

# 1 Peter 1:1-12

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## *Living as Foreigners*

One of the current radio adverts for Honda cars, voiced as always by Garrison Keillor, says something like:

Home. A word that makes you think of comfort, security and happiness. That's what we try to reproduce in our cars.

They have spotted that the idea of "home" is deeply attractive to us, especially if we are forever on the move. Our modern culture which forces us to move house, and indeed cities far too often, only serves to intensify our desire for community, and settledness; for 'home'.

My mother actually grew up moving endlessly. Her mother died when she was a little girl and her father never really settled after that. She was sent to boarding school as a little girl and more than once she returned to a different home. She grew up determined to settle. So she married my father and lived in the same house for the next sixty years. She was happy.

You could say that the whole bible is about longing to be home. At the beginning the garden of Eden is described as an idyllic home for Adam and Eve. A place of fruitfulness, security, contentment and unhindered human relationships, in the presence of God. Adam and Eve's sin causes them to lose their ideal home. They become alienated from one another, alienated from God, and they are banished from the peace and security of the Garden and are forced to live dangerous unprotected lives as restless wanderers in the world.

Ever since Adam and Eve that Honda car advert would have played well human ears.

As the story goes on we meet Abraham. Who – as we saw a few weeks ago – is called to leave his comparatively settled home, to establish a home in the unpromising Promised land. He dwells in the land but not as the settled owner. He lives in tents and longs for home.

The high point of Old Testament history is the rule of King David. He does rule over the whole Promised Land, he builds a palace in Jerusalem, and his son Solomon builds a permanent temple to symbolically establish their settled relationship with God again. But just like Adam David and then Solomon sin, and slowly over time the whole great project to establish a perfect homeland unravels.

A few generations later the Temple is in ruins, the people are scattered and the land is overrun by enemies. God's people experienced again what Adam and Eve first endured – banishment. And they long for home.

There is a return from that exile, and the Temple is even rebuilt after a fashion. But at its completion there are as many tears and cheers, because the whole project is a pale shadow of its former glory. They are like people evicted from a mansion having to live in a mobile home. They are not home.

Then Jesus steps onto the stage at the beginning of the New Testament. Jesus came to bring us home.

"come to me all you who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest"

he said. His death on the cross was to pay for our sins. The sins which had banished Adam from the Garden, which had banished Israel from the Promised Land, and which

now if unforgiven banish us from God. He came establish 'the kingdom of God' – a phrase which conjured up the Honda triumvirate of comfort, security and happiness and much much more. A phrase which spoke of home.

But here's the thing: the Bible teaches that those who follow Jesus are home... and not home. That is especially strong in this letter of 1 Peter.

We are home in that now reconciled to God. 1 Peter 3:18

For Christ...suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

We are home in that we now belong to a secure community. (1 Peter 2:9–10, NIV)

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

But we are not home in that presently we live in a world ruled by other forces.

Our full inheritance lies in the future. As Jesus put it

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5, NIV)

The original intention of God - as Julian Hardyman was telling us at our day away last week - was for the Garden of Eden to be expanded until it filled the whole earth. God's intention now in Jesus is to fulfil that hope by recreating his universe as a 'new heaven and new earth' in which there is no longer any sin, or suffering or even death, and in which God dwells in relationship with his people – but that is all future. The meek 'will inherit the earth' but not yet.

We presently live as scattered exiles.

#### **1 Peter 1:1**

This is language which was used of Abraham and the Israelites in general, even when they lived in the Promised land. They were home in one sense, and yet still living as exiles longing for their true home.

This autumn as we examine 1 Peter we are going to see how to live joyfully as people who are home and not home.

It was written as we can see in verse 1

- ignore – lines – Paul's missionary journey.
- to Christians spread over a wide area of now northern Turkey.

These were people on the outskirts of the Roman Empire so the idea of being exiles was familiar to them. Some people have suggested that the letter is written mainly to Jews because the language of elect scattered exiles was often used by the Jews who did not live in Palestine. But later in the letter Peter seems to be mainly addressing gentiles. For instance in 1 Peter 1:18 he speaks of

"the empty way of life handed down to you by your forefathers"

The New Testament never describes Old Testament faith in that way. Peter, then, seems to be taking Jewish concepts and applying them to Christians of all races. Abraham and Israel were strangers in the world – and so are we. Abraham and Israel were scattered and so are we. But Abraham and Israel were elect – and so are we.

So we find Peter using Old Testament language to describe our privilege as God people. You are

a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God (1 Peter 2:9)

We are home and not home.

So this is a great letter for us to study in our present culture in which it is constantly being impressed upon us that this is not our world as Christians. It was ever thus.

This is a great letter to study for Oxford people who are particularly rootless. Nearly half the people in inner East Oxford have lived in their present house for less than a year. The ideal of a settled existence is anyway a false hope – our true home is in God.

This is a great letter for us who struggle or suffer in one way or another. It will remind that this is our calling as we look forward to our true and final home.

But it is going to help us to live our lives with confidence and joy! That is the mood that this letter establishes right at the beginning. And I want us to catch it this morning – as we look briefly at what Peter wants to say about our status, our joy and our privilege as Christians.

Firstly our status.

