



Peter and the Aliens

1 Peter 1:1-2

1. The Author
2. The Recipients
3. The Greeting

I have heard it said on several occasions by several people in several different ways that those who are suffering are often helped mostly by those who have experienced suffering themselves. In other words, when in the midst of suffering people tend to find their most comfort when another person comes along side of them who has experienced the same sort of suffering that they are now experiencing. Nothing helps a young widow more than another widow who can share the pain of losing a husband and how she got through her loss. It is the couple that has lost a child that is often best equipped to minister to others whose child dies. When a man loses a job and can't find work it's the man who spent nine months looking for work who is uniquely prepared to help him deal with the feelings of hopelessness and despair that come with such an event. Those who are facing financial bondage are often helped greatly by those who were in similar situations but patiently disciplined themselves to work their way out of debt. Those who have been converted in jail are often the best ones to travel back into the jail with the gospel because those in prison will be more likely to hear their story.

The world understands this concept. There are all sorts of support groups out there for those who have experienced suffering of one sort or another. Alcoholics Anonymous is a group established to help those dealing with their own abuse of alcohol. I did a little search online for support groups and found that they exist for those dealing with hundreds of sorts of difficulties: Bereavement, Cancer, Depression, Diabetes, Divorce, Eating disorders, Infertility, parenting, autism, chronic pain, paralysis, burns, osteoporosis, adoption, college stress, obesity, stuttering, and my favorite, short stature (being a bit on the shorter side myself). [\[1\]](#) These support groups are simply the world recognizing this principle that help and support often comes through those who have suffered similar things. Whenever you can say, "Been there. Done that," it can be a great help to others.

This is a biblical concept as well. At the beginning of 2 Corinthians, Paul writes of how his suffering has equipped him to help others in their suffering.

2 Corinthians 1:3-7

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.

Last week we began our exposition of the book of 1 Peter with an overview of the entire epistle. In that overview I sought to highlight for you some of the major themes in 1 Peter. The theme of 1 Peter can be stated this way, "Suffer Now, Glory Later." As we come again to the book of 1 Peter we have a man who is well qualified to teach us about suffering. Peter was a man who had experienced much suffering in his life. Therefore he was well qualified to teach us all about suffering.

Peter knew what it was like to suffer because of his lack of support of the Lord. On the night in which Jesus was betrayed Jesus predicted that all of his disciples would fall away from Him that night (Matt. 26:31). Jesus quoted from Zechariah 13:7, "I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered." Yet Peter boldly promised, "Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away" (Matt. 26:33). To this, Jesus replied, "Truly, I say to you that this very night, before a rooster crows, you will deny Me three times" (Matt. 27:34). Again Peter made the bold promise, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." And we know the story. Before the cock crowed, Peter had denied Jesus three times. It distressed him so greatly that Peter went out and "wept bitterly" at having failed his Lord so greatly (Matt. 26:75).

Peter knew what it was to anticipate the suffering of a cruel death. Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go." (John 21:18). Those words may seem a bit cryptic but John clarified exactly what Jesus meant in the next verse. John 21:19, "Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, 'Follow Me!'"

Can you imagine the mental torment that such words would have caused? When Jesus predicted the future it came to pass exactly like He said it would. And here is Jesus telling Peter that his hands would be stretched out and someone would bring you to a place that you don't want to go. Church tradition has it that Peter too was crucified. However Peter was crucified upside down because he didn't consider himself to be worthy to die like Jesus died. Peter knew how to anticipate the suffering that would come upon him.

Peter knew what it was to suffer persecution for the name of Christ. On several occasions in the book of Acts Peter is seen preaching the gospel when the civil authorities came in and arrested him and threw him in jail. After the first night he spent in jail he was forced to stand trial before the rulers and elders and scribes and high priest to explain what he was doing. He explained to them of how he was preaching Jesus, "the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the chief cornerstone" (Acts 4:11). Upon conferring, the Council "commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:17) and then released them. Some time later Peter again was with the people healing them and preaching to them about Jesus. When the high priest heard about it Peter (along with the other apostles) were thrown in jail (Acts 5:18). That night, an angel of the Lord opened the gates and freed them to continue their preaching ministry (Acts 5:19). When Peter and the other apostles stood before the Council and explained that "we must obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29), the Council "was cut to the quick and intended to kill them." (Acts 5:33). It was only the advice of Gamaliel that prevented their death (Acts 5:34-39). Instead, they simply were flogged and ordered not to speak any more in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:40). Peter suffered a whipping!

