Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Peter’s letter is addressed “*to those who are elect exiles*.” And an exile is someone who has been forced to leave their home to go and live somewhere else. A notable example of an exile, from the Bible, is the people of Israel who were taken to Babylon around 600 BC. And it was not until 70 years later that they were allowed to return to their homeland. Another notable biblical example is the Apostle John. Because he was a Christian, he was exiled to the Island of Patmos.

And to be an exile is an awful punishment. Imagine what it would be like if you, just because you are a Christian, were forced to flee New Zealand and go and live in a place like Indonesia or Uzbekistan? Somewhere that felt foreign and very unlike home? It would be extremely very difficult.

And we will say more about the exiles that Peter wrote this letter to in a moment, but Peter was one of the first disciples of Jesus. His given name was Simon, but Jesus gave him the name, Peter, which means ‘rock.’ And all that Peter says about himself here is that he is an “*Apostle of Jesus Christ*,” which simply means that he had been given a special authority by the Lord Jesus to tell others about Him.

And he wrote this letter to encourage these believers, but we will also see that the Holy Spirit intended this letter to be a source of great encouragement and instruction *for every believer* in every age, including you and me. So, get ready for a fantastic journey as we work through this letter together!

And here at the beginning of this letter, **Peter Writes to Encourage Believers in Difficult Circumstances**. And the heart of Peter’s encouragement is one of the most controversial and disliked doctrines in all of Christianity – election! But we shall see that election should not be difficult or controversial, but, instead, wonderfully encouraging! And we will see this as we consider this passage under two headings – the **difficult circumstances** ***of* all believers**, the **doctrinal encouragement *for* believers**.

