

# Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good evening. For those of you who do not know me, my name is Luca, and I'm one of the members here at Bransfield Evangelical Church. As you might know, we're beginning a new series of sermons on the book of 1 Peter tonight.

1 Peter is a letter, it's in the New Testament, and it's a really powerful letter which has so much encouragement for us, I think, as we strive to live out our Christian lives in a broken world.

Today, as you know, we're going through the first 12 verses in the letter, and I think these first 12 verses in particular, they really overflow with positive language.

I think perhaps Peter has carefully chosen his words to set the tone in these first verses of the whole book, because the passages that we will be looking at in the coming Sundays, they do have some very direct challenges for us.

So I think this is probably why Peter opens the letter the way he does, as if he was saying, this is what I'm reminding you of in these first 12 verses.

[ 1 : 08 ] This is the reason why you should do what I'm going to tell you later. As I studied this passage, I was reminded of a painting by a French painter, Paul Gauguin.

He lived in the 1800s. And it's one of the many paintings that this art teacher of mine made a study back in school in great detail.

I'm really no art expert. And the reason why this painting came to mind as I read the passage and studied the passage is its title, which is quite a peculiar one.

It's really long, and it's made up of three questions. So the title of the painting is, where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? You might notice a running theme if you were here this morning with existential questions today, as Graham preached this morning.

But I think, as Graham said, if we're honest, we've probably asked ourselves these questions.

Maybe we still come back to them, perhaps from a different perspective every time I know I do, at least.

[ 2 : 20 ] And Gauguin's answers to these questions seem to be in this allegoric, quite enigmatic picture. No one really knows what all the different elements in the picture symbolize, so to speak.

But the most common interpretation is that this is where we come from, the baby on the far right.

And this is what we are, just people going about their lives in the middle, maybe picking fruits.

And that's where we're going, the older lady crouching on the far left. So why the painting? Because I think in these verses that we're looking at today, I think they give us the answers to these three huge questions.

But I'm convinced also that we will come to some wildly different conclusions than the painter.

Because unlike the painting, there's really nothing enigmatic in these verses.

In fact, I think the answers we're going to find are quite clear and transparent for us. Now, before we dive in, because this is our first Sunday in 1 Peter, I thought we would spend a couple of minutes just looking at the background of the book.

[ 3 : 38 ] So the apostle Peter writes the letter. He's one of the 12. And he's possibly the apostle that we often remember because he denied Jesus in a moment of weakness.

But let's make sure that we don't let this event in his life define the whole of his life. In fact, I think if any of us today are skeptical about the difference that the gospel can make in a person's life, then Peter's biography is a really good place to go.

We read in Matthew 26, as we said, how he hits rock bottom and he denies Jesus, who is about to be killed. But then just a few pages later in the Bible, in Acts chapter 2, the same Peter is preaching

to thousands of people in public, out loud, and 3,000 people that day after he preached or as he preached join the church.

That's how powerful the gospel is. And that's the same gospel that Peter is telling us about in these verses. As he writes the letter, Peter is in Rome, and he is writing to Christians who belong to different churches, churches in Asia Minor, which is modern-day Turkey.

And these people are being persecuted. Nero is the Roman emperor of the time, but his systematic persecution, which we might know of because it culminates in the great fire of Rome, that hasn't started yet.

[ 5 : 06 ] It's likely that 1 Peter would have been written just a couple of years before that, around 63 AD. But going by a few hints in the letter, it is likely that these Christians are victims of non-systematic persecution.

Because they live in provinces of the Roman Empire, therefore a pagan world, and therefore they stick out. They do not conform to the society that they live in.

This society that is becoming more and more hostile towards Christianity, this new philosophy that is getting more and more disciples. So people are skeptical, people don't trust Christians, and therefore Christians end up suffering at the hand of those in power.

Now I wonder, does any of this sound familiar to us? People around us, skeptical of Christians and Christianity? People around us, hostile even? This feeling of sticking out because of our beliefs, maybe at work or among family or among friends?

I'm sure it does probably for many of us. And so I think we can understand at least to a certain extent, probably what these Christians would have been going through. And that is great because this is a letter which will show us what it is like to live as Christians in a difficult world, just like we do.

[ 6 : 32 ] So I think it's safe to assume that these Christians that he is writing to, they are discouraged. They're probably wondering, what is the point of it all?

Has God forgotten about them? Does God even care about us? Well, I think God clearly does because he works through Peter so that they can receive this incredible letter, which is a letter of encouragement and a letter which reminds them of their identity as children of God.

But it's also a challenging letter, which will exhort them to behave as children of God. So thinking about us, I'm hoping that this is going to be for us a letter of encouragement, which will remind us of our identity as people of God and which will exhort us to behave as such.