➤ *Our status*

We have already said that we are scattered exiles but more fundamentally we are also 'elect'.

 **1 Peter 1:1a**

That is we have been chosen by God. And that not because of anything wonderful about us, but simply because of God's overflowing love, grace and mercy.

 **1 Peter 1:2**

He decided it from eternity past – it was 'according to the foreknowledge of God'.

He implemented it through the sovereign work of his Spirit, pouring out his love into our hearts so that we were changed from enmity towards God to loving him – it was 'the sanctifying work of the Spirit'.

He gave us a new purpose to be 'obedient to Jesus Christ' and a new security since our forgiveness was won by Jesus through the shedding of 'his blood'.

I watched a bit of X-Factor last night. They were choosing who was going to the judges homes – note the power of home imagery again. But what I noticed again was the way in which these programmes now routinely build the tension around the great question – "Will I be chosen?"

It is not rare to have people say "my life depends on this," which of course is rubbish.

But all that is only the faintest echo of the eternal joy for a Christian of hearing what Peter tells them. You are 'elect of God' - chosen by him. Your life does depend on that.

And Christians here you were not chosen because of your talent. You need the Spirit of God to infuse goodness into your life. You need the death of Jesus to deal with the badness in your life. You are entirely dependent on God who simply looked on you from eternity past and said I want you for myself.

“What if I am not chosen?” you say. Well here is the privilege you have today. Although God has eternal foreknowledge, you can turn to God and say ‘please forgive me, please accept me, please give me your Spirit to change me, please let the death of Jesus be for my sins’ and he pledges to respond to that and accept you. How when elsewhere we are told that we were chosen before the creation of the world? I don’t know. That lies in the mysteries of a infinite and eternal God. I just know that today you can say those things to God and from that moment be called ‘God’s elect.’

This is our status as Christians. And this lead to our joy.

➤ *Our joy*

 **1 Peter 1:3a**

Look at some of the reasons for that outburst of praise.

We have a living hope

 **1 Peter 1:3**

He gave us new birth – that is he brought our hearts from death to life. He did it because of his mercy. And that living hope is resurrection hope. That new bodily life that Jesus enjoyed when he rose from the dead is promised to us.

This is our inheritance

 **1 Peter 1:4**

It is absolutely secure – it will not ‘perish spoil or fade.’ All our precious things get destroyed. Moths have eaten my favourite old clothes these last two summers. Our wedding present china is slowly disappearing. We broke the first piece on the day we opened our presents. Our bodies are slowly perishing. Even money perishes. We met a great throng of treasure hunters with their metal detectors yesterday and one of them showed us a Henry V silver penny. It was nearly unrecognisable.

But our resurrection inheritance does not ‘perish spoil or fade’, because it is kept in the presence of God – in heaven.

It is kept for us, and we are kept for it.

 **1 Peter 1:5**

God’s exerts his power to keep us trusting him until the end. We may have many vicissitudes, many periods of doubt or despondency or apathy, but someone whom God has first touched by his Spirit is ‘shielded’ from total despair.

So that alongside the grief of living as scattered exiles in a hostile world joy is always possible.

 **1 Peter 1:6**

Indeed those very sufferings are used by God to do something beautiful in us.

 **1 Peter 1:7-9**

Peter doesn’t mean that we will never grieve, or be confused, or never have any doubts. The Bible is full of the frank recognition of the harsh reality of living in a world of sin and death. What he means is that suffering has a paradoxical way of weaning us off false and temporary hopes – hopes of relationships, or wealth or status in the world – and fixing us on our true hope – the hope of resurrection glory.

Some of us here are in our declining years and it is hard. But every growing ache that I have makes me look forward even more to my resurrection body.

Some of us will have to pay a considerable price to follow Christ. Perhaps a relationship which you know you must end, or a difficult marriage which you know you must persevere in. Perhaps a job which you will not take. Perhaps a home which you will not buy. Perhaps just the stigma of being a 'God-botherer.'

Those things, in the hand of God, refine our eager longing for our true community, our true place of honour, our true riches, our true home.

This is our 'inexpressible and glorious joy', that we have a living hope, a secure inheritance, a shielded security, that suffering – though it is tough - actually refines.

And then Peter adds to that our privilege.

➤ *Our privilege*

As people who live after the time of Christ we are more privileged than all the Old Testament saints.

📖 **1 Peter 1:10-12a**

When someone tells you about Christ's death and resurrection you are hearing something that Abraham and Moses and Isaiah and all their contemporaries would have given their right arm to hear.

There is a clarity to your hope that saints before Christ longed for. Indeed even today the angels don't quite get it.

📖 **1 Peter 1:12b**

Angels see a lot, but there is something about being a human being which helps us to see the gospel with greater clarity than them.

So you exiles you scattered people – cultivate your true joy. Don't buy a Honda car, or any of the myriad other things which promise 'home' and don't deliver. Understand your true status, your true joy, your true privilege and live in it.

When you go to work tomorrow, or you go out with your friends, or meet family there is something that will mark you out as different from those around you. It is an unbreakable joy. If you don't have it then these truths will infuse it into your heart. Meditate on them this afternoon – wrestle with them in the presence of God – go to homegroup and chew them over – until they fill your heart. Because with God – though you are a scattered exile – you are as good as home.