom, they make vows to one another, don't they?

[16 : 08] It's a beautiful moment. And in those vows, the two people involved commit themselves to love each other no matter what, don't they?

It is a choice. Each individual is choosing to commit themselves to love the person in front of them, regardless of circumstance. For better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness or in health, I am going to love you.

When I married Mary, I didn't say I'm going to love you because you're quite a good cook. I didn't say I will love you when I feel like loving you.

I didn't say I will love you as long as I feel like I'm happier in this marriage than I might be outside of it. No. What happened was I chose, I chose to make a vow before God and a covenant with Mary and in choosing to be part of the covenant relationship.

I said out of my own free will, I am going to love you. I am going to love you when you cook a beautiful gammon roast and I'm going to love you when you made that carrot chicken casserole thing.

[17 : 42] love you love you when I don't. I'm going to love you when we're having a good day and I'm going to love you when we're having a bad day.

I'm going to love you when you're in good health and I'm going to love you when you're sick I'm going to love you when we're rich and I'm going to love you when we're poor no matter what happens to us I am going to love you no matter what anyone else does to you I am going to love you no matter what you do I am going to love you there are no other conditions there is nothing you can do to change my mind I decided I chose that day to make Mary the object of my love for as long as I live she will forever be the recipient of my love that is just a tiny little glimpse of what it means for Peter to say that God foreknew us God is saying from before the beginning of time

I have chosen to love you and there is nothing you can do to change my mind there is nothing anyone can do to you to change or lessen his love for you nothing in this world or outside this world if you are in Christ will ever separate you from the personal grace-filled love of God that is bad news if you think God loves you because you made better choices in life than other people it is a real dent in the pride for anyone who thinks they have done anything to earn the love of God but it is wonderful news the greatest comfort the most wonderful encouragement and assurance for all of us who know we are undeserving sinners that have earned nothing but God's wrath and yet receive his infinite eternal unchanging love that is what it means to be foreknown that is what it means to be chosen by God the Father and it is a beautiful picture but it is not the only picture we have here is it let's move on to the next couple of points here we'll move more quickly not because they're any less valuable and we could easily spend as much time and more on each of them but I don't want to keep you here all night secondly we are chosen through the sanctifying work of the Spirit sanctified is the same word as holy right it is literally to be made holy that means we have been set apart for God we've been given a new status it doesn't necessarily describe some aspect of your character it is a designation of your status that you are then called to live up to right you are now holy so Peter will say later on in chapter 1 so go and live holy lives the Spirit has set us apart for God that is what it means to be holy set apart for God but we are we are a profaned people aren't we?

we are a sinful unclean people and so to enter into his presence as his people we must be cleansed to enter into the presence of a holy God we cannot come in in our sinfulness do you remember that passage that Vanna read for us from Exodus 24 earlier on in the service it sounds like a bit of a strange ceremony going on there it is a bit of a strange ceremony going on there with Moses sprinkling the people with the blood of a bull I mentioned earlier marriage is a covenant making ceremony where two parties are committing themselves to each other it is the same thing that is going on in Exodus 24 God's people have been redeemed from slavery in Egypt and are now standing at the foot of Mount Sinai committing themselves to God they are choosing to commit themselves to him and God says explicitly in Exodus

I have redeemed you to be my people but in order to be his people they need to be cleansed and the only way they can be is through the blood of a sacrifice and so Moses sprinkles doesn't he the blood of the oxen onto the people but we know that the blood of bulls and goats and lambs is only a sign of what needed to happen because for us to be truly cleansed it was the son of God who had to shed his own blood for us so that we could be God's people and so we are this is more of those Old Testament allusions we mentioned earlier sprinkled with the blood of Christ just as Israel was sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifice it is how we are cleansed so that we can dwell in the presence of our Holy God for known, sanctified and cleansed by the sprinkling of Christ's blood that is what it means to be chosen by God