And also before we dive in, I just wanted to say if any of us today don't think they're children of God, if any of us today are unsure as to what that possibly even means, then I'm hoping that we will find the answer in this book together.

So if we go back to the three questions, the first one we're going to begin with, and the first one we're going to look at is, where do we come from? And I think Peter gives us the answer to these questions in the opening and closing verses of the passage.

[ 7 : 57 ] So verses 1 and 2, and then verses 10, 11, and 12. Let's read verse 1 together again. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

I'll read it again. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect. This is who Peter says he is writing to. It's very fast words that he uses, God's elect.

Do you see what he is doing here? He's telling these Christians from the very start, God knows you personally. He always has. Imagine the power of a statement like that for someone who's feeling neglected by God.

Let's think about those moments in our life, for instance, when we asked ourselves if our life mattered to God. With just one word, Peter takes us right back to where we really belong.

We are God's elect. In verse 2, he says, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. So where do we come from is the question.

[ 9 : 13 ] Well, says Peter, we come from the family of God. God the Father, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ, see the Trinity, here in verses 1 and 2, they work together, and are still working together, so that these Christians may be saved, so that we can be saved.

So if that doesn't make us the opposite of neglected, then I really don't know what does. The triune God of the universe has chosen us, and he has made us his family.

Something that we will see as we go through the letter is that it is full of Old Testament language. As he writes to these Christians, Peter wants them to feel part of the family of God, despite the fact that they are Gentiles.

They're non-Jewish people. So it needs to be clear to them that through Jesus, as he says in verse 2, having been sprinkled with Jesus' blood, they are now part of God's people.

Christians are all part of God's family, whether they were born Jewish or not. And this probably sounds quite straightforward to us, but in the context of the first century, using words like this for Gentiles, it takes on a lot of significance.

[10:33] What they're hearing is, you are not nobodies. You are not less important than the Jewish people around you, because you are God's elect.

And then we have all of these Old Testament references throughout the letter, but in these verses we're looking at tonight, and in particular 10, 11, and 12, then he, Peter addresses even more directly this link between the Old Testament, the people of Israel, and these Christians.

Sorry, yeah, these Christians, these Gentiles, who lived after Christ. Because he's telling them that the prophets that God sent to the people of Israel hundreds and thousands of years earlier, these prophets who foretold the coming of Jesus, just like Isaiah, just like the passage we read, they were serving them.

They were not serving themselves. They were talking about things that would have happened in their time. So you unimportant non-Jewish Christians in Asia who are going about your ordinary lives, who are being looked on by the people around you, God himself, he sent prophets who would speak of things which were going to happen in your time, events which even angels long to look into, he says in verse 12.

The gospel is for you. There is one last little word in these verses which has a lot to say about where we're from and it's exiles in verse 1.

[12:09] These Christians feel like they do not belong where they live and there is a reason for this. There is a reason why they feel like outsiders and why they are being persecuted and the reason is because they actually really do not belong.

The same way that we don't. Paul says in Philippians 3, our citizenship is in heaven. Jesus says in John 17, we are in the world but not of the world.

We might have a British passport for many of you or an Italian one for me but these are just earthly temporary citizenships while we are on exile on this broken planet, while we wait to go back to our real home.

So I think it's quite easy to see how everything that Peter has said so far to these Christians is actually so, so relevant to us too. When our faith is causing us to feel uncomfortable, it's causing us to feel out of place.

Well, of course it does. We need to pause and remember where we come from. Yes, we're here.

Yes, we have families and friends and work but we are children of God.

[13:24] We've been saved by the God of the universe. His own son died for us and his spirit is at work in us now. And as Peter points out at the end of the passage, we're so fortunate to live on this side of history, to be able to hold this book in our hands and to witness God's grace through Jesus' death for us.

So when we are discouraged like the original readers of the letter, then let's look into this book and let's be thankful that God loves us so much that he sent Jesus to die for us.

Let's look up to him and marvel at his love instead of focusing on our difficulties here. Thank you.

Question number two is where are we going?

And we're going to look at verses three to five from this. These three verses in the NIV are split into sentences but in the original they are one long sentence and as I read them I thought this really is the gospel in one long sentence.

So I thought I imagined if any of us were chatting to some stranger at the bus stop and we end up talking about Christianity and then the question comes up they have no idea what Christianity is so they go like what is the gospel?

[14:57] And you think well this is my opportunity I can tell someone what the gospel is and then you turn around and you see their bus coming so they need to hop on on their bus maybe you have 20 to 30 seconds how do you answer a question like that?

You read these three verses. Let's do it together but more slowly so let's break it up a bit if you follow in your Bibles starting in verse 3 so God who is the father of Jesus in his great mercy and we'll come back to this he has given us new birth how has he done that?

Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and what is the result of this new birth? That we have access to our inheritance which is kept in heaven for us and what does this inheritance look like? This inheritance can never perish can never spoil can never fade and when are we going to get it? We're in verse 5 now in the last time at the coming of the salvation so when Jesus comes back there you go summary of the whole gospel So where are we going is the question this is where we're going it's the place where Jesus has already gone and where we are headed as children of God it's our inheritance we are family part of the family of God and that's what happens with family you get an inheritance it's such a it's a world with such a strong sense of belonging we are going to heaven I don't know if we say it to ourselves often enough I know I don't think about it as much as I should we are going to heaven heaven is being kept for us Jesus did say didn't he that he is preparing a place for us a place so so different from where we are now so so different that Peter uses these three amazing words to describe it in verse 4 and I realized as I studied the passage particularly the first few times it was just so easy to read quickly over it and overlook these three attributes so I thought we should stop and look at all three of them tonight and try and savour them I thought of just small sort of illustrations for each of them heaven is imperishable what does that mean?

[ 17 : 24 ] it means that there's no expiry date on it it's there to stay it isn't going anywhere heaven is waiting for us always and forever so we're trying to think what is like that?

is there anything in the world that we can all relate to that's always been there and will always be there and the best I could come up with maybe you will come up with something better but the best I could come up with was the sun I think no matter how far back in history you go we all take for granted that the sun was already there and if we think about the future probably we will always assume that the sun is there but even the sun we do know is burning away I think at the moment the estimate has got a few billion years to burn but heaven will survive even that it's really difficult to even comprehend and then still in verse 4 our inheritance in heaven is undefiled there is nothing anyone can do to spoil it to damage it to ruin it there's so much focus at the moment on our planet on how we are destroying it how humankind is spoiling it and the damage that we can make is so visible isn't it well not in heaven because no one can do the same to our inheritance whatever expects us is going to be pristine when we get there and it will remain intact we won't have to worry about sustainability in heaven our inheritance it cannot spoil unlike the earth we're on just now heaven is exactly like God intended it and then the third attribute Peter uses is unfading heaven doesn't fade it will not lose radiance it won't be like going to a party everyone's really excited at the start you meet your friends there's a lot to catch up on maybe you meet new people where are you from what do you do but then by then the party sort of peaked and then people start to get bored they start leaving and then the party dies well not the party that God has prepared for us heaven will not fade what a complete picture that Peter has painted for us do we see do we realize the grandiosity of what awaits us this description of heaven should really lift our eyes from our everyday lives and have us marvel as the beauty of what awaits us it's a place that's been designed by God himself it's a place that is being kept by God himself it's a place that hasn't been spoiled by sin so Peter is telling these Christians you come from the family of God and because that's your identity then this is where you're going so do not let what is happening here and now discourage you distract you just drag you down and forget where you belong you are on exile here your citizenship is not on this earth but look up instead that's where you belong and that is where you're going again here

I think there's one little word that we need to pay attention to and it's mercy in verse 3 great mercy Peter says because the description of such an astonishing inheritance it can be overwhelming it can make us wonder what on earth can I possibly do to deserve it well the answer is nothing we can accept it in fact we have if we want to enter this inheritance at all but we can't possibly deserve what God has prepared for us we are not going where we're going because we've been ticking off a few boxes on a to-do list we are going because God infinitely loves us simple as that verse 3 reads he has given us new birth into a living hope how has he done it is it maybe through our actions no it's not it's through Christ's death and resurrection nothing we can do will ever change the extent of God's mercy the last question that we need to answer then if we put it in Goggins words is what are

we we're going to look at verses 6 to 9 here so we've seen where we come from as children of God we've seen what inheritance expects us where we are going but what about the here and now what happens in the meantime what about all of those moments when we wonder why am I having to suffer for my faith does the Bible have any answer any answers for us in this passage let's look at verse 6 together though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kind of trials

Peter tells us that we suffer grief and maybe we're thinking thank you Peter I noticed and why would we be suffering grief why would we be enduring trials if not because we're broken people because there's something inherently broken with us and I think we all simply know that we're broken don't we I mean we have to live with ourselves every moment of our lives and I'm pretty confident we can probably think of even a few examples from just the past couple of hours which point to our brokenness and this is quite simply what we are we are broken people and we live in a broken world and as Christians these subjects us to all kinds of trials don't we know it all too well in a world which was so hostile to

