

An Easter People

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, I'm going to leave you to read the rest of these together and also to use the prayer notes there about our UCCF workers. Very busy time of year for them, and we want to have them very much in prayer at this time.
- But we're going to turn now to the Bibles and to our reading this morning, which you'll find in the first letter of Peter. If you have one of our church Bibles, then that is on page...
- What page is it on? 1,000 then? 1,014. Oh, yes, on the screens. 1,014. Or else it's pretty near the end of your Bibles, after the book of Hebrews and James.
- And we're beginning a new study in this book this morning that will take us, I think, through to the end of this term anyway. So this morning we're dipping our toe into 1 Peter, doing what Dick Lucas calls wagging on the T.
- Just getting ourselves a little bit oriented in the letter before we, next Sunday, take our first drive up the fairway of chapter 1. But we're going to read a little in chapter 1 and a little bit in chapter 2 and a tiny bit from the end of the letter this morning.
- [1 : 1 0] So 1 Peter chapter 1 at verse 1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion, the diaspora, in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.
- That's that whole northern area of Asia Minor, which we call Turkey today, bordering up onto the Black Sea. According to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctification or the consecration of the Spirit.
- And 4, obedience and sprinkling with the blood of Jesus Christ. May grace and peace be multiplied to you.
- Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
- To an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being kept through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
- [2 : 2 9] In this you rejoice. Though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials. So that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it's tested by fire.
- So that the precious genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.
- Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.
- Obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours, searched and inquired carefully.
- Inquiring what person or time the spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you.

[3 : 36] And the things that have now been announced to you through those who preach the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Things into which angels long to look.

Just turn over to chapter 2 at verse 11. These verses that begin really the second main movement of the letter.

Beloved, says Peter, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable.

So that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on a day of visitation. And I just turn to the last little section, the end of chapter 5.

Peter says, Peace to all of you who are in Christ.

[5 : 05] Amen. May God bless to us this, his. Well, if you turn with me to 1 Peter.

And as I said, we're going to be just trying to get a measure of the message of the letter as a whole this morning. What I call the theme tune or the melodic line.

So that as we come into the study proper, we will have a better idea of where we're going. A teenager who had a great time at Christian summer camp and is thrilled at the start-up again of the Church Youth Fellowship, comes back to school and is immediately plunged into the break-time chatter and the lunchtime banter, which, of course, is all centered around sex with lurid stories and lewd jokes and talk that generally just belongs in the gutter.

Everyone joins in, it seems, and they feel very much an outsider. They don't think like the others do. They realize that their discomfort is noted, and, of course, it's seized on, and they're made to feel like a misfit.

They're labeled as weird. They know that they should just ignore it, but the trouble is that so much of school life just reinforces that feeling of alienation, not least the dreaded PSE lessons where constantly their Christian convictions are shown to be quite foreign to that of everybody else's.

[6 : 54] A student in the first weeks of university finds it just as difficult. They come from a solid Christian home. They seek out the CU and a church fellowship.

But in their halls of residence, there seem to be very few, if any, whose lifestyle resembles theirs. And already they've noticed the whispers, the giggles, among others, as they pass the common room with their Bible in their hand on their way off to the CU meeting.

They've seen the disdainful looks that they sometimes get standing in the supper queue. They speak the same language as everybody else, but they just feel a lot of the time like they are, in fact, a foreigner.

Or an older person, now retired, having had, well, a churchy background most of their life, but never having really taken it too seriously, that person is brought by a friend to a quite different church, where they begin to hear the Bible being opened and explained every week.

And suddenly they begin to see things and understand things that they'd never understood before. And it really feels like, at long last, they've come alive spiritually.

[8 : 05] In fact, language that they'd previously thought of as just odd, suddenly sounds absolutely real to them, because they feel as if a whole new life has gripped them, like a new birth.

And they feel at last that they've come home to God, and they're thrilled just to be belonging to this family of faith. But the reaction of some of their friends and their family is extremely hostile and negative towards their newfound faith.

One of their friends, who regards themselves as a pillar of the Kirk, warns her that the church she now attends is an extremist place, a very dubious reputation, the last thing that she should be getting involved with.

Another tells her that that church is no longer considered mainstream at all, and in fact, the very fact that they don't meet in a proper building with a spire and a bell should be plain evidence of that.

Yet another friend urges her to come instead to St. Etheldred's, which is a proper church with pews and a choir, and with a minister who's very well thought of in the best circles, and who's just been made a royal chaplain.

