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The Mission
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1 Peter 1.1-2

**1 Peter 1:1, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia,
Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 elect according to the
foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit,
for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:**

One of the commentators I was reading told the story of a pastor who always seemed to be thankful no matter what. In whatever situation he might find himself in, he would find something to be thankful for.

Well, being the pastor of a small church in a tight knit farming community, and everyone knew him for his thankful spirit. And every Sunday, they knew that their pastor would thank God for something in his opening prayer.

Well, one particular weekend they had a blizzard and along with it came this ferocious cold howling wind blowing straight out of the north. And so the weather was just miserable outside.

Well, to make things worse, this was before the age of the automobile and their only transportation to the church house was by horse-drawn carriages and carts. And some didn't even have that luxury and had to walk.

Well, on their way to church, in the back of all their minds was the same question. What in the world is the preacher going to be thankful for on such a miserable day as this.

Well, as the service opened and he stood to pray, he said this as he prayed. He said, “Heavenly Father, we thank You that not every day is as bad as this day!”

And whether we’ve actually prayed that prayer or one similar or no prayer at all, we’ve no doubt all been in situations where we were having a real hard time finding something to be thankful for. Or at least we were in our feeble minds.

Well, truth is, that’s why we need to read and study the word of God, because it provides for us a remedy if you will for what’s got us down. This is not just a book of correction, though it is, it’s also a book of encouragement. And so if you are feeling like you don’t have a lot to be thankful for tonight, then you’re in the right place. And you didn’t have to brave a blizzard in a horse carriage to get here.

And so that’s the first thing you have to be thankful for. And then add to that lights and air conditioning and padded benches and good fellowship and shoes and decent clothes and the freedom to worship without fear of persecution and we could go on and on and on. We have much to be thankful for if we’ll just think about it.

And yes we have troubles and trials and we live in a broken world and there are mean and evil people all around us and bad things happen to good people and good things happen to bad people, but we have much to be thankful for as we’re going to see tonight as we get into this letter that the Apostle Peter is writing to Christians who were going through some really tough times in their lives.

These Christians to whom Peter is writing probably couldn't think of a lot of things to be thankful for at this time in their life. Troubles have a way of blinding us to the goodness of God sometimes. And we all need encouragement and we all need to be reminded from time to time of the things we can always be thankful for no matter what's going on in our life.

And so Peter opens by mentioning all these different regions or areas where many of these believers now live. And whether they were scattered because of the persecution or whether they moved away on their own for some other reason, they lived in all these different places around Asia Minor. Look at verse one

**1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia,
Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,**

Now, different commentators interpret this verse differently. Some say this dispersion refers only to Jews and that Peter was writing only to Jews who had been dispersed from their homeland, but others interpret the word dispersion in a more general sense and they include Gentile Christians in this dispersion as well.

And the thinking there is that as Christians, we're all foreigners in the world, because our home is not here on earth. Our home is in heaven. And just like these people, we're pilgrims. We're just wanderers and travelers in this foreign land called earth making our way to our final destination which is in heaven with Jesus.

But either way, these brothers and sisters to whom Peter was writing, were scattered all throughout the region of Asia Minor. And many of these places listed we know were places that had been visited previously by Peter and were of course visited as well by Paul. And so these letters from Peter

were being circulated to a very large audience, because the persecution in the region was increasing. It was spreading very rapidly and no doubt the people of God who had committed to follow Christ had become very concerned.

And so in an effort to encourage them in this time of trouble, Peter is going to give them several things here in this first chapter to be thankful for. And the first thing Peter implies they should be grateful for comes in one word in verse 2. In fact, it's the first word. The term "elect". The Bible says that those to whom Peter wrote to, were the

2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

Now, I had every intention on teaching through this entire first chapter tonight, but when I got to this word, things slowed down tremendously. And with good reason, because this both, one of the most important truths in all of the Bible; and at the same time one of the most hated truths in Bible, and especially within the Christian community.

Now, truth is we could camp out here and talk about this subject until Jesus comes back, because this is a very deep and hard to understand truth.

The elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

Now, let's break that down, because this is very important for us to understand.

First of all, who are the elect?

Well, in the most simple terms, the "elect of God" are those whom God has predestined to salvation. And they're called the "elect" because God "elected" or "determined beforehand," or "ordained," that that person would be saved. In other words, God decided ahead of time who would be saved.

Every four years in the U.S., we “elect” a President right? In other words, we as the American people, choose who will serve in that office.

Well, the same goes for God and those who will be saved. God, before the foundation of the world chose those who would be saved. And those who have been chosen are the elect of God. He elected them to be saved.

Now, most people and even many in the Christian community would say that the doctrine of election or predestination is controversial. But it can't be controversial, because it's a biblical truth that is as plain and simple as any other Biblical truth; if we will just look at it from a Biblical standpoint and let scripture interpret scripture.

That said, it's still hard for some people to accept the truth that does the choosing and that man is but the mere recipient of that choosing. It's hard for men and women to acknowledge the fact that salvation is a sovereign act of God.