Soon thereafter Stephen was martyred and "a great persecution began against the church in Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1). The believers were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1). However the apostles (including Peter) remained in Jerusalem under constant threat of being killed as well. Peter knew what it was like to be in danger of the government. Some time later, "Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also" (Acts 12:1-3). This was with the intent to put him to death as well. Peter came within a few hours of his execution. It took another miraculous deliverance "on the very night when Herod was about to bring him forward [to kill him]" (Acts 12:6).

You can only imagine what kind of torment this must have been for Peter. Jesus had promised him that he would die at the hands of others. Each imprisonment must have filled his heart with thoughts that wondered whether or not this was the time that he would be taken away to die. Then you can multiply the mental torment when you remember that he was a married man. (Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law of fever (Mark 1). To have a mother-in-law, you need to be married. Also, Paul mentions about the right that he had of taking a believing wife like Peter did (1 Cor. 9:5). As he was in prison he was certainly concerned about the well-being of his family on the other side of the prison walls.

When John Bunyan was in prison his testimony was that concern for his family's well-being was his greatest suffering. Listen to what he wrote while in prison:

The parting with my Wife and poor children hath often been to me in this place as the pulling of the Flesh from my bones; and that not only because I am somewhat too fond of these great Mercies, but also because I should have often brought to my mind the many hardships, miseries and wants that my poor Family was like to meet with should I be taken from them, especially my poor blind child, who lay nearer my heart than all I had besides; O the thoughts of the hardship I thought my Blind one might go under, would break my heart to pieces. [\[2\]](#)

It may well be that Peter experienced some of the same things as he was in prison, being worried about his wife (and any family that he may have had). All this to say that Peter is well-qualified to teach us about suffering, having suffered greatly himself.

Having seen the forest last week with our overview this week we will begin to look at the trees. Our exposition will take us through the first two verses.

1 Peter 1:1-2

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.

In our day and age we usually begin our letters by addressing the intended recipients of the letter. We then follow with the contents of the letter. We usually end our letters with a signature followed by any sort of title that we might have. "Dear Fred, It was nice to see you a few weeks ago. I appreciate your kindness you showed to me. You are a true friend. Sincerely, Steve." Peter didn't follow this pattern. In this greeting Peter first identified himself. In doing so Peter was simply following the conventions of his day. If you are at all familiar with the New Testament you now that this is how Paul wrote many of his letters. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus ... to the saints who are at Ephesus" (Eph. 1:1). "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus ... to the church of God which is at Corinth" (2 Cor. 1:1).

Should you spend a few moments looking once again at 1 Peter 1:1-2, you can pick out the three different sections of this greeting. You can pick out the author, the recipients, and the greeting. For the sake of ease I will use this breakdown for my outline: (1) The Author; (2) The Recipients; (3) The Greeting. Let's look first at ...

1. The Author

The author identifies himself as "Peter" (verse 1). This wasn't the name given to him by his parents. Rather it was the name given to Peter by Jesus Himself. When Peter was born his parents named him, "Simon," a good Biblical name. He was named after one of the sons of Jacob who was the head of one of the twelve tribes of Israel. When you read the gospel accounts Peter always comes on the scene as "Simon." When Jesus first saw him and called him, his name was "Simon" (Mark 1). Early in his ministry his name was "Simon." However there was an event in his life in which Jesus changed his name. It took place in the district of Caesarea Philippi which is a bit north of the sea of Galilee. Jesus had taken all twelve of His disciples to that place. And he was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matt. 16:13). His disciples replied, "Some say Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets" (Matt. 16:14). At this point Jesus was a bit more personal. He said, "But who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15). And it was Simon who said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matt. 16:16). At that response, Jesus was most delighted. He said, "Blessed are you, Simon, son of Jonah, because flesh and blood

did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it" (Matt. 16:17-18). The name, "Peter" comes from the word, "Petra," which means "rock."

