

Last year, was a horrendous year for bush fires in Australia – not out here, because we’d been in drought so long, there wasn’t anything much in the way of vegetation to carry a fire...

But whenever a disaster happens, the human nature is such that (rather than just accepting it), we want to know the cause, and most particularly, we want to know “Who’s responsible?” – “Who can we blame for this???” ...

And so, at great expense to our nation, not only are we having an enquiry – we’re having a Royal Commission (no less), to determine the reasons for the severity of the fires, and whether anyone’s to blame... And we will spend tens of millions of dollars, to get to the bottom of it, because we can’t accept that our “Sunburnt Country” ... as Dorothea Mackellar said: is the land that:

*For flood and fire and famine,
She pays us back threefold...,*

We want someone to blame...

19th July 64AD, fire swept through the city of Rome. It burned for more than a week, and about 2/3 of the city was destroyed... We don’t know how the fire began, but the popular theory was that the Roman Emperor Nero, was the one who was responsible... You see, Nero had great ambitions to rebuild Rome to his own design.ⁱ

And you’ve probably all heard the saying that Nero played the fiddle while Rome burned... - well, that couldn’t of happened, because the earliest record of a bow-played instrument wasn’t until 800 years laterⁱⁱ...

But there were witness reports that while Rome burned, Nero dressed up in thespian garb (clothes for a theatre actor), and that he quoted from various poems, and that he did strum his lute....

Anyway, regardless of this, the popular theory, was that Nero had ordered his lackies, to light the fire, and then had attempts to fight the fire, hindered... And these rumours persisted...

What was Nero to do? Well, what all politicians do – deflect the blame (of course), and so he thought, “Who are the most hated people in Rome? I know: the Christians”.

And Christians **were** hated.

1. Firstly, they were hated because the Jews were hated, and Christianity was seen as a Jewish sect..
2. They were hated because they wouldn't worship the Roman Gods;
3. They were hated because they were portrayed as being cannibals, because they used to have ceremonies/feasts, where they would eat the body and blood of someone named Jesus...

And so the Christians of Rome, were the perfect patsies to take the blame...

And I'm not making this up. A Roman Historian of the time, Tacitus, recorded this

But all human efforts, all the lavish gifts of the emperor, and the [appeasements] of the gods, did not banish the

sinister belief that the [inferno] was the result of an order. Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus...ⁱⁱⁱ

And he went on to describe the hideous torture of Christians, that was inflicted by Nero.

- He fastened the skins of wild animals onto Christians, and then released his hunting dogs onto them;
- Many were crucified
- And he used Christians as garden lights... When the sun went down, he would have Christians coated in tar or pitch, and he'd set them on fire, and they would burn through the hours of darkness, to light his garden...

And this same historian "Tacitus" records that his sadistic treatment of the Christians, was so great, even hardened criminals began to feel compassion for those who were being so-treated...

And so understandably, many Christians fled the city of Rome... But their torment wasn't only limited to Rome – Christians were persecuted throughout the Roman empire.

And so when the Apostle Peter wrote this letter (which we know as 1st Peter), he was writing to Christians and churches, who had suffered greatly... And when we know this, wow!, doesn't it make this letter come alive...

When Peter wrote this letter, he was actually **in** Rome. And according to church history, Peter was executed in Rome. Jerome records that he was crucified upside-down (at his own request), because he didn't believe that he was worthy to die in the same manner as Jesus^{iv}...

Righto, so this is the **Apostle** Peter – His parents named him “Simon”, but Jesus changed his name to Peter (The Rock)...

But who did he write the letter to? Well, the location of the recipients is in **Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia**, which basically covers a large part of modern day Turkey... But, what's the actual address??? Well, it's a very strange address indeed:

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,
² 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:

What a strange address...

Now, when it comes to Bible teaching, I've got a habit of biting off more than I can chew. And when Laura asked me what the message would be on this week, I told her we'd take the first 12 verses.... But do you know how far we're going to get??? V2...

Wow!!! Peter sure does know how to address a letter. – and the theology, that we need to try and comprehend, that's just in these 2 verses....

We're dealing with:

- The elect
- Exiles
- The dispersion
- The foreknowledge of God
- We've got the Trinity (Father; Son; Holy Spirit)
- Sanctification;
- Obedience; and
- The sprinkled blood of Jesus...