1. So, first of all, the **difficult circumstances** ***of* believers**.
   1. Peter describes his original readers as “*exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia*.”
      1. These five regions were a part of what is modern-day Turkey. And while our ESVs have “***the Dispersion***,” many other English Bible versions refer to “*those who were scattered throughou*t” these five regions. And we know that terrible persecution of Christians had begun in the Roman Empire, so Christians had been forced to flee their homeland in Judea because of this persecution. And some of them had fled to these regions and established churches there. And that is why Peter calls them “*exiles of the Dispersion*.”
      2. But that word, ‘**exiles**,’ is about more than just the place where the people that Peter originally wrote this letter to were forced to live. In **Hebrews 11:13**, we read about Old Testament believers who “*acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth*.” So, it did not matter whether they were in their homeland or in physical exile, they were always “*strangers and exiles on the earth*.” And this is actually true of every believer, in every age, including you and me. Why? Because, as we see in **Philippians 3:20**, “*Our citizenship is in heaven*.”
         1. In **John 14:2-3**, Jesus said to His disciples and to all who would receive Him as their Saviour and Lord, “*In my Father's house are many rooms … I go to prepare a place for you … And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also*.” So, if you are a follower of Jesus, you have a room or a place in heaven. It has your name on it! It is reserved for you. It will be your home for all eternity! You will never lose it! You will never be forced to flee from it. It will be 100% satisfactory, in every respect, because there you will enjoy face to face fellowship with Jesus, and every other delight of life in the new heavens and the new earth! So, the place where you truly belong is heaven. And that is why, as a child of God, you are “*a stranger and exile on the earth*.”
      3. And this has **consequences** for your life on earth. Peter’s original readers had and were experiencing persecution and suffering. But they were not the only ones experiencing persecution. Later in **1 Peter 5:9**, Peter says, “…*knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world*.” In **John 15:20**, Jesus said, “*If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you*.” And so, in **1 Peter 4:12**, Peter says, “*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you*.” So, persecution of Christians is not something strange; we ought to expect it!
         1. Each week in the bulletin’s prayer calendar, we have news from around the world of brothers and sisters who are suffering persecution. There are also the monthly ‘*Voice of the Martyrs*’ newsletters in the foyer that have articles and prayer points about the persecuted church. And let me just encourage you to take one of the VOtM newsletters. You will find them very encouraging, and they will open your eyes to what is going on with our brothers and sisters around the world.
         2. But the main point is that the situation of these persecuted brothers and sisters is what is normal for believers; not ours.
         3. But as we have noted many times before, we are fast headed in the direction of persecution in the West. If you believe that the Bible is the Word of God, and you say that faith in Christ is the only way to heaven and that all other religions are false, and if you call evil what the world calls good or if you call good what the world calls evil, then get ready for persecution.
         4. Imagine that you are a **passionate All-Blacks supporter** and that on Saturday the All-Blacks are playing against the Wallabies at Eden Park. So, you turn up to the game but somehow you lose consciousness for a few moments and when you wake up you are right in the middle of the section of the grandstand reserved for Wallabies’ supporters. You are in for a tough time because what defines you and what you love is different than everyone around you. Now, you might survive that situation because rugby supporters are generally good-natured, but if it were a European or South American soccer game, chances are that you would be physically assaulted or even killed, because you would be viewed as the enemy.
         5. Well, that is how it will be with Bible-believing Christians. In **1 Peter 2:11**, Peter says, “*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh … Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honourable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation*.” If you try and obey all of the commands of God, and you call evil, ‘evil,’ you will be hated by the world.
         6. And this is situation normal for Christians. So, when it comes, do not be surprised and remember that you are “*strangers and exiles on the earth*.” “*Our* *citizenship is in heaven*.” You have an invisible passport, with ‘Citizen of heaven’ stamped on it, which cannot be taken from you!
2. So, those are the **difficult circumstances** ***of all* believers**. But let us move on, secondly, to the **doctrinal encouragement** ***for* believers**.
   1. And the doctrinal encouragement begins with the word “**elect**” in **verse 1**. Another word we could use is ‘chosen. So, believers are not just exiles but “*elect [or chosen] exiles*.” And if you look ahead to verse 2, election or being chosen is “*according to the foreknowledge of the Father*.” And this is the doctrine of election.
      1. If you look ahead to **2:9**, Peter says to believers, “*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation…*” And these words connect the New Testament Church to Old Testament Israel. Earlier, we read **Deuteronomy 7**. That is where God spoke to the people of Israel and reminded them that they were “*a holy people*,” because He had “*chosen*” them to be “*a people for His treasured possession*.” So, they did not choose Him; He chose them. And everything that happened to them was because of God’s choosing of them.
      2. And it is the same with believers in New Testament times:
         1. **Ephesians 1:4** says this of believers, “[*The Father] chose us in [Christ] before the foundation of the world*.”
         2. To the Thessalonian Christians, Paul said in **2 Thessalonians 2:13**, “*God chose you as the first fruits to be saved*.”
         3. In **John 6:37**, Jesus said, “*All that the Father gives me will come to me*.” And we see similar language in **John 10:27-29**, where Jesus said, “*I give [my sheep] eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand*.” And the ones that the Father gave to Jesus are the ones He chose “*before the foundation of the world*.”
         4. In **Acts 13:48**, we read of Paul and Barnabas preaching, and some who heard “*began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed*.” Why did they believe? Because they were appointed to eternal life or chosen.
         5. And several times in **Revelation** we read about those who whose names “*were written in the Book of life,*” before the foundation of the world; in other words, those whom God chose to salvation.

Congregation, the Bible is crystal clear that God is a God of election. He has chosen to save *some* of fallen humanity to present to the Lord Jesus as His eternal bride.