Jesus is here identifying Peter as a rock upon which the church will be built. In today's language Jesus started calling Simon, "Rocky." And many times I'm sure as he reflected upon his new name, "Rocky," this incident in his life came to mind. "You are 'Rocky' and upon this 'Rock,' I will build My church." Now there is a great divide on the interpretation of this passage. On the one hand Roman Catholics like to lift Peter high claiming him to be the first pope upon which the entire church was built! On the other hand Protestants like to lift Peter's confession high claiming that it is the identification of Jesus as the Christ upon which the entire church was built! I believe that these are extremes in interpretation. I'm all against anointing Peter as the first pope. However I'm not willing to jettison the role of Peter in establishing the church of Jesus Christ because Peter played a prominent role in establishing the church.

When you look at the way in which the church actually grew you discover that Peter played a prominent role in the establishment of the church. After the Holy Spirit fell upon the church at Pentecost Peter was the one to preach Jesus to the Jewish congregation, in which 3,000 souls believed and were baptized (Acts 2:41). When the Holy Spirit fell upon those in Samaria the church sent Peter to pray with them (Acts 8:14-15). Also God called Peter to go to Caesarea to preach to Cornelius and his friends and relatives about Jesus. It was contrary to all of his natural inclinations to preach to these gentiles. Yet when the church in Jerusalem heard how "the Holy Spirit fell upon [these gentiles] as He did upon [the Jews in Jerusalem] at the beginning" (Acts 11:15), the early church "glorified God, saying, 'Well then, God has granted to the Gentiles also the repentance that leads to life.'" Peter was the means in which the gospel initially spread to Jerusalem, to all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest parts of the earth (Acts 1:8), which is the story of the early church. Indeed Peter had "the keys of the kingdom of heaven." Indeed Peter was a "rock" upon which the church was built.

We must remember that the church wasn't built simply upon Peter. Rather it was built upon the gospel of Christ the message of a crucified Messiah! Apart from Christ we have no foundation. We have no cornerstone. We have no church. When Paul sought to build the church, he didn't call Peter along to help him do it! No, he went to the only foundation that could be laid. "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). Paul preached "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:22). He preached "Jesus is the Christ!—the Son of the Living God" (i.e. Matt. 16:16 -- The contents of Peter's confession). As the apostles preached Jesus they founded the church. Ephesians 2:20 says that the church has been "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone." The picture is that of a foundation. The New Testament apostles and prophets were the founding fathers of the church. They are the foundation. And yet, Jesus Christ, Himself, is the cornerstone; the most important stone of the entire house! From the cornerstone the entire house is built with integrity!

Peter, "the Rock," was most prominent among the apostles. Whenever we read a list containing the disciples Peter is the first in the list. Matthew 10:2, "Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, [and so on]." Mark 2:16, "And [Jesus] appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), and James, the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James ... [and so on]." Luke 9:28, "Some eight days after these saying, [Jesus] took along Peter and John and James, and went upon the mountain to pray." John 21:2, "There were together Simon Peter, and Thomas called Didymus, and Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, and the [sons] of Zebedee, and two others of His disciples." Matt. 26:37, "[In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus] took with Him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee." Mark 13:3, "As [Jesus] was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew were questioning Him privately" I don't care what list you take of the early apostles, Peter is always first. That's too much simply to dismiss as a coincidence. There's something to it.