So, let's begin with at the beginning...

those who are elect.

In the New Testament, “the elect”, are those who are chosen to receive the grace of God.

Which is a good thing, and yet, within the Christian church, there are some, who have a great deal of difficulty with the doctrine of predestination. And I reckon, that most of this difficulty comes because of 3 reasons:

1. The difficulty of accepting the sovereignty of God – He has supreme authority – what He says, goes...
2. The inability to acknowledge the total depravity and broken sinfulness of every human, and therefore our need of a saviour
3. I reckon for some people, their difficulty with the doctrine of “Election”, is a reaction against some of the more extreme views, which take the doctrine of predestination way beyond what the Bible teaches, and they use their own logic to say “Therefore, this must be so...”, when the Bible doesn’t teach that at all...

But predestination – the Biblical teaching that God chooses to save us, is wonderful...

The Lord our God, is Lord/Ruler/Master – He is sovereign...

Now, we live in “Democracy”, and so the concept of having a ‘sovereign head’, is foreign to us... Even a constitutional monarchy like England, don’t have a truly sovereign head of state. Queen Elizabeth II, is bound by the constitution and bound by law, and her ruling capacity, isn’t much more than a rubber stamp of parliament...

Sovereignty, is to have supreme power – supreme authority – Such that what the sovereign head decides, goes – there is no higher power to appeal to...

And our God is sovereign... He is the supreme power/authority... But He’s not a despot... Our God, uses

His unrivalled/unparalleled authority, to choose to show grace and mercy...

In V3, Peter says:

³ 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

That's the doctrine of election – right there!!! It's not so terrible, is it???? It's wonderful...

Doesn't it stir your heart, to know, that before the creation of the world, God knew that He was going to create humans, because He is a God of relationship, and He wanted a family to love....

But God **also** knew that from the very first generation, humans would sin (breaking that relationship), and that we would continue to sin, right through until now... God knew this, and yet He created us anyway... (That's foreknowledge)

And God decided/determined, that He would send His only Son to die on the cross, so that He could show His great mercy to us, so that He could **cause** us, to be born again to a living hope. And do you know when did He decide all this? He had all that sorted out, before He laid the foundations of the Earth...

And God had every right to make that decision, because The Lord our God, is Sovereign...

But not **all** people are saved. Not all people experience the mercy of God... Is that because **they** didn't choose God, or is it because God didn't choose them? Well, it's both...

I've told you this story before, but I'll tell it again, because it's a good one...

*One time, when our family went to choose a puppy, we went out to a farm, to inspect a litter of puppies, but we only chose one. Do you know how we chose it??? It left the litter, and came to us... It sort of chose us, but **we** chose it... We could've kicked it aside, and said "You're no good – we want that one" ... The puppy had no power to choose. We were the ones who had the authority to determine, which pup was coming home with the Brumpton's...*

That pup, we named "Jessie". She's long-gone now...

But Jessie never questioned my authority to choose. She never said "You're wicked and evil, because you only chose one puppy and left the rest behind... She never wondered, "What if those other pups didn't find a good home." She never questioned my authority - How could she, a mere dog, question my decision...

And who are **we**, to question God??? Jesus died, so that we could all have the opportunity to be saved... But in His mercy, it's more than opportunity – He rounds us up, and He calls to us, and He elects us, "Come to me, to be saved". And then we choose whether we obey or not...

And so, we might think that **we've** chosen God, but He chose us first...

The Exiles

Just as God chose us (elected us) to be saved, He also chose that we would suffer... You see, Jesus never promised us a bed of roses, but He did promise us a cross of nails...

Didn't Jesus say:

Luke 9: (ESV) ²³ ... "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.

And didn't Jesus say:

Matthew 10: (ESV) ²² ... you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ²³ When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next...

These Christians Peter was writing to, were exiles. Many had had to flee from their homes, as the fury of Nero and the persecutions that followed were aimed squarely at them... But they were exiles in another sense too.

There's two words together here – they're **exiles** of the dispersion. (diaspora)

What's the diaspora/dispersion?