And the reason it's so hard for us to accept is because of who we are and what we are. Every since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, every man and woman who has ever been born has been born with a sinful nature. And because of our uncontrollable inclination to sin, and because of our fallenness, we want to assume some responsibility, for our having believed.

In other words, we want some credit for having made a right choice.

Also, when we consider the doctrine of election, it seems unfair to us that God should do the choosing. It seems unfair that out of all the people in the world, God chooses some to be saved, but not all.

But now the reason we view it as unfair, again goes back to our sinful nature and more specifically the sin of pride. Just like Satan, we want to be like God. We want the same decision making power as God.

So what about the part about being unfair? Is God unfair?

Well, when we measure God by our standards, we may think so. Only problem is, God should never be measured by our standards, because the source of our standards is a fallen nature.

And to assume that we're smarter or wiser than God is again the sin of pride. And so God is never to be measured by the human standard of fairness which is nothing more than a reflection of our fallenness.

Let me give you a few scriptures.

Psalm 97:2, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne."

In other words, whatever God does is righteous and just. It may not line up with our human righteousness and justice, but it is divine.

Here's another one **Isaiah 55:8-9, the scripture says of God, " 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,' declares the Lord, 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.' "**

Listen, we are in no position as fallen creatures to determine whether what God does is just, or right or fair. We've stepped way out of bounds when we say that God does anything that's not fair.

The source of God's justice is Himself. It comes about from His own free will and nothing else. And so whatsoever He wills is just, not because we think it's just, but because He wills it to be just.

God doesn't work by human standards. He is the standard. And so divine justice or God's justice is of an entirely different order and character than human justice.

And by the way, you don't want justice. When it comes to our salvation, friend, we don't want justice, because if God gave us all justice, we'd all be sent to hell. God the creator, owes nothing to the ones He created, not even the ones He chooses to be saved.

And so how do we call God unfair or unjust for saving some when we all deserve hell?

So salvation is not a matter of justice, it's a matter of grace.

Now, let me give you a few other verses that have to do with the doctrine of election, and you may want to underline or highlight these in your Bible. The first one is

John 6:44, No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

Romans 8:28, And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. 29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. 30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Ephesians 1:4, Just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

So there's nothing there to cause a controversy. That's as plain as your hand in front of your face.

But what is controversial, is how and in what manner God chooses those who will be saved.

Now, as long as there's been a church I guess, there's been at least two different views on the doctrine of election. One view, is what we call the foreknowledge view. This view teaches that God, through His omniscience, which means that God knows all things, past, present and future, also knows in advance who will in the course of time choose of their own free will to place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation.

And on the basis of that divine foreknowledge, God then elects these individuals "before the foundation of the world" to be saved. Again, knowing that they will make a decision to follow Christ.

Now, the second main view is called the Augustinian view, which essentially teaches that God not only divinely elects those who will come to faith in Jesus Christ, but that He also grants to these individuals the faith to believe in Christ.

In other words, God's election to save these individuals is not based on a foreknowledge of an individual's faith, even though He does have the foreknowledge. It's not based on that foreknowledge, but rather it's based on the free will, and the sovereign grace of Almighty God.

You say, well, why does that really matter?

Well, it matters because we need to understand who has the ultimate choice in salvation?

So does God have the choice or does man have the choice?

Well, in the first view, in the foreknowledge view, obviously man has control. His free will is sovereign, and it's man's will that becomes the determining factor in God's election. If a man is going to choose at some point and time in his life to be saved, then God before the foundation of the

world, based on His foreknowledge of what that man is going to choose, predestines that man to be one of the elect.

And so in this view, all God can do is to provide the way of salvation, which of course is through Jesus Christ. But ultimately the decision to be saved is up to the man. He must choose Christ for himself in order to make that salvation real.

But now, the problem with that view is that it undermines our biblical understanding of God's sovereignty. The Biblical view of God's sovereignty is that God is in control of **all** things. Not just some things, but all things!

But in this view where man makes the choice, this puts the Creator's provision and plan for salvation, at the mercy of the one to be saved. No longer is the creator sovereign, now the creature is in charge. And if God wants people to go to heaven, then His only hope is that man will freely choose His way of salvation.

And in reality, this view of election is not really a view of election at all, because God's not really choosing—He's only confirming what man will choose. And so it's man who is the ultimate chooser.

But now, if man is the ultimate chooser, then what do we do with these verses?

Romans 3:11, There is none who understands; There is none who seeks after God.

Now, if no-one seeks after God, then how can any person choose to be saved of his own free will?

John 6:44 again, No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day.

If we can't even come to God without Him drawing us to come, then how can we say it's our choice to come?

John 15:16, Jesus told His disciples, He said, You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you.

So how do you interpret that verse and still say that man does the choosing?

Here's another one.

Romans 8:7, Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. 8 So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Ephesians 2:8, For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

Now, in all honesty, I don't see how anyone can hold to that first view and believe what the Bible teaches.