I believe that Peter is listed first because he was the prominent one among the apostles. In the opening words of 1 Peter, Peter calls our attention to his role as an apostle. Verse 1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." I love the humility exhibited by Peter with these words. He doesn't call himself "chief-apostle." He doesn't call himself "head of the apostles." (Which he could have done). Rather he simply identifies himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ." In chapter 5, Peter demonstrates the same humility. When addressing the elders of the churches he simply writes, "Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder" (5:1). He doesn't pull rank on these elders. He doesn't say, "Hey guys! Do you realize who I am? I'm 'Rocky'! I'm the guy that Jesus singled out to be the rock upon which He would build His church. You guys need to listen to me!" No, he simply says, "I'm your fellow elder." It appears to be the same type of attitude here at the beginning of his letter. He's not holding his office with any sort of manipulative leverage over these people. This same humility continues in 2 Peter, where he introduces himself as "Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ." This is Peter's perspective on his own life. He has been called by Jesus to serve the church as a bond-servant.

Back in our text, the simplicity of identifying himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ" brings to the remembrance of his readers of the calling of the Lord upon his life. This is all the description that Peter would have needed in the early days of the church. Edmund Clowney was surely right when he wrote, "Peter's calling as an apostle would be well known wherever the gospel had been preached." [3] Peter didn't really need to describe how the Lord Jesus called him to be His ambassador. If anyone in the early church hadn't heard about Peter, it was because they were a new convert and simply hadn't been taught about the history of the church. Peter's name was about as famous as Billy Graham's name is today. Have any of you heard of Billy Graham? So also had those in the early church heard of Peter. As such, he is well qualified to teach us over the next few months, as we go through 1 Peter together. He was called by Jesus. He walked with Jesus. He was taught by Jesus. He was sent out by Jesus. These are a few words about (1) The Author. Let's turn our attention now to ...

2. The Recipients

Verse 1 continues with a description of where these people lived. "To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." Some of these names are familiar to you, like Galatia and Asia. Others may be new to you, like Pontus, Cappadocia, and Bithynia. To the readers these all would have been familiar places. They were all Roman provinces in Asia minor which is our modern day Turkey. These regions would have been as familiar to them as our counties are to us. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout the counties of Winnebago, Boone, Ogle, DeKalb, and McHenry."

The good news this morning for us is that the exact location of these places isn't so important. What is important is how Peter describes the

people in these locations. Peter describes them as “scattered aliens.” Don’t pass on from that too quickly. Should you think about these words for a moment you can discern quite a bit about what things were like for those who were receiving this letter.

A “scattered alien” has a difficult life. Let me help to put things into perspective. During our recent family vacation we spent a few days in San Francisco. Yvonne’s mother grew up in San Francisco and so she became our tour guide for several days. We saw many important sites. We went to Union Square, Nob hill, and Coit tower. He had lunch in China town and drove down the crooked portion of Lombard Street. We visited a fortune cookie factory and the Cable Car museum. We crossed the Golden Gate Bridge and dipped out toes in the ocean at China Beach. We had a picnic dinner in Golden Gate Park and watched the sunset over the ocean. The next day we took a tour of Alcatraz followed by a walk through Fisherman’s wharf to Ghirardelli Square. We had a great time.

When were in China town for lunch I remember my daughter asking me some questions about “China town.” She said, “Dad, is this an actual town? Is it a suburb of San Francisco?” I explained to her how it’s not any official part of San Francisco. Rather China Town has arisen because of Chinese immigrants to the United States initially gathered together in one location. Then as others Chinese people came here from China they found that the easiest place to live is where other Chinese people are. You can speak Chinese with your neighbors as you seek to learn English. They can help show you what you need to do to live life in America. Eventually more and more people came over from China landing in this same part of town which has made it easier and easier for Chinese-speaking people to live in San Francisco. Chinese shops opened for business with Chinese signs and Chinese language spoken. With these shops you can purchase food that isn’t sold in your typical American Wal-Mart. You can purchase Chinese clothes that aren’t found at Kohls. You can purchase Chinese household goods that aren’t found at Bed, Bath, and Beyond.

The existence of China town is a testimony of how difficult it is to live as an alien in a foreign country. Those from China all gather together to help them survive in America especially in the early days when the entire culture around you (including your language) is foreign. It’s comforting and helpful to have a taste of home. It’s difficult to live in a strange land. It’s not impossible but it’s difficult. Down through time many missionaries have faced similar difficulties. They travel from one land to another, seeking to live in the culture around them bringing the good news of Christ to them. Many missionaries enter the country with a support group. They arrive at some missions station to acclimate to the culture before going at it alone.