[24 : 15] I don't know if you picked up through those three things it is all to make us his own it is all to make us his own Peter goes on to make this point really explicitly in chapter 2 where he says you are a chosen people a chosen people a royal priesthood a holy nation God's special possession you are now his this is all making you one people God's people that is what it means to be elect to be elect means you are now the people of God you are loved by the Father you have been set apart by the Spirit you have been cleansed by the Son once more once you were not a people but now you are God's people that is that is great news it is it is a wonderful privilege and we should be immensely thankful for it but the consequence of being God's people in this world is that we are all strangers here because we are now

God's people our home is where God is that is where we belong and so we live here as exiles as outsiders as people who don't quite fit in Peter is writing to people who do not belong in the world they are living in exiles strangers surrounded by people who live life according to completely different customs and rules so the big the big question this this great book answers is how do we live well how do we do it as people who do not belong how do I interact with my friends who enjoy things the bible teaches me to stay away from how should I act in the workplace where people gladly gossip and step on top of one another to climb the ladder how do I live well for Jesus in the home when my husband isn't a Christian and doesn't have any interest in my faith how do I submit to a government that promotes laws that seem to go completely against what I believe if you want those questions answered go and read on read the rest of one Peter when you get home this evening read it through this week wrestle with it listen to it ask about it listen to sermons on it because it is so incredibly helpful as we seek to understand how to live as Christians in a world that we don't feel at home in that Peter first of all before he gives us that guidance wants us to make sure we know who we are remember you are chosen by God to be his you are set apart from the world because this is not your home it would be easier in the present wouldn't it if we could just fit in keep our heads down assimilate to the culture around us but you are

God's chosen people and so that is not a choice for us we are not to make ourselves comfortable and at home here because heaven is your home Jesus has gone to his father's house to prepare your room for you and we are all one day going to dwell there forever home is where our father is home is where our elder brother is home is where our brothers and sisters are and so we should not want to remain here forever because this is a strange land that is how we must see ourselves that is what Peter wants to make sure we know before we go diving into the rest of this letter he wants to make absolutely certain that we know our identity that we are chosen by God and we do not belong here there's a great verse in an old hymn says here in the body pent absent from home I roam yet nightly pitch my moving tent a day's march near home nightly pitch my moving tent a day's march near home and I love that picture

I love camping but it's not the most comfortable experience is it that's the Christian life love it but look forward to something so much better every day every day your tent is a day's march nearer home and you will arrive you will get there one day but this letter is written to pilgrims on their way to us all as we march day by day let me just close this evening by asking you whether or not you are living as strangers in this world it's very easy isn't it to get comfortable here to make the aim of our lives to be as comfortable as possible in the present you'll take none of it with you to make sure we are living for things that are of eternal value remember brothers and sisters this world is not your home so don't bother settling down don't cling to the vain things of this world that offer no lasting satisfaction enjoy good things absolutely that don't live with your hope set on set your mind set your hope on things above remember you are an exile a pilgrim a wanderer on their way remember who you are because only then will you hear the call to live as a child of

God you are chosen loved beyond measure from before the beginning of time cleansed by the blood of Christ living a stranger this world and so go I would encourage you and read through Peter's guidebook to help you find the right path in life because the journey is great it is wonderful but it is not easy that is why Peter has written this letter to us to help and encourage us all and to help and encourage us encourage one another as we pitch our tent each night every one of us a day's march near our home let me pray father we thank you and praise you for your love for us that you set your heart on us from before the beginning of time that you have chosen to love us that your love for us is not dependent on anything we do on who we are and what we have or have not done but is dependent on your sovereign choice to set your love on us to redeem us through the blood of your son to cleanse us by him to set us apart for yourself through your spirit we thank you for the life and the hope that gives us we pray as we continue as pilgrims on the way wandering each day at days march nearer home that you would strengthen and encourage us that you would give us the perseverance to live for you in a world that so often doesn't understand us to go boldly with the hope of the gospel to people who don't know what to make of us we ask this for your name sake for the glory of your son in whose most precious name we pray amen we're going to sing our final psalm together now psalm hardest ■■ not as name