Throughout history, (and it's true today), the people of Israel, have largely been absent from their Promised Land, and much of this has been because of the hatred of the nations, towards the Jews, and towards Israel... We can see it in the news today, where the nations surrounding Israel, have a hatred for Israel, and many of them are very open, that their stated aim, is to annihilate the nation of Israel...

And I don't know about you, but I perceive a fair bit of media bias against Israel, in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, where Israel are always painted as the baddies, and it seems they have to constantly bear bombings ; rocket attacks; ,, and whenever they retaliate to maintain their security, the media comes down on them.

And today, anti-Semitism (racism against Jews), is rife in our world... It has always been so – it wasn't only during the Nazi holocaust... Since the time of Jesus, the Jews have been dispersed across the world, and they've generally been despised, wherever they've gone...

And at the time that Peter wrote this, it's estimated that about 1M Jews were living in Palestine, and 2-4M^v had dispersed to other lands outside of Palestine... Some had dispersed for economic reasons (looking for new opportunities to work and trade); And others had dispersed as refugees, fleeing atrocities that were being committed against them.

And the dispersed people of Israel, were known as the diaspora...

And the Jewish diaspora, provided the perfect vehicle for the spread of Christianity, through all the lands, where the Jews

had dispersed... We can see this in the book of Acts.

Wherever the Jews dispersed, wherever they went, they gathered as a Synagogue... And the Jews themselves, were great evangelists – wherever they went, they tried to get the Gentiles to become Jews (God-fearing Gentiles)...

And when Paul preached the Good News of Jesus Christ, where would he go first? He'd go to the Synagogue, and there he'd preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, to the Jews, and to the God-Fearing Gentiles...

And so, in a sense, many of these new Christians, had been part of the diaspora, because of their Jewish heritage... But now, because of the persecution of Christians in Rome and throughout the Roman Empire), the Christians themselves (just like the people of Israel), had to disperse...

And Peter calls them

- ESV: “Exiles”.
- NIV: “Strangers”
- Better translation, is a word that we don't use much anymore: “Sojourners”

because, the Greek word here “**παρεπιδήμους** (parepidēmous) - isn't about being in a forced exile – it's a resident foreigner – *someone who lives for a short while in a foreign place as a stranger or alien*^{vi}

And in this regard, he's not talking about their physical address/citizenship status... He's talking in a spiritual sense...

As disciples of Jesus, we are sojourners in the world... This is our current place of residence, but it's not our home... My address is ST GEORGE (a little town in Southern QLD),,, but it's not my home...

Just like Abraham (Old Testament) was on a pilgrimage – sojourner on his way to the promised land, **we** are on a pilgrimage. We are sojourners, through this life, to **our** promised land – to be with Christ in Glory...

We're going to hear more about that in a couple of weeks time, when we get to V4, when we will hear about what Peter calls: ⁴ ... **an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,**

In this life, we're just sojourners/strangers/exiles – we're passing through, on our way to the promised end...

I'd better move on.

The foreknowledge of God:

What does God fore-know??? What does God know is going to happen before it happens??? Well, everything of course – there are no surprises for God...

And in this letter, we're going to hear Peter **encouraging** these churches who have been scattered, and encouraging Christians who have been suffering the most horrendous of persecutions....

Can you imagine, the feelings that many of them would have – look what's happening to us God... Do you not know? Do You not care???

Of course God knows... And when you encounter the most terrible circumstances of your life, of course God knows about it. He even knew it would happen before it did. Our Heavenly Father,,,, knows....

And what a comfort that is – to know that our heavenly Father knows....

God not only knew that we would be saved – He knew that because we were saved, the world would hate us... And so let's not be surprised that the world hates us, because of the faith that we have in Jesus...

Alright, so, it's **According** to the foreknowledge of God the Father,,,, **In the sanctification** of the Holy Spirit...

Sanctification – there's a big theological word... Now, when we use that word “sanctification”, I usually explain it as God changing us/perfecting us/ making us more like Jesus, and it's something that happens right throughout our life... But here, Peter's using it in a different way... He's using it more in the way that things would be sanctified in the temple to make them holy...

You see, the Temple was a holy place. And if something was going to be brought in to the presence of God, it had to be sanctified – it had to be made holy... It had to be cleaned of everything that is not holy...

And it's the same for us... Before we were sanctified by the blood of Jesus, we were sinners – we were unholy. And for us to come into the presence of God, we have to become holy – we have to be sanctified...