The recipients of this letter are dealing with these very things as they are living as aliens in a strange land. To make matters worse they are “scattered aliens,” which means that many of these believers may be lacking a support group as they are scattered. Conservative scholars date this book somewhere around 64 or 65 A.D., some 30 years after the resurrection of Christ. Though the church exploded in those early days things were still far from settled in many communities. It may just be that some who would receive this letter from Peter were the only believer in their village. It may just be that the majority of them knew only a handful of other believers with whom they sought to gather faithfully for fellowship and encouragement.

Now to be sure there would have been some of these people in established churches. Paul’s letter to the “Galatians” was addressed to “the churches of Galatia.” So there were churches in Galatia. Furthermore in chapter 5, verse 1, Peter addresses the elders of churches. Yet it seems as if Peter is writing mostly to scattered believers, many of who are aliens in a strange land, which certainly contributed to their sufferings. Now when Peter addresses these “aliens” I don’t believe that he is talking about national aliens. I don’t believe that he’s talking to Jews who have come to live in a foreign culture.

I don’t believe that he’s talking to those who grew up in Spain but are now living in Bithynia. Rather Peter is talking about people who are still living in their hometowns but because of their faith in Christ they now feel as if they are strangers living in a foreign land. Look over at 2:11: “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.” Through faith in Christ they have entered the spiritual battle for their souls. The flesh and its worldly desires have begun to attack them.

Peter exhorts his readers to lay aside the fleshly lusts. Don’t pursue them. Don’t continue after them. Your fleshly desires are fighting against your soul. Back in 1:14 Peter addressed this. He said, “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:14-16). When Christ came and redeemed you from your sins, he redeemed you from “your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers” (1:18). He saved you “to die to sin and to live to righteousness” (2:24). We get a clear picture of what was taking place in their lives in 4:3-4.

1 Peter 4:3-4

For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you;

Peter is writing to scattered Christians who have believed in Christ. As such their desires have changed. No longer do they want to live “for the lusts of men” (4:2). Rather they want to live “for the will of God” (4:2). His will for our lives is simple: “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” Yet such a summons isn’t so easy. There are pressures all around. Their old friends want to be joined in their sensual pleasures. “Come to our party! There will be beer! There will be girls! You’ll have a great time! There will be dancing! We’ll rock the night away! What? You aren’t coming? You can’t be serious! We need you! You have always been the life of the party! C’mon! Help all of us have a good time!” But, as you continue to fight the temptation to run “into the same excesses of dissipation” that you used to engage in, “they malign you.” “What!?? Are you too good for us now? Look who you’ve become: Mr. Religious. You’re out of your mind! You’re a prude!”

Peter is calling his readers to stand firm. Don’t be engaged in the former lusts. Your calling now is entirely different! “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” In other words, “God has chosen you to be his holy race! You are now God’s own possession. A

few years ago, you were not a part of the people of God. You were pagan Gentiles, doing what was right in your own eyes. But now, by faith, God has called you to be His people! At one time, you were the objects of God's wrath. But, through faith in Christ, you have now come into the fold by His mercy. When people deride you and malign you and say all kinds of evil about you, speak to them of the excellencies of Jesus. Tell others that you have been called from the darkness of sin and it's ugly practices into the marvelous light of Jesus. Tell others that you have more pleasure in being with Him in the light, rather than running with them in the dark. Show them that your faith in Christ gives you great reason to rejoice with 'joy inexpressible and full of glory' (1:8). You don't need to pursue their sin to make you happy. You are now happy in Jesus!"

That's your calling. As the people of God you are like aliens living in a foreign land! As Peter writes to these scattered aliens perhaps there was little or no support structure around them to help them in making these righteous stands. As such they felt like aliens. Thus Peter rightly identifies them as "scattered aliens." They weren't aliens because they were living in a different culture. Rather they were aliens because they had a new God and thus a new home; a heavenly one. The culture in which they grew up seemed so strange to them after they believed. They had lost all desire for such a culture of lust and sensuality.

