

Here/There—Week One

There's where Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico meet. It's called 4 corners, and it's the only place in the United States where 4 states come together like that. There's a monument there and a plaque that marks the exact spot where the four states meet, so it is possible to stand in four states at the exact same time.

Several years ago we were out west to see the sights. That evening we had driven through monument valley. Just picture Road Runner and Wile E. Coyote and you get the picture where we were. It was a beautiful place for a sunset. We then drove on up to 4 corners so we could be in four places at once, but unfortunately, it was late and it was closed, so all we could do is look through the fence. I missed my opportunity to be in four places at once.

Then I find out later, that the 4 corners monument is in the wrong place. Although it's location is amazingly accurate given the technology available to the 1875 survey that placed the marker, in exact terms the marker is off by about 1,800 feet to the east. So, even if the monument had been open I would not have been able to stand in four places at once.

How often do you have the opportunity to be in more than one place at the same time? Well, if you're a Christian, the answer is, "Every Day!"

We're beginning a new series this morning called "Here/There" because—in 1 Peter—Peter tells us that, as Christians, we live here, but we also live there. We are a part of two worlds at the same time. Let me show you what I mean:

*1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia
and Bithynia,² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,
through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his
blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. — 1 Peter 1:1-2*

Ok, there are a few things going on there. Peter identifies himself as the author of this letter. This is Peter, the fisherman, the brother of Andrew, whom Jesus called to follow him. This is the same Peter who walked on water. The very same Peter who sliced off some dude's ear when the soldier's came to arrest Jesus, and very same Peter who denied Jesus three times. But Peter was an apostle, which he was an ambassador, someone who was sent by Jesus to help establish the church in this world. He was chosen by Jesus, he was loved by Jesus and he was sent by Jesus despite all of his mistakes and failures.

He's writing this letter to Christians he who live in several provinces of the Roman Empire—Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia. If you look at a map of the ancient Roman Empire these provinces are all located in Asia Minor directly north of Africa across the Mediterranean Sea mostly in what is modern Turkey.

In this sense, they are residents, maybe even citizens of the Roman Empire. They would have had legal documents identifying them as tax paying citizens of cities like Ephesus, Miletus, Colossae, Philadelphia, Nicaea, and Laodicea. In that sense, they were here. They were a part of this world.

But did you notice what else he calls them? He calls them, “exiles.” The New American Standard translation says, “To those who reside as aliens.” The New Living Translation renders it this way, “I am writing to God’s chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of...”

Do you hear that? They are exiles, aliens, foreigners. All of these translations are trying to convey the meaning of the word *parepidēmos* – which is a sojourner, a foreigner in another land. A *parepidēmos* is someone who is just passing through. They’re only here temporarily, before they go back there. They are here, but they don’t really belong here. This isn’t their true home. They are citizen of somewhere else.

This is an idea Peter comes back to several times in this letter.

11 Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. 12 Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. – 1 Peter 2:11,12

Peter says that as Christians they are “foreigners and exiles.” It’s that same word *parepidēmos* again, but he uses another word *paroikos*. Literally, this word refers to someone who is temporarily dwelling with a people who are not his own. This would be a houseguest you have for only a couple of weeks. This is the person who rents the house next to yours for just a few months for a temporary job assignment. They may be great houseguests. They may be wonderful neighbors, but they don’t belong here. They are not staying. Someday they will leave.

What’s Peter trying to tell them...and us? Exiles? Foreigners? Sojourners? Aliens? Four times in just these few verses Peter is reminding us that we are Here & There. We live here, but we don’t belong here. This world isn’t our true home. This isn’t where our hearts long to be. It’s a nice place to visit, and we may enjoy it while we’re here, but our true home, the place we truly belong is there. We live here, but we are here just temporarily, because we really live there and we will live there for eternity.

Brothers and sisters, here is the reality we must understand as we strive to follow Jesus in this world– We are living in two places at once. We are here and there. So, how do we do that? How do we live here and there? Let’s go back to our text.

*1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia
and Bithynia, ² who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,
through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his
blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. – 1 Peter 1:1-2*

I. We Are Chosen by God

Let’s look at these verses more closely, because Peter packs a couple of helpful nuggets in these opening verses. The first thing you need to notice is what Peter calls them. They aren’t just Christians, believers, the church, or followers of Jesus. He calls them “God’s elect.” That means they are chosen by God. He picked them. He wanted them. If you are a Christian, you are

chosen. And you were chosen by none other than your Creator, the Almighty Ruler of all space and time and nature, the author of your salvation. He picked you.

In verse 2 he adds that we *“have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God.”* Think of what an honor it is to be chosen. To be chosen to for the homecoming court, to be chosen to receive a scholarship, chosen to be asked for you hand in marriage, chosen for the big promotion.

