

**RESIDENT ALIENS**  
**1 Peter 1:1-9**

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This is a beautiful opening by the Apostle Peter. It reminds those who have linked their lives by faith to Jesus Christ what they have in that life – in that linking. Peter, as he gives us these words of hope and promise, is not being naive. He recognizes their suffering. He recognizes their trials. He is not bringing some philosophy that says, “Every day and in every way things are getting better and better.” He says that in this world there will be trials. But Peter has some awfully good news to share to those who are suffering in Christ Jesus.

Notice how he begins.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, – I love the way the New American Standard Bible says it – to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen...

It’s such a powerful introduction. Peter, the apostle, the messenger of Jesus Christ. And who is he writing to? Those who are aliens – exiles, sojourners, however you wish to translate it. They live in a land that is not really their own. They’re not really fully at home in their environment. They don’t have the rights and the privileges of citizens – like Abraham, seeking a small plot for burying Sarah, making his request as an exile, a stranger, an alien among his neighbors (Genesis 23:4). Or the psalmist asking for God’s favor, doing so as a “passing guest, an alien like all my forebears” (Psalm 39:12).

In Hebrews 11 we have the clear picture that we, as a people of God, are not really at home here on earth. We’re aliens – resident aliens. Exiles. In Hebrews 11:13 we read, “All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own. And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.”

The author of Hebrews is saying really the Promised Land never was the promised land. There was always another place for the people of God that no place on earth can ever fulfill. Paul says it in Philippians 3: “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus, who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of

His glory by exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).

We need to be careful about how much at home we begin to feel here on earth. We build barns and bigger barns, and we act like we’re going to be here forever. But the truth of the matter is that we are resident aliens – we’re just passing through.

The story circulates about the Jewish rabbi who invited a traveler to his home. The traveler was surprised at the rabbi’s house. It was all simple, just a dirt floor and a wooden box – hardly any furnishings at all. “Why don’t you have more things? Where is your stuff?” the traveler asked. In reply, the rabbi turned the question. “Where are your things? Why haven’t you a lot of belongings with you?”

“Oh, I’m just passing through,” said the visitor.

“And so am I,” said the rabbi. “This earth is not my home.”

Peter reminds us in this first chapter that we are resident aliens. This is not ultimately our home. Someone else will live in your house. Someone else will sit in your chair. Someone else will drive your car. Someone else might even marry your husband or your wife. Death will snatch us all away. We’re merely resident aliens.

Notice they are dispersed – resident aliens dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. The dispersion, or the *Diaspora*, was already a designation for the Jews scattered among the nations after the loss of Palestine to foreign powers. The church adopted the term symbolically as a description of its own place in the world. Aliens scattered. We’re at home, but we’re not at home.

You notice the next word – chosen. It’s the word for election. Oh, it doesn’t mean that it allows us to be arrogant or elite, for we’re not chosen for superior qualities any more so than Jacob was chosen over his twin Esau or Israel was chosen from among the nations that were really more rich and more powerful or Bethlehem was chosen to be the city of the birth of the Messiah. Rather, it is a word that reminds us of the initiative of God. We are who we are by a prior act of God. We may think of ourselves as the searchers, but really we are the found. We may seek to know, but our life is really being known by God. Paul is saying to the Christians, “You’re aliens. You’re scattered. And you’re chosen by God according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” It’s the language of destiny – destined by the Father.

Not only destined, not only chosen, but also sanctified. It’s the activity of the Holy Spirit hallowing God’s people. And notice, obedient and sprinkled with blood. It’s the language of the Covenant, of Exodus 24. As Moses comes down with the Book of the Covenant and the people pledge to be obedient, Moses sealed the Covenant, the agreement between God and His people that they would keep His law, by sprinkling on the people the blood of an ox.

God's people are resident aliens. God's people are scattered. God's people are chosen, destined, sanctified, and obedient in the covenant relationship with God. Peter brings the good news of who we are.

Do you know who you are?

Sometimes we are struck by dazzling personalities, by the importance of people. There was a religious convention of the Lutheran faith in Kansas City. While their two husbands were in the meeting, the wives were out shopping. As they were shopping, they decided an ice cream cone would be a good idea. They went into an ice cream shop, and they saw over in the corner, sitting at a table by himself, none other than Paul Newman. Now, they weren't going to be giggly and act like teenagers and act classless and go over and ask for an autograph or go over and introduce themselves. They weren't going to do that. They went about their way in a sophisticated manner, stealing as many glances as they thought they could get by with. When they got outside, one lady realized she didn't have her ice cream cone. She thought she had probably left it on the rack on the counter by the cash register. She went back in, and the ice cream cone wasn't in that rack. She talked to the attendant about it, and Paul Newman, with baby blue eyes, walked up and said, "Lady, you just put your ice cream cone in your purse!"