Can you relate? Can you relate to feeling like an alien in this culture? This is the experience of everyone born again by God. We have been born into a different realm. I can relate. There are times in which I'm engaged in conversations with people who are living only for this world. I haven't seen their television shows they talk about. I haven't even heard of the movies that they have seen. I don't know their songs. I don't know the latest in Hollywood. I don't have a desire to engage in many of their activities. I want to spend my time with my God, with my family, and with my church. That's where I feel most at home.

Can you relate to this? If not, it may just been that you aren't an alien. Perhaps you have not yet been born again. Perhaps you aren't a believer. If that's the case many of the things that Peter addresses here in this little book will be foreign to you. You simply won't be able to relate. You love the world. You love the things in the world. To you, I give a warning, "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

Your lusts and pleasures will be but for a moment. They will pass away. You will pass away along with them. I urge you to repent from your sin and trust in Christ. A life as an alien is far more satisfying than a life of worldly sin and pleasure. If you can relate to being an alien know that Peter's counsel will help you in the battle. Know that you will find great comfort in His words throughout this epistle.

His words of comfort begin in verse 2.

You might think that your experiences simply came upon you for no real reason. Well, be comforted this morning. They didn't come by accident. God has called us to be different. Look at the end of verse 1, "... who are chosen, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood." Here we see the Holy Trinity at work in your life, choosing you, purifying you, and calling you to a dedicated life, living for His glory. It's God the Father who has chosen you to be an alien upon the earth. It's God the Spirit who continues to sanctify you by giving you godly desires that run contrary to the world. It's God the Son to whom you are called to follow and obey. Your feelings as an alien isn't an accident. It's God's design for your life that you experience these things.

These three phrases ought to give us **great comfort in our suffering**. Look at the first one, ...

1. The first phrase in verse 2 comes with these words, "who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father."

God has chosen us for this life. It has come with His design. People become Christians because God the Father has chosen them. In verse 3 we read that God is the one who has "caused us to be born again." We have no part in giving ourselves a new heart. He is the instigator in our salvation. He is the one who determines our salvation. He is the one who changes us. It's not like God has decided on a whim to work this in our heart. No, we see here that we are chosen "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1:2).

When you couple this with the opening pages of Ephesians you see that God's choosing of us came from before the foundation of the world in eternity past long before we came to be.

Now there are some who will say that God merely looks down the corridor of time and sees that we will choose Him and thereby He chooses us. However, that makes no sense. First of all it makes no sense with the meaning of the word "choose." Suppose you go to a buffet restaurant. For some reason or another your spouse goes through the line putting food on your plate. When your spouse brings the plate full of food to your table can you in any sense say, "I chose the food on my plate"? Even if you knew beforehand that your spouse would select only the most healthy food (salad, fruit, vegetables, and fish) you do great dis-service to the meaning of the word "choose" if you claim to have chosen the food on your plate. You strip it of all meaning! The word used here means you are actively selecting something out of a group of things. In this case God has chosen us out of the people of the world to be different.

A second reason why this cannot mean that God chose those who chose Him is the meaning of the word "foreknow." Certainly it could mean that God "knew the facts of what would happen before it happened." When used in the Bible it is most often used to mean "to know a person with an intimate knowledge and care and love." (1:20) Wayne Grudem rightly summarizes the situation here, ... "'According to the foreknowledge' suggests 'according to God's fatherly care for you before the world was made.'" [\[4\]](#)

And that should be comforting to us. Our situation in life as aliens has come upon us by the kind hand of a sovereign God.

It is His intent for our life. It is His wonderful plan for our lives that we feel like aliens.

2. The next phrase here in verse 2 is also filled with comfort. God has chosen us to feel like aliens and strangers “by the sanctifying work of the Spirit.”

The reason we feel like aliens in this world is because of the sanctifying work that the Spirit of God has done in our lives.