Do you remember playing in the playground as kid, and the kids decided to play a pickup game of baseball or basketball? There were always two kids who anointed themselves captains of the two teams and they began picking teams. I pick Johnny. I pick Steve. I pick Laura. If you have ever been the last kid picked, you know what it is like to not be chosen. But here’s the thing. God chose you. Before the foundation of the world, he chose you. When you’re struggling with life in this world, remember that God picked you for eternal life in the next world.

I know that this gets into some prickly theological stuff that Christians have been debating for centuries, and I’m not going to solve all of those arguments here this morning, but let’s just take what Peter says here and apply it to you.

If you are a follower of Jesus, God chose you. He picked you for heaven. How and why did he do this? He did it according to his foreknowledge. Foreknowledge– to know before, to know something ahead of time. He knew you before you were ever born. He knew you would repent of your sin. He knew you respond in faith, and because of that, he chose you.

But what if you’re not a follower of Jesus? What if you’re here this morning, and you’re not sure about this whole faith, Jesus, church, Christianity thing. There’s something about Jesus you like. There’s something about Jesus you want in your life, but you’re just not sure about the whole package. Does that mean God hasn’t chosen you?

No, not at all. God foreknew your whole life. God already knows all the parts you don’t know yet. God may have chosen you based on stuff you haven’t even decided yet. Jesus may already be preparing a place for you based on things you haven’t even done yet.

I don’t know what brought you here this morning. I don’t know the twists and turns your life has taken to get you to the point where you are now. But God knows. And know this. It’s not an accident that you’re here today. It isn’t just random chance that you met a particular person and had that specific conversation. You’re here for a reason, and a part of that reason may be that God has chosen you.

We know we can live here, because we have been chosen for there. You ever seen those bumper stickers that say, “You should see my other car”? You usually find them on a rust bucket Chevy Cavalier with 300,000 miles and it’s held together by duct tape, and one of the things holding it together is this bumper sticker that says, “My other car is a Porsche.”

Every Christian can go through this life with a sticker that says, “You should see my other home.” This is just a temporary home. This is just home away from home, but we’ve been chosen for someplace much better than this, and you should see who did the choosing.

II. Nothing Surprises God.

Let's talk a little more about this foreknowledge thing, because there is another lesson here. Something that will help us live both here and there. Nothing surprises God. God's not up there in heaven saying, "Wow! That election didn't go the way I thought it would go!" God never once has said, "I didn't see that one coming." God never turns on his social media first thing in the morning and is shocked by what he sees.

These Christians were going through some hard times. They were struggling. Some of them were suffering, and some of them were dealing with persecution. Peter wanted them to know that nothing happening in their lives was a surprise to God. In his perfect foreknowledge, he already knows it, and it's in the plan.

Now we have to be careful about where some people take this. Just because God knows everything, doesn't mean he causes everything. God is not the source of evil in this world. I don't believe that he's the heavenly version of the mean boy Sid in Toy Story with his great big magnifying glass in the sky and we're a bunch of measly ants and he's just up there randomly roasting us for kicks and giggles.

Bad things happen, and just because God knows it's going to happen doesn't mean He causes all bad things to happen.

But God can work his purpose through everything that happens, and there is nothing that happens that can stop his purpose. Even the most shocking, unexpected, surprising thing in your life was already a part of God's plan. He's already accounted for that. It's in the plan.

We can live here and there because we know that God has a plan to get us from here to there.

III. We are not alone

The third thing that helps us live here and there is found in the very next phrase in verse 2, "*through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.*" He talking about the Holy Spirit and his work in your life to make you more like Jesus. Sanctifying is just a fancy word that means to make holy. That's what he's doing in each of our lives. He making us more holy, more like Jesus.

Turn to a person in another row and tell them, "Boy, you sure have a long way to go." Okay, don't say that. There is an important point here. Each one of us is in process. None of us is a finished product. The Spirit is still working on me. He's still working on you, and we have a long way to go.

We joke about the weather here in Missouri. "If you don't like the weather... wait five minutes." We experienced that two Sundays ago. Snow on Sunday morning, seventy degrees the next day. The same is true for us. We're all changing. Impatient becoming patient. Critical becoming complimentary. Selfish becoming giving. Unfaithful becoming loyal. Angry becoming forgiving.

Jesus gave us his Holy Spirit to help us through this life and to prepare us for the next life. Listen to what Jesus told his disciples before his death and resurrection in John 14:15-18

15 "If you love me, keep my commands. 16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know

him, for he lives with you and will be[c] in you. 18 I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.

We are not alone. Jesus did not leave us as orphans, but His own Spirit lives and works within us. It's lot easier to live two places at once, if you're not doing it alone. Well, we have the Holy Spirit to help us live here and there.