* + 1. And just in case we are in any way tempted to recoil from this doctrine and demand that salvation must surely be about free-will, listen to these words from **Isaiah 46:9-10**: There God says, “*I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose*.”
       1. The very idea that God can only wait with His cosmic hands tied behind His back until hostile sinners independently choose to believe in Him ignores passages like this, which set before us an all-powerful, sovereign, choosing God.
    2. **Verse 2** talks about the “***foreknowledge*** *of the Father*.” The same Greek word is used also in **Acts 2:23** where it says that Jesus was delivered up to be crucified, “*according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God*.” God was not surprised by the crucifixion of Jesus; it happened according to His “*definite plan and foreknowledge*.” And the eternal destiny and the circumstances of the believers that Peter originally wrote to and the eternal destiny and the circumstances of every believer in every age happen according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of the Father.
  1. And we should receive this truth as a wonderful encouragement! When God reminded the people of Israel that He had chosen them, it was meant as an encouragement for them. And Peter wrote these words to encourage these exiled believers. And the Holy Spirit wants you to be encouraged by these words, also. Why? Well, there are at least three reasons why this doctrine should be an encouragement to us.
     1. The first is that the circumstances of life that we encounter are not random. When you encounter persecution or suffering of any kind, it is not because God is ignoring you, abandoning you, or uncaring.
        1. At our Bible study on Wednesday evening, we were looking at the Psalms. And our teacher pointed us to **Psalm 74** where the Psalmist sees the Temple being destroyed and basically cries out to God, “Why aren’t you doing anything, O God? Why don’t you take your hands out of your pockets and stop this? Don’t you care?”
           1. And I am sure that every one of us here has had thoughts like that when we were in distress; Lord, why are you letting this happen to me? Don’t you care? Where are you? Why don’t you make this stop? Yes?
           2. But in the **Psalm** we were looking at, it says, “*The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD's throne is in heaven; His eyes see [everything] … The LORD tests the righteous, but His soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence. [They shall be punished, but] … the upright shall behold His face*.” God is in sovereign control of everything! Nothing escapes His notice. He has a perfect plan that nothing will thwart, including the wicked.
           3. **Romans 8:28** says, “*And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose*.” So, because He is sovereignly in control of all things, all things work together for the good of God’s chosen ones.
     2. And the second encouragement of the doctrine of election is that even if suffering or persecution leads to your death, **your eternal destination is secure**.
        1. **Romans 8:29-30** says that those whom God “*foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, in order that He might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified*.”
        2. And because being glorified is about being received into eternal life, you would think that Paul would have written that in the future tense: “*He will also glorify*.” But he doesn’t! Because this is about God’s electing decree before the foundation of the world, which cannot be undone, Paul puts the whole thing in the past tense – “*those whom He justified He also glorified*.” It’s guaranteed!
        3. And in Philippians 1:6, Paul said this about believers: “*And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ*.” Why? Not because of anything special about believers, but because God is a God of sovereign election whose plans cannot be thwarted!
        4. So, as a believer, your eternal destination is secure!
     3. And that brings us to the third and last reason why this doctrine is wonderfully encouraging, which is **relationship**. Look again at **verse 2**. Who did the choosing? God the … Father! And Father is a relationship word.
        1. When God called **Jeremiah** to be a prophet to the nations, Jeremiah was afraid that he would not be able to this. But God said to him, “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations*.” Isn’t that beautiful? Isn’t that encouraging?
        2. It is a mistake to think of election as a cosmic pulling random names out of a hat. We need to understand that the goal of election is for the Father to present an eternal bride to His Son on Judgment Day. So, before the foundation of the world, when the Triune God decreed to create the world and permit the fall and save some of them, you must picture the Father as going: Oh, Jeremiah! I choose Jeremiah! I want Him to be my child and a prophet. I choose Him to be with you in eternity, My Son. And then the Son agreed to go the cross and die for Jeremiah’s sins and the Holy Spirit agreed to bring Jeremiah to faith and to apply all of the benefits of Christ’s work on the cross to Jeremiah and to equip him with all he needed to be a prophet.
        3. And that is how it is for every one of God’s elect ones. Before you were formed in the womb, God knew you and decreed that you would know Him as your Father in heaven!
        4. **Question 26 of the Heidelberg Catechism** asks: “What do you believe when you say, "I believe in God, the Father almighty"? And the answer is: “That the eternal Father of our Lord Jesus Christ … is my God and Father because of Christ His Son. I trust Him so much that I do not doubt He will provide whatever I need for body and soul, and He will turn to my good whatever adversity He sends me in this sad world. He is able to do this because He is almighty God; He desires to do this because He is a faithful Father.”

And that really leaves only one question, doesn’t it. You have heard me explain the doctrine of election. It is what the Bible teaches. And it is meant as a wonderful encouragement! But election is God’s business. It is about His secret will. He hasn’t given us the Book of Life so we can see whether or not our names are in there. What He has given us is this promise: “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*.” And when the Philippian jailer said to Paul and Silas, “*Sirs, what must I do to be saved?*” They didn’t go into a long explanation of election; they said, “*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household*.” So, have you repented of your sins and believed that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died and rose again for the forgiveness of your sins? If you have, praise the Lord! If you have not, please do so today! Do not put it off until tomorrow because tomorrow may not come.

Believer, you are an elect exile; your true home is heaven. And while you labour in the service of Christ, here, especially when it is hard, know that your Father is faithfully controlling all the circumstances of your life, for your good, and your eternal destination is secure. Amen.