And just like things were sanctified for the temple by the blood of bulls and whatnot, the only way for us to be sanctified, is to be washed clean by the blood of Jesus... And that's why Peter mentioned the Sprinkling of Jesus' blood.

Jesus is the sacrifice. It's only through Jesus, that we are sanctified, and made holy, to enter into the presence of God...

But this isn't a physical cleanliness – it's a spiritual cleanliness...

When I was a student at Ag College, for a couple of weeks of the year, we had to work in the piggery... And I found in those 2 weeks, no matter how much I scrubbed my hands, I could not get the smell of the piggery out of them... In the dining room, there was a special table, right over to the side, for those students who were on 'pigs', because they stank, and nobody wanted to be with them...

And so, if it depended on physical cleanliness, nobody who worked in a piggery, could become a Christian, because no matter how much you scrub, you can't get the smell off ya... And even if you think you smell alright, how about you ask somebody else...

It's not a physical cleanliness – we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit...

And here, in the address of this letter (of all things), we find the trinity (the Father; the son; and the Holy Spirit)...

- According to the foreknowledge of the Father;
- In the sanctification of the Spirit; and
- For **obedience** to Jesus Christ ...

And in this letter, we are going to learn, “What we are saved for” – Obedience to Jesus Christ...

You know, some people treat salvation as if God has saved them from their sins, but then it doesn't have any ramifications for their attitude; for the way they relate to others; expression of everyday life...

God has chosen us; God has sanctified us; for obedience to Jesus Christ...

And as we read this letter, we're going to discover what obedience to Jesus Christ means...

- Obedience to Jesus Christ, begins, by holding firm to our faith (no matter what the cost)
- It affects how we relate to God;
- it affects how we relate to other Christians; and
- it affects how we relate to others within the world

We haven't been saved:

- to go on sinning...
- to only follow Jesus until the going gets too tough...

We have been saved for obedience to Jesus Christ.

And so Peter's opening greeting, is:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

And my prayer, is that as we study this letter, the grace and peace of God, would be multiplied to us...

You know, a couple of weeks ago in Philippians 4 **Paul** told us to think about things that are:

- true;
- honourable;
- pure;
- lovely;
- commendable;
- excellent;
- worthy of praise; and
- to practice Godliness,

⁹, and the *God of peace* will be with you.

And I believe that as we study this letter of 1Peter, that's what we'll be doing... We're going to be reminded of the beauty of the grace and mercy of God that we've received.... And as we dwell on these things, Grace and Peace, will be multiplied.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,

What an amazing 2 verses we read today – all in the address of a letter written to a scattered and dispersed people almost 2000 years ago...

And yet what a wonderful encouragement it is for us today.

Lord, we just want to burst into thanksgiving and praise...

That You would elect us/choose us to be your children...

That You would sanctify us by the blood of Jesus –
That You would wash away all of our sin, so that we become holy and fit to be in your presence...

Lord, thank You...

And Father, when persecutions arise –
when the world hate us because of our allegiance to Jesus,

give us courage...

Knowing that before time began,

You knew,

not only that You would choose to save us,

but You knew, that the world would hate us because of it...

You know...

- When the world would ridicule us because of our convictions, and our obedience to live counter to the culture of the world,,,
You know.
- When the world singles Christians out to accuse us of "intolerance" and "hatred"; and
- when governments legislate to make obedience to You 'unlawful'

Lord, You know...

And Lord, we pray, that as we study this letter of 1 Peter, over these next few months, that we would become increasing aware of Your Grace, and Your Peace,

And that these would be multiplied to us.

In Christ Jesus our Lord,

Amen

ⁱ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Fire_of_Rome

ⁱⁱ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiddle>

ⁱⁱⁱ Tacitus Annals XV <http://classics.mit.edu/Tacitus/annals.11.xv.html>

^{iv} Foxe John, Fox's Book of Martyrs. Barbour Publishing: Uhrichsville 1989

^v Davids, Peter H. 1990. The New International Commentary on the New Testament – The First Epistle of Peter. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids. P.46

^{vi} Bietenhard, H., 1986. παρεπίδημος L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther, & H. Bietenhard, eds. *New international dictionary of New Testament theology*.