We're dazzled by important personalities. Kirk Douglas tells the story of one day walking down the sidewalk and some star-struck, glassy-eyed fan came to him, thrilled and excited. Overwhelmed by seeing him face to face, she looked him in the eye and all she could say was, "Do you know who you are?"

I think that's what Peter is saying. I think that's what God is saying through His apostle to the Christians to whom the Epistle is addressed and to those to whom the sermon is addressed this morning – to you. Do you understand who you are? Do you understand how important you are and how blessed you are? How you're chosen of God. How you've been saved by the Son. How you've been sealed, sanctified by the Spirit. Selected by the Father. Do you know who you are? Resident aliens. Chosen. Sanctified. Sprinkled in the covenant blood of obedience.

Do you realize the relationship you have with God?

Verse 3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again...

Sounds like John's writing, doesn't it. These verses, 3 through 5, celebrate the activity of God that sweeps from our new birth to the final unveiling of God's salvation, activity that is prompted by the great mercy of God. We have a new birth. We are born from above. We are born again. We are born again, to a living – I love the next word – hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

We have hope because of our saving relationship, our new birth, with Christ Jesus.

I'm here to say to you today that if you have responded in faith, if you have professed the Lordship of Christ Jesus, if His Spirit has bid you and you have responded – you are chosen, you are destined for heaven as your home. That's your hope, says Peter. A hope that is based upon none other than the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself.

There are some of you here today who are doubting your salvation. Satan has brought you questions about your relationship to God through Jesus Christ, His Son.

**Randall O'Brien, the retired president of Carson-Newman College, remembers such a time in his life. Vietnam lay behind him, as Egypt lay behind the Hebrews. The shadows of death had disappeared before the dazzling light of freedom. God had delivered him. As Exodus had been to the Israelites, so the end of Vietnam was to him. Freedom. Peace. New life. Literally, but more importantly, spiritually.**

**He had been a Christian since childhood. He'd rebelled as a teenager. It was his years of "being in Egypt," his years of rebellion. The oppression of guilt and bondage to sin left him, though a child of God, like in ancient Israel, enslaved in a far country. Then, running from God, he volunteered to fight in Vietnam.**

**"God found me," he says. "As God found the Israelite children in Egypt and also the prodigal son, God found me. In the land of Vietnam, during the height of war, I gave my life totally to God through Jesus Christ. Thus from the land of Vietnam and the state of sin, God delivered me. I came home."**

**Upon his return to South Mississippi in 1971, he was on fire for Christ. Wherever and whenever he had opportunities to share his testimony for Jesus Christ, he did so with enthusiasm. He spoke to youth groups, college groups, and in churches of any denomination, sharing the good news of Christ's life-changing love and grace. A small church soon asked him to serve as a volunteer youth minister. He was eager and accepted.**

**Then there was a crisis. An evangelist came to town preaching that if someone did not know when they were saved, they very well may be lost. "As we sang, he would shout, 'Stand if you were saved on a Monday.' Then he would go on to Tuesday, Wednesday. He warned if you did not know when you were saved, maybe you weren't. Then he added for evidence, 'I remember the date, the day, and the time I was saved as plainly as though it were yesterday.'"**

**O'Brien says he began to doubt his salvation. Maybe he never had the new birth that I Peter talks about. He could remember his baptism as a child, but not the day of salvation. After the evangelist left town, his troubles persisted. The doubting and confusion were painful. "How could I serve God as a minister in this condition?"**

**Then comes Louie Smith. Were you to see him, you would not be overly impressed. "Uncle Louie," O'Brien called him, must have been in his seventies. He was bald, slow moving, average height, and always with his wife, "Miss Myrtis." Uncle Louie was a deacon in the church, a volunteer song leader in worship services. His pride and joy, the absolute love of his life, was Miss Myrtis – that's what he called her – his wife of some fifty years.**

Uncle Louie had a quiet peace about him that made O'Brien feel at ease. As his anguish reached its peak, he decided to drive to Uncle Louie's and pour out his heart to him. There, in the cozy warmth of their small living room, with "Miss Myrtis" rocking and knitting and Uncle Louie and him seated by the fire in chairs, he let it all out.

Uncle Louie just listened, and when at last I finished my story, he looked at me, eyes twinkling, and asked, "Do you believe that I love Miss Myrtis, Son?"