[9 : 19] You've probably heard her on Thought for the Day, says her friend. Don't you realize that people are starting to say that you've gone all evangelical?

You don't do something about it soon, you're going to be stigmatized for the rest of your life. As her friend leaves her, shaking her head and tutting to herself, that lady feels very shaken, rather confused, and really quite ostracized.

Well, maybe one of these scenarios seems quite familiar to you, or perhaps you're just conscious of the very many other grievous trials that often make our Christian walk seem such a struggle, and so very isolating in the world of school, or college, or work, or the extended family, or wherever.

These things can so easily rock us, can't they? They can make us question our faith in God, and question our allegiance, and make us wonder whether in fact we have got something all wrong.

These feelings of foreignness and alienation, well, they're not new. And right back in the first century, the people that Peter wrote this letter to were acutely conscious of just such perplexing experiences.

[10 : 45] They seem to be suffering plenty of grievous trials, as chapter 1 verse 6 says. Indeed, fiery trials of various kinds mentioned in chapter 4, so much so that they were probably wondering if they had indeed made some major mistake to be signing up to a group defined by the name of this Jesus Christ, which seemed to bring nothing but trouble.

It's easy, I think, to imagine them asking the very same kind of questions that many Christians ask today in these circumstances. Why is it so hard to be a follower of Jesus?

Why is it so isolating? What am I doing wrong that things always seem to be this way in my life? Has God abandoned us? Has God angry with us?

Is it because we've not done something right? Now, those who had proclaimed the faith to them at the first had promised them grace from God and glory with God.

But where is that glory? All I see is mockery and derision leveled at my faith. All I feel is isolation and hostility.

[11 : 57] So maybe I have got something wrong somewhere. I'm sure that that's a very familiar feeling that we can understand as believing Christians in 21st century Britain.

I think it's just reinforced when somebody like the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, declared, as he did just a few weeks ago, that Christians are not facing hostility and persecution in this country, that he himself has never encountered that, and that any Christian who does think that just needs to grow up and stop being paranoid.

So clearly our school pupil, our student, our elderly new Christian, and many another, clearly they have got something wrong, haven't they? It's them who are at fault.

Their faith must just be too simplistic and too narrow. Or their experience of the Holy Spirit, perhaps, is not as glorious and fulsome as it ought to be.

And that's why their experience is so troubled. And that's why their life is not one of glorious peace with all the world around, obviously. Because clearly there does seem to be a version of Christianity that does offer glorious peace with the world, that brings acceptance and approval rather than enmity with the culture, in the sense of being foreign and being alien among our own kith and kin.

- [13 : 22] So which is the true Christianity? Which is the true church of Jesus Christ? Which is the true grace of God revealed in the gospel of Jesus?

Well, it is to answer exactly this question that Peter wrote this letter. Look at the statement right at the very end of the letter that we read in chapter 5, verses 12 and 13.

I have written briefly to you, he says, I, who, as verse 1 of chapter 5 says, identifies Peter as an apostle of Christ and as a witness of his sufferings, I have written briefly to you, exhorting and declaring that this is the true grace of God.

Stand firm in this, says Peter. What is the sign of a true Christian believer or a true Christian church upon which the true glory of the one and only God does rest?

Is it the one who is entirely at ease and at home with the culture roundabout, fettered by the authorities, moving easily with the times, morphing its ways to match the mores of contemporary thinking?

- [14 : 44] And so laughing off any notion of there ever being any hostility towards it because it knows nothing of hostility and only the honor of society. Is it that? A resounding no is what Peter says to that all the way through this letter with great clarity.

You're blessed, says Peter, and the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. When? Look at chapter 4, verse 14. When you are insulted for the name of Christ.

And when you suffer, verse 16, just for being a Christian. Friends, if you remember nothing else today, or indeed from all the rest of our studies on 1 Peter, will you remember this?

Especially if you are that school pupil or that student or that older Christian. Especially if you are experiencing anything like that, that has rocked you in your faith, that's made you unsettled and uncertain in that feeling of alienation.

This is the true grace of God. This is the true gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. That one cardinal sign of the spirit of God, the spirit of glory at work in your life, is that you will be mocked and derided and insulted for the name of Jesus Christ.

- [16 : 17] You will, your CU will at school or university, your church fellowship will, all of these will if they are truly faithful to the gospel of Christ.

The spirit of glory and the scorn of the world. And it's that tension always that marks real Christian faith and authentic Christian experience.