In the second view, the Augustinian view, God has control; He is the one, who, of His own sovereign will, freely chooses those whom He will save. He not only elects those whom He will save, but He actually accomplishes their salvation by drawing them to Himself and by providing to them the faith to believe.

And rather than simply making salvation possible, God chooses those whom He will save, and then He saves them. And so it's this view, and this view only that puts God in His proper place as our Sovereign Creator.

Now, that said, the Augustinian view is not without problems of its own. Critics have long claimed and rightly so, that this view robs man totally of his free will. In other words, if God chooses those who will be

saved, then what difference does it make for a man to believe? Why even preach the gospel if man has no choice in the matter?

Furthermore, if God elects according to His sovereign will, then how can we be held responsible for our actions or our inactions?

Well, these are all good and fair questions that need to be answered. And a good passage to answer these questions is Romans chapter 9, which is the most in-depth passage of scripture in the Bible that deals with the sovereignty of God and election.

Now, to get the context we need to back up to Romans 8, which ends with a great climax of praise: Paul writes

Romans 8:38, For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, 39 nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Now, as Paul was teaching these truths about salvation in Romans, he was no doubt taking into consideration what the Jews in Israel were probably thinking about all this. After all they were God's chosen people right? That's in

Deuteronomy 14:2, For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

But now here comes Jesus and though He no doubt had come to the lost children of Israel first, and of course the church when it first started was largely Jewish in makeup, but the gospel was also spreading among the

Gentiles. In fact, it was spreading to the Gentiles even faster than it had spread among the Jews.

In fact, most Jews saw the gospel as a stumbling block and so they rejected Jesus. And in his mind, the average Jew probably saw what was happening and thought, well, God's plan to choose Israel and make Israel God's chosen people, well that plan has failed! Because most Jews had rejected the message of the gospel.

And so all throughout Romans 9, Paul is showing that God's plan and God's sovereign election has not failed! It's been in force since the very beginning of time, and it's all working out exactly like God planned.

And in **Romans 9:6**, Paul writes this.

6 But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,

In other words, Paul says, not all people who are of ethnic Israel and not all those who descended from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, are among the elect or the chosen of God.

And Paul shows that in the next few verses as he goes back in history how God had chosen Isaac over Ishmael, and how he had chosen Jacob over Esau. And how He had chosen them not because of their faith or their good works that they would do sometime in the future; He had chosen them even before they were ever born.

Romans 9:11, (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls)

And yes, God had the foreknowledge of what they would do or not do, that was not God's reason for choosing them. His choice had nothing to do

with what either of them would do in the future. And it certainly had nothing to do with the present because they hadn't even been born yet.

And then in verse 14 Paul says this to anyone who thinks that God acts unjustly by choosing. He says,

Romans 9:14 What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! 15 For He says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion." 16 So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. 17 For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth." 18 Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

And so God is sovereign over His creation. He's free to choose those whom He will choose, and He is free to pass by those whom He will pass by. And the creature has no right to accuse the Creator of being unjust. Even the very thought that the creature can stand in judgment of the Creator is absurd to Paul, and it should be to every Christian.

And if you read the rest of Romans chapter 9, Paul just continues to substantiate what he's already said.

Now, let me say this and then we'll come back next week Lord willing and pick this up again.

Our greatest error in considering God's election is to think that God chooses for arbitrary reasons. In other words, to think that He chooses or makes choices in a random way.

Now, we may not understand God's reasons for choosing, and they may be reasons He alone knows, but God's choices are not crazy, or without reason, or capricious. They make perfect sense knowing everything God knows and seeing everything God sees.

Ephesians 1:3, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, 4 just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, 5 having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, 6 to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.

According to this verse, the basis of our being predestined is not something that we can do or ever will do. It's based solely on God and His predetermination is based solely on His sovereignty and unchanging character.

Malachi 3:6, "For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

It's based also on His foreknowledge .

That's **Romans 8:29, For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.**

Ephesians 1:4, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love,

Also He chooses according to His plan and pleasure.

Ephesians 1:5, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will,

Now, in addition to all that, the Bible teaches that it's God's desire that all men be saved and come to repentance.

2 Peter 3:9, The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

And therefore He offers to all salvation; to everyone.

That's Titus 2:11, For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men,

And then lastly God has made Himself plain to everyone so that everyone is without excuse.

Romans 1:19, Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

So both election or predestination and personal responsibility or free will, are all true. God is completely in control, and humanity makes choices and is completely accountable for those choices.

I know many times we say we can't reconcile these two truths, but in reality we can, if we'll just be willing to receive and to believe what the Bible teaches. God elected those He foreknew, and He knew about His creation before it ever existed and based on His all knowing and perfect knowledge and wisdom, God determines everything with respect to His creation.

And if God is great enough to be the Creator of all in the first place, then He's not stumped or confused or intimidated in any way by the mutual existence of His sovereignty and His sovereign will and how it is to be reconciled with human volition, and choice, and responsibility.

And while we may not can understand or completely comprehend these things, we can rest assured that God knows what He's doing! And He knows best! Amen.