Picture yourself on a cattle farm where you are serving as a hired hand. Your job is to herd the cattle, feed the cattle, and clean up after the cattle. It's dirty work but it's what you signed up for. Now imagine that your farming boss sat you down before you started and said that he expected you to show up each morning for work in a suit and tie. Furthermore he expected you to work with those sorts of clothes on. When you are in the barn dealing with the manure slop you would certainly feel a bit strange. Perhaps the other farm-hands might ridicule you for dressing so nicely. However your comfort would be found in the fact that your boss is the one who told you to wear nice clothes in your work.

In a small way that's what the Spirit of God has done for us in our salvation. He has sanctified us and made us pure and clean. You are called by God to walk in purity as you deal with the slop of the world. The reason we feel like aliens in a sinful world is because of God's sanctifying work in our soul!

3. The third phrase in verse 2 also points us into the same direction. God has chosen us to feel like aliens and strangers “to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood.”

When God called us unto salvation it was to obey Jesus Christ. There is no other way for a Christian to live than to obey Jesus Christ. In 1 Peter 4:17 Peter asks the rhetorical question, “What will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” There is an obedience that comes when you believe in the gospel. Near the end of this epistle, Peter exhorts his readers to to “stand firm” in the “true grace of God” (1 Peter 5:12). In the grace of God, there is a standing firm.

Obedience to Jesus is going to cause friction in our world. It's going to make you feel uncomfortable around many in the world. Obeying Jesus Christ will often make you feel like an alien. Yet, again, this is intentional. It's not as if God is surprised when your obedience to Jesus puts you in difficult circumstances. Jesus knew full well the implications of being united to Him. “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you” (John 15:18-19).

These three phrases indicate that any suffering that we experience due to our love for God is all intentional and planned by God. This ought to be a source of great comfort for you. You won't find comfort in your suffering with a God who wishes that things weren't so bad for you, but can't quite seem to help. In this case, things are out of control and your suffering may well get worse! Rather, you will find your comfort in suffering when you trust that the sovereign God has full control over your suffering and won't give you more than is necessary for your testing (1:6).

We have seen (1) The Author and (2) The Recipients. Now, let's turn our attention to ...

3. The Greeting

This comes at the end of verse 2, “May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.”

This is the sort of greeting that we may easily pass by. Yet should you spend a few moments thinking about it. It becomes rich with meaning. Here were people in a distressful situation and Peter is granting them grace and peace. This is exactly what you need when going through difficulties in life. You need God's grace to come upon your soul. You need God's peace to pacify your soul. Often these sorts of words can sound a bit like a cliché like something you always say. In fact Paul begins every single one of his letters expressing a blessing of God's grace and peace upon those to whom he is writing without exception! In thirteen epistles written by him, thirteen times, he uses these words, “grace to you and peace.”

I believe that Peter knew that. According to 2 Peter 3:15-16, Peter acknowledged reading a bunch of his letters. However Paul never says what Peter says. Never did Paul say, “May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.” In fact never did Paul really add much to his greetings. It's always the same-old, same-old.

By adding the words “in fullest measure” I believe that Peter is attempting to show that he really means what he is saying. It's a bit like saying, “I'm sorry.” How many times is that said? In the repetition, it can lose its meaning. When we are truly sorry for something that took place we often place a superlative on like “I'm really sorry” or “I'm very sorry.” In doing it startles the one to whom we are speaking and restores some real meaning into the words.

In adding the phrase, “in the fullest measure,” I believe that Peter genuinely desires this these scattered aliens experience the grace and peace of God. And oh, do they need it.

As I close I simply want to turn this upon any of you who are suffering today. May God truly grant you His grace and His peace to deal with your situation. May you experience the priestly blessing, ...

The LORD bless you, and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine on you,
And be gracious to you;
The LORD lift up His countenance on you,
And give you peace.
(Numbers 6:24-26)

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on August 26, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] See <http://dailystrength.org>.

[2] John Bunyan, Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners, paragraph #327.

[3] Edmund Clowney, The Message of 1 Peter, Edmund Clowney, p. 28.

[4] Wayne Grudem, 1 Peter, p. 50.