That is what this letter says. That is what this letter is all about. Peter wants these scattered and these perhaps very isolated feeling Christians to understand this, this inevitable tension that is at the very heart of the life of genuine Christian discipleship.

And he wants them to understand it so they will not lose heart, so they don't lose their balance, they don't lose their spiritual equilibrium in life. He doesn't want these Christians to be tossed about, up and down Christians.

One moment may be riding high because they feel that everything's marvelous, but the next minute plunged into despair because actually they realize life is grievous and hard and tough so much of the time.

- [17 : 30] Now the real Christian life, says Peter, will mean both glory and grief together, and indeed inseparable from one another. And that's because real Christians are both elect, special to God, and yet still exiles, still strangers and foreigners in this world that has rejected God.

And that is the theme tune that permeates this letter. You'll see it if you look at the very, very first letter, the very first verse. Peter writes to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion, the diaspora in these regions all around northern Turkey.

People who are chosen, elect as God's precious people, chosen for glory that is eternal, but not yet at home in that glory which is eternal, and therefore still very much feeling like aliens, like foreigners in a world all around that is opposed to and is hostile to any notion of the exclusive lordship of Christ, any notion of the obedience to Jesus Christ that verse 2 speaks of.

Now if you come to the end of the letter again, you'll see that Peter ends almost exactly with that same two-fold emphasis in chapter 5 verse 13. He uses coded language that they would all have understood when he talks of she who is in Babylon sending greetings.

Almost certainly is referring to the church in Rome where Peter's writing from. And it's a reminder that they too are in exile, just as the ancient people of God were in exile in Babylon.

[19 : 12] But notice they too are chosen, elect. The same word as in chapter 1 verse 1. His point is clear, you see. All Christ's people, whether they're in the relatively larger numbers of the church fellowships across a great city like Rome, or in these scattered, isolated places in the provinces, that all Christ's people share in the grace of God, which is the hope of a certain inheritance of God's full salvation, his glory that is to come.

And just because we are people of the unfading eternal kingdom of glory, we shall inevitably therefore feel estrangement in a world which is fading, in a world which is passing, in a glory which will not outlast the sun.

How can it possibly be otherwise? You see, there is an enmity with this world and an estrangement from this world that is established by the believer's very election in Christ.

And we need to learn to live so as to stand firm in the true grace of God, which alone will keep us for that glory to come, even amid the griefs of this world all around us.

So this is a letter to bring great encouragement, great strength by reminding us who we are and to whom we belong. And above all, in whose image we are being shaped, even now, as we walk with Jesus on the road to glory, which is a road that on this earth always leads in the direction of his cross.

[21 : 01] We are a people with a glorious hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on Easter day. Chapter 1, verse 3 reminds us of that living hope through resurrection, of an inheritance that is imperishable and unfading, kept for us in heaven.

And that hope is so glorious, he says in verse 6, that even now, in the midst of trials, we are able to rejoice with a joy which is inexpressible. We are an Easter people.

Hallelujah is our song. And yet, you see, just because we are an Easter people, a people who share in all of Christ's Easter glory, which is a glory, remember, on the other side of his death on the cross, because of that, there can never be anything trite, nothing superficial about the music of rejoicing that permeates this letter.

A year or two ago, Bob did a short series on 1 Peter in our Wednesday lunchtime congregation, and I think he captured its essence when he said this. It's a bracing letter filled with the smell of resurrection hope, yet underneath is the tread of the jackboot and the sound of the prison door.

It is a letter of joy. You will see that. Joy, nevertheless, full of the utmost realism, because Peter understands that Christians truly are an Easter people, that we are at one and the same time, that is, both an elect people special to God and yet still an exile people who are strangers on this earth.

[22 : 47] And so our song, although certainly triumphant, is never triumphalistic. And the truth is, it will just as often ring with grievous lament as with glad laughter, at least for a little while, as Peter says in chapter 5, until God does establish forever that unshakable kingdom of his glory.

So in our remaining time this morning, I want just to focus on this, this threefold theme tune, if you like, of the letter, which I think will help us if we're all just humming it in the background as we read and study this letter together over the coming weeks.

Three great themes that so dominate this letter of 1 Peter. And we need to grasp if we're going to keep our balance, if we're going to keep our spiritual equilibrium as real believers in the 21st century.

We need to know these three things. We need to understand them. First, that we are an elect people, that our privilege is being special to God, that we have been chosen to share in God's glory to come.