Of course I believed Uncle Louie loved Miss Myrtis. Everybody knew that. Why else would he still be opening car doors for her after fifty years of marriage? Why else did he still refer to her as his "bride." "Yes sir," I replied, "I know you love Miss Myrtis."

"How do you know that?" he asked. I told him. He chuckled. Then he and Miss Myrtis laughed lovingly, almost sheepishly, as though I had caught them in an inside joke. Then he told me their mutually embarrassing confession. "The other day Miss Myrtis and I were sitting right here trying to remember when it was that we met. Do you know when that was?"

"No sir, I don't," I answered.

"Neither do we," Uncle Louie replied.

We all laughed. "For the life of me," he shook his head and confessed, "I can remember when I first met Miss Myrtis or when it was when we first fell in love. But let me ask you something, Son. Do you still believe I love Miss Myrtis?"

I was beginning to catch on when he became as serious as I ever saw Uncle Louie. He leaned forward in his chair, looked me straight in the eye, and said, "Son, listen to me. I know you love Jesus. I know you love Jesus the same way you know I love Miss Myrtis. A lot of us can't remember the exact day of things, but the Good Book says you will know a tree by the fruit it bears even if you don't remember when it was you planted it." (Randall O'Brien, *I Feel Better All Over than I Do Anywhere Else*)

Peter is reminding the Christians that because they've begun the journey, because they've had the new birth, they are a people of hope. And you are a people of hope. Hope because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It's not a hope that's whistling in the dark nor activated only by spring flowers. Rather, it's a hope grounded in the Resurrected One of Israel. Hope is the stuff of life that keeps a farmer on the tractor, the prisoner alive, the student at his books, and the patient watching for the morning. Hope fills present sacrifices with joy and keeps us at a worthy task. Hope lets us wake up in a Covid-19 rattled cosmos and face the future with courage. Hope through the empty tomb of Jesus.

Notice verse 4.

...to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.

Don't worry, Peter seems to be saying to those Christians who are suffering. Oh, their suffering is real.

Skip down to verses 6 and 7.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Christians were suffering ridicule. They were suffering embarrassment. They were suffering various trials. As Jesus Himself had said, "In this world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Once again, it's a co-joining of strange words – trials and joy, cheer and tribulation. What a strange combination of words. Yet that is what he says we are in Christ. Peter says joy and trials, and Jesus says cheer and tribulation. But these odd words can be partners because of the gospel of Christ Jesus, because we have linked our lives with Him in faith.

It's like the fire that purifies the gold, says Peter. The trials in your life are shaping you, but they don't change the fact that you're a people of hope. Notice, "...because you have an inheritance" (verse 4) – that is, the inheritance of the Kingdom of God – "reserved in heaven for you." The author of Hebrews put it this way, "We are children of the pilgrims, Abraham and Sarah, who looked beyond the land to a city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God."

This promise is kept in place and made new every morning by the watchful power of God that the church continually appropriates by trust. The triumph of God's power will be in the finally complete unveiling of the salvation in which we will participate. The Holy Spirit, the one sanctifying us, is a guarantee of what will come.

Peter is saying, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials...obtaining at the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls."

An inheritance reserved in heaven for us.

Verse 8

...and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.

Our salvation is linked to a single event. That event is the resurrection of Christ Jesus from the dead. It reserves a place for us in heaven as we respond in faith. It doesn't matter about our abilities. It doesn't matter about our performance. The invitation remains consistent.

There are some of you this morning who need to hear this good word. You are aliens – you are the people of God, a place in heaven reserved for you. You are called, elected, destined, foreknown by God. You are the ones of His own choosing. You have responded in faith. You are sanctified, set apart by the Spirit. And yes, even despite your suffering, your suffering today, God has a forever place reserved for you.

**As Vice President, George Bush represented the United States at the funeral of former Soviet Leonid Brezhnev. Bush was deeply moved by a silent protest carried out by Brezhnev's widow. She stood motionless by the coffin until seconds before it was closed. Then, just as the soldiers touched the lid, Brezhnev's wife performed an act of great courage and hope, a gesture that must surely rank as one of the most profound acts of civil disobedience every committed. She reached down and made the sign of the cross on her husband's chest. There, in the citadel of secular, atheistic power, the wife of the man who had run it all hoped that her husband was wrong. She hoped that there was another life, and that life was best represented by Jesus, who died on the cross, and that the same Jesus might yet have mercy on her husband. (Gary Thomas, *Christianity Today*, 1/3/94).**