IV. Obey Jesus.

The next thing he says is, *"to be obedient to Jesus Christ."* One of the keys to surviving here and making it there is to not just to acknowledge Jesus, or to believe in Jesus, but to obey Him.

One of the reasons so many people don't believe in God isn't because of the evidence or lack of evidence, but it's because they don't want to submit to anyone! They don't want to have to obey some higher power. They don't want to have to answer to an ultimate authority. I can do what I want. I can make my own choices. I'm not going to let some 2,000 year old book tell me how to live.

But here's what people don't understand about obedience. Obedience is never intended to keep us from something good; it is to keep us on the road that takes us there. Every command in the Bible does one of two things: One, it keeps you from something that would endanger you, or two, it guides you to something that makes you better. Jesus' commands are like the guardrails along a dangerous road. The guardrails don't keep you from having a good time, they keep you safe and alive and they get you where you want to go.

We want to kick and scream at authority. We don't like anyone else being in control That's probably why, when people curse, they often use God's name and Jesus' name.

Why not pick on someone else?

"Oh my Hillary!"

"Oh my Trump!"

"Oh Bill Bellicheck! What did you do that for?"

We don't do that because, even subconsciously, we know that even the president of the United States isn't really in control. But God's authority is never misplaced, misused, or misdirected. It is always for your ultimate good. When we obey Jesus it helps us live both here and there.

V. Allow grace and peace to be multiplied in us.

The fifth thing that empowers to live here and there is God's grace and the peace that comes from Grace. Peter ends his introduction with what became a standard Christian greeting, *"Grace and Peace be yours in abundance."* Literally it's, "May grace and peace be multiplied to you." It's not just a little bit of grace. Just a little extra. It's multiples more. Many times more.

Of course the grace here points back to what Jesus did for us on the cross. He paid the price for our sins by dying for us on the cross. This is what Peter is talking about when he refers just before the grace and peace to being sprinkled with his blood. Sprinkling with blood was something that happened at the temple when a sacrifice was made for sins. But Jesus was the perfect sacrifice. He paid for every sin. So how do you multiply that?

It multiplies when we allow the grace that was shown us to be shown through us to others. Do you know how amazing this world would be if we would just allow the grace we've experienced to be multiplied in and through us?

We sometimes show so little grace to people.

That's like standing, with our backs to Jesus dying on the cross, and telling someone, "You really hurt my feelings and I'm not forgiving you."

That's offensive!

Let me ask you a question: If we pulled up your social media posts and read some of them, would we all say, "He's allowing grace to be multiplied through his life"? "She's a grace multiplier!"

Let's all resolve to be grace multipliers! Multiplying grace helps us live here and there.

Peace follows after grace. Grace is the cause. Peace is the result. Where grace abounds, peace thrives. Where grace is stunted, peace shrivels. When we allow God's grace to flow through us, it brings an incredible peace. A peace with God and peace with others.

We can find a peace in this world even though it is not our home, because we KNOW we have a peace with God for all eternity. Listen to what Peter says next in verses 3-5.

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

That's the key to true peace, right there— a new birth into a living hope, an inheritance than can never perish, spoil or fade, it's kept in heaven just for you, and you are shielded in this world by God's power until it is time. That's pretty cool.

The Christians, to whom Peter was writing, knew that this world was not their home.

They had to endure some of the most horrific forms of persecution in history.

1 Peter was most likely written about 65 A.D during the reign of Nero. Nero came to power at 16. His mother secured the throne for him by poisoning his father. When Nero came to power he rewarded his mother by having her killed. Nero was afraid that his mother would take the throne from him the same way. This same fear inspired Nero to kill his own wife. He was crazy. In 64 Rome burned and a respected Roman historian, Tacitus, claims that Nero started the fire so he could rebuild the city in his own image. Historians today debate whether Nero started the fire. It doesn't matter. What matters is that Nero was afraid that the people thought he did. When the people became angry, Nero pointed his accusing finger at Christians and made them scapegoats. To give his accusations traction, Nero began one of the fiercest periods of persecution to punish Christians for their crime.

Some were crucified in the arena, others thrown to wild animals, and still others were dipped in tar and then burned alive as living tiki torches to light Nero's garden parties. The Apostle Peter

himself died during Nero's persecution. He was crucified upside down because he felt unworthy to die in the same manner as Jesus.

Even in this, God was not surprised. Even in this, these believers could have peace multiplied to them. Don't get too comfortable in this world. Don't feel too at home. This isn't where you belong. This isn't your true home. God's got something much better waiting for you.

We can live here because we have a home there. Don't forget where your true home is? Don't forget what you heart truly longs for? Don't settle for motel 6 when you have a permanent room at the Ritz Carlton, Heaven.

PEARLS BEFORE SWINE