But second, therefore, that we are an exiled people whose path is to be strangers on earth. And therefore, we have been chosen by God to show his glory even now in this hostile world.

[24 : 16] But above all, to understand that we are an Easter people. And that means that our pattern will be to suffer with Christ.

That we have been chosen by God to be shaped through that suffering for the glory that is eternal. And it's this last thing, I think, which is the most profound and indeed the most encouraging thing for us all.

But let me start with the second point first because perhaps it's the thing that's most immediately obvious to us day by day as it was to Peter's first readers scattered around the edges of the Roman Empire. To them, it was very obvious that they were, and perhaps this was quite literally, an exiled people.

Their path very definitely felt like one of strangers on earth. It's clear that this people faced many hardships in their life. Chapter 1, verse 6, they were grieved by various trials.

Chapter 2, verse 19, they were suffering unjustly. Even suffering for doing good. And why should that be? Well, as we saw in chapter 4, verse 16, I think that sheds very clear light on it.

[25 : 34] It was related directly to their Christian faith. They were suffering often simply for being Christian. Now, the scholars argue, as scholars always seem to do, about the exact time and situation of this letter.

But it seems by far the most likely that it was written perhaps in the early 60s AD during Nero's reign, but before systematic state persecution under Nero really got underway.

It may actually have been written even quite a lot earlier, in the mid-50s. But either way, it seems the letter doesn't refer to imprisonments. It doesn't refer to martyrdoms.

And it does seem that what's in view at this stage of writing is really just the marginalizing of Christians. They were distasteful to the society they lived in.

They were being shut out of its institutions. They were facing increasing hostility just generally from the population. They were, verse 1 of the epistle, exiles.

[26 : 43] The word means outsiders or foreigners. It's the word actually used in Hebrews 11, verse 13 to describe all the saints of old. They were strangers and foreigners on earth.

It's used of Abraham back in Genesis chapter 23 where he was living as a foreigner among the Hittites. It means somebody who's not one of us. The focus isn't so much on foreignness as being transitory, the transitory nature of life on this earth.

The focus really is on the estrangement. The estrangement the man of faith feels in the midst of an unbelieving society and culture. As one writer put it, this foreignness is established by election.

It's because of their faith that they're foreign. Moreover, he tells us that these exiles are exiles of the dispersion, the diaspora.

Again, that's a term that's used in the Old Testament of the Old Testament people of God during their Babylonian exile. Now, as we've seen, Peter ends the whole letter with a reference again to Babylon.

[27 : 56] And it seems that he's using this language of scattering and exile in Babylon very deliberately. It may be because quite literally the experience of those he's writing to was like that.

One of the puzzles for scholars has been to work out who exactly these people are and how exactly Peter knew them. So, the areas that are mentioned in verse one are not areas that were evangelized by Paul in his early missionary journeys.

In fact, if you recall Acts chapter 16, you'll remember that Paul was actually prevented by God from going into these areas of Bithynia and Asia. We don't have any record of any of the other apostles evangelizing that area until much later when Paul, in his later missionary journeys, went to Ephesus and part of that area may have been reached through that mission.

But there is this question of how so many Christians seem to be already in numbers scattered over these apparently un-evangelized areas so early on. And it may be, in fact, that quite literally they had been exiled from Rome.

In other words, they'd been sent by the Roman authorities to colonize these distant areas of the empire. We know as a fact that during the reign of Claudius in the 40s and 50s AD, Roman colonies were set up in every single one of these places mentioned here.

[29 : 23] We also know that Claudius banished many Jews, many of whom would have been Christians. He banished them from Rome on several occasions. You can read about that, for example, in Acts chapter 18, explains why Priscilla and Aquila were in Corinth.

So it may very well be that when these colonies were set up, that many of those who were sent from Rome were literally the foreigners, the resident aliens, those who didn't have Roman citizenship, even though they'd maybe lived there all their lives, and therefore were right to be the kind of people that would be sent off to these places.

And perhaps later on, when Jews and many Christians were forcibly evicted from Rome, that they too were sent to these places, and that added to the numbers.

So here they were, far, far away from the place that they belonged for a very long time, literally a diaspora of exiles, foreigners in this pagan culture in Asia.

It may very well be that Peter had known them and loved them and served them as their apostle in Rome, and now he's writing to them far away, and he's interpreting their experience and showing that the very experience they've had in life demonstrates that they are at one with God's true people of old, his elect, his chosen ones, who have always been strangers and foreigners, who have often been exiles in a world that knows nothing and cares nothing for their God.

[31 : 01] See, that alienation goes right back to the very beginning. In Genesis 3, verse 15, it's God who says, I will put enmity between your seed and the seed of the serpent.

It's because of God's call on the lives of his people that enmity and estrangement with the world exists. It's inevitable.

And so ultimately, you see, all the social isolation and the political isolation that believing Christians and churches experience, it stems from that spiritual isolation, a separation that is caused by God who calls his people out of this dying world and into his everlasting kingdom.

And in a nutshell, friends, that's why it's hard to be a Christian. That's why we, just like these people that Peter is writing to, so often feel that we're strangers and foreigners, even in our own culture, even in our own society.

We are. We are. We are. And we're feeling that, I think, aren't we, more and more in the West today, even in our own country today. What I said about that pupil, about that student, about that older person, that's real, isn't it?

[32 : 22] We know that. Of course, we're not nearly secular enough yet for the likes of Richard Dawkins and the National Secularist Society, but it is certainly not in doubt, is it, that the one perspective on things which is increasingly marginalized and increasingly not tolerated in public life today in our country is that of the Christian perspective.

It's especially so. Wherever marriage or sexuality is concerned, that's why increasingly we find ourselves isolated, estranged. It's very interesting that the Roman Empire greatly prided itself on its tolerance.

But you see, it was a conforming tolerance. The great watchword was reciprocal acceptance. In other words, there's no place for exclusivism or exclusive claims.

And Christians, of course, were alarming precisely because of their exclusive claims about one God and one alone and one way. Christians were alarming because of their proselytism, seeking to share that with others, to convert them.

Again, as one scholar says, that was a shocking novelty in the ancient world. And so estrangement and conflict was inevitable for any truly witnessing Christian.

[33 : 53] Well, how little has changed. And so we too need apostolic guidance, don't we, about how to live as sojourners and aliens in a hostile culture today.

And in fact, the bulk of this letter, from chapter 2, verse 11, to chapter 4, verse 11, as we'll see, teaches all about that. And Peter's call to believers is not, as we might think, to withdraw from the world, but to witness in the world.

Chapter 2, verse 12, keep your conduct among the pagans honorable, so that when they see your good work, or so when they speak of you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on a day of visitation.

We're strangers on earth, yes, but we are chosen by God to show his glory in this fallen world. But to live like that, we need to be assured and to know who we are and whose we are.

And that's why Peter, first of all, before he gets into that instruction, reminds believers that we are an elect people, that our privilege is to be special to God, that we are chosen by God to share in his glory forever.

[35 : 11] Now, all the way through the letter, Peter brings us back to that wonderful reality. God's sovereign choice is the envelope, if you like, that encapsulates everything in this letter.

We've seen it in the first word. We've seen it in virtually the last word at the end of chapter 5. We are chosen by God. As we'll see next time, it's the first major theme.

He unfolds from chapter 1, verse 2, right the way through to chapter 2, verse 10, where again, this first chapter and a half is held in these brackets, if you like, of God's wonderful sovereign choice.

Chapter 1, verse 1, we're chosen according to God's foreknowledge. In chapter 2, verses 9 and 10, we're a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a people of God's holy possession.

We'll come to that, of course, in much more detail over the next couple of weeks, but do just notice today in verse 2, just notice how certain is this eternal glory. It's so important for us to grasp that.

[36 : 18] It's all there, actually, in verse 2, isn't it? Because it tells us that our election involves the inviolable action of the sovereign triune God in time and in eternity.

Our election is founded, he says, in the eternal choice of the Father. We're chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. And so God's plan and purpose for the whole of eternity overshadows and eclipses every current uncertainty and fear that we might have in this life.

And our election, he says, is realized by the effectual consecration of the Spirit, by the sanctification, the consecration, the setting apart as holy by the Holy Spirit.

That's what happened when we came to Christ, when we heard the living and the abiding word of God and we came to new birth. And, he says, our election is fulfilled, do you see, in the everlasting covenant sealed in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Christians are chosen for the purpose of, it's difficult to read this well in English, but obedience and sprinkling by the blood of Jesus. It's not two things, it's one decisive act he's referring to.

[37 : 37] He's reminding us back to Exodus chapter 24, the sealing of the covenant on Sinai when God's people pledged obedience to him and they were sprinkled with the blood of the sacrifices, bound to God as his people.

And now Peter's saying everything that that pointed to and prophesied, everything that the prophets spoke of, of the sprinkling of God's people forever through the cleansing of the blood of Jesus Christ, that is now fulfilled and sealed to you through the precious blood of the Lamb of God.

That's who you are, says Peter. You're sharing in the glory to come and it is certain, just as certain as is real, the eternal choice of the Father, the effectual consecration of the Spirit and the everlasting covenant in the blood of Jesus his Son.

So this present exile, he's saying, is not all there is. This is not as good as it gets. There's an inheritance of glory that is certain and that is kept for all who are bound to Jesus Christ by these eternal bonds.

that doesn't our school pupil and our student and our pensioner and everybody else, don't we need to know that in the midst of the estrangement and the enmity that we feel and that is very real day by day in the classroom and in the workplace?

[39 : 16] We need to know that. We are an elect people. But we also need to know something more because it's not just about balancing these two things, the present struggle against the glory to come which is greater.

It's about understanding how actually these two things fit together. It's how we make sense of them. And that's why in this letter, thirdly, Peter wants us to know above all that we are what I call an Easter people.

That our pattern is that we suffer with Christ. That we are a people chosen by God to be shaped through that suffering for the glory that is to come because it is our infinite privilege to be united forever with God's Holy Son, Jesus.

So that we are led to glory by him and with him. In this we rejoice, he says in chapter 1, verse 6, in this pattern that Peter comes back to again and again all through the letter but comes to a climax really towards the end from verse 12 of chapter 4 onwards and it's encapsulated in chapter 4, verse 13.

Just look there as we close. Rejoice, says Peter, insofar as you share Christ's sufferings that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

[40 : 51] You see what he's saying? We rejoice in these sufferings not just because grievous trials are only for a short while and the glory to come will be eternal.

That is true and that in itself is a wonderfully joyous thing. But it's much more than that. We rejoice, says Peter, because we are being shaped now through these very trials for that glory.

These very sufferings are the crucible and they are the only crucible in which Christ-like glory can ever be forged. These present battles that we face in life that bring such pain, these are the very things that are testing and refining us for praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Christ.

In other words, what God has promised us and has kept in heaven for us, he is even now achieving in us as he guards our faith through these very trials of life as strangers and exiles on earth.

Peter is saying God is like a master craftsman who is shaping you now through these very fires as the only way to produce that beauty and glory.

[42 : 20] God is so God is God is to be that way because, says Peter, that's the Jesus way.

For an Easter people, for a people united to their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, the road to glory is the road to Calvary. The road to the crown is the road to the cross.

There's no other road. That's a lesson Peter himself learned, you remember, right back at the beginning, painfully.

He wanted to think it could be different for Jesus himself. No, no, no, you'll never suffer. But Jesus said that's Satan's lies. He had to rebuke Peter strongly.

He said to him plainly, whoever would share in my glory, the glory of the Son of Man must take up his cross daily and follow me. The way of the cross is the only way to the glory.

[43 : 32] It's the only way, you see, that we can be shaped by the kind of glory that is Jesus' glory. And Jesus' glory is the only kind of glory that will outlast and outshine the Son.

So, friends, beloved, to use Peter's words, whether you are that isolated pupil at school or student at university or pensioner or anybody in between, when you are acutely conscious of these grievous trials in life and you feel deeply that your path is that of a stranger on earth.

Remember also that your privilege is to be special to God. You may be estranged in exile, but you are elect and you are chosen to share in that glory that is to come.

And above all, will you recognize in that the pattern that you are sharing in the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ?

It's not that God has abandoned you. It's not that your faith has failed. It's not that your understanding of Christianity is all wrong. No. It's simply that God loves you, that he has a hold of you, that even now he is shaping you in the glorious mold of his precious son, the Lord Jesus, so that you will shine forever with the same glory as the Lord Jesus.

[45 : 16] We are an Easter people. We rejoice in as far as we share in Christ's sufferings, that we may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.

This is the true grace of God. This alone is authentic Christianity. So, beloved, let us help one another to stand firm in this.

Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, how we thank you that our privilege is not only the extraordinary privilege to share in your calling of grace to eternal glory, but that it is the privilege of sharing in union with your precious and only Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, that we should be made like him.

Help us, Father, as we walk with him day by day in this coming week with all that this world may throw at us to make us feel estranged, foreign, not one of us.

Guard us and keep us in this faith, we pray. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.