Christianity in Peter's times and still is in our times we can think of outright persecution in countries like China for instance but also closer to home there's less violent or direct forms of persecution in our western countries in the form of stigma against Christianity maybe or the controversial topic of freedom of speech when it comes to certain issues I know of some of you who regularly face these problems in the workplace but there are two things that Peter points out for us about these trials there's good news for us the number one is for a little while in verse six our trials on this earth are temporary they're only for a time and we must not make the mistake of thinking that Peter is trivializing what Christians go through of all people he would be the last person to do that what Peter does with these verses instead is he is helping us lift our eyes let's think back to one of those three attributes of our inheritance in heaven we said imperishable now compare that this heaven that will survive the sun to what we go through on earth don't our human mortal lives pale in comparison and so should our trials if we look at things from the perspective of eternity eternity with God and then the second piece of good news is that these trials are necessary he says in verse six you may have had to suffer and then in verse seven he says these the trials have come so that and then he gives us an explanation which we're going to look at in a minute but just to say these words the way he words things that means that they are necessary what these

[ 25 : 38 ] Christians are enduring what we have to endure is no accident yes you have trials yes it is horrible yes it is frustrating yes it is difficult but they're not let's not make the mistake of thinking that these trials are the inevitable consequence of this world that's been forgotten by this God who's looking the other way God is in control they are part of God's plan and as such they are necessary because and he gives us the reason these trials serve a purpose just like Jesus' death on the cross did he didn't die in vain did he so where is this purpose verse 7 to test our faith to prove the genuineness of our faith and by doing so ultimately to strengthen it these trials strengthen our faith in a way that results in praise glory and honor when Jesus will be revealed that's in verse 7 and then to top it all off it's not in today's passage but

Peter will say in chapter 4 verse 14 if you're insulted because of the name of Christ you are blessed for the spirit of glory and of God rests on you so these trials what we undergo for being children of God they are a blessing because they strengthen our faith so when we're at work tomorrow and we're faced with what we can call persecution let's remember that this is part of God's plan and not because God acts like this mean fitness instructor who pushes us to our limits for the sake of it but because he knows the fruit that these trials will bring to our faith and to his kingdom so we're broken people who endure temporary and necessary trials due to our Christian faith but it doesn't stop there because what is the flip side of all of this it's that we have hope because we are believers because our hope is not in whatever is happening to us here on this earth our hope is in that inheritance to come and this hope

Peter says in verses 6 and 8 it produces in us great joy inexpressible and glorious joy we have faith in the triune God of the first three verses we have faith in a God who is our father in his plan of salvation through Jesus and in the God whose spirit is working in us this is all back in verses 1 and 2 and so Peter tells us what this faith looks like in verse 8 these Christians have never seen Jesus and yet they love him that's faith and the end result of it of this faith in verse 9 is the salvation of their souls nothing less so what are we we are broken people in a broken world who have to endure trials because of our faith and therefore lead miserable lives no because this same faith which

caused the trials in the first place it makes us overflow with joy at the thought of the salvation that it produced in us so as we wrap up

I have a couple of applications for us all to think about of the back of all of this the first one for any of us who are struggling with the idea of faith in the gospel if we're thinking yeah okay I'll believe it when I see it these Christians that Peter is writing to they are proof that faith is enough though you have not seen him you love him Peter is telling us that this book the bible is all we need it is enough evidence maybe we're doubting and we're thinking if only I had a sign but again here is our sign Jesus died for us and that's all we need and then for those of us who do believe then my challenge for us is where is our joy if I'm honest with myself as someone looks at me from the outside do they see a joy in

Peter's words so great in my salvation and the inheritance which awaits me that I can't even express it as we go about our life are the truths of the gospel what we focus on what is it the challenges that our Christian life produce and how sorry we feel for ourselves is that what we're focusing on instead are we using the bible as a compass to lift our eyes towards the God who chose us these amazing loving God that we're going to go back to for the rest of eternity and if the answer to these questions is no then can I invite you to grab someone maybe at the end of this service and just pray together let's pray together and ask God to direct our attention to the greatness of salvation and the greatness of what is to come let's ask him to give us perspective let's go back to the painting as we conclude so I ask myself in the light of everything that Peter tells us what is the problem with this painting and I think it's that it begins and end on earth it doesn't show us where we come from the foreknowledge of God the father and it certainly doesn't show us where we are going eternity in the presence of God perhaps it partly shows us where we are this broken confusing world but it doesn't show us the joy that we have in the hope of what is to come as [ 32 : 01 ] Christians how much bigger and just fuller and more beautiful is the picture that Peter has painted for us in these 12 verses it's infinitely bigger so as we study the rest of the book in the coming Sundays can I encourage you to try and remind yourselves of what these 12 verses are all about is where we are from and where we're going really is the premise for everything that is to follow and it's the only way that we can find the strength that we need to lift our eyes and to rejoice despite our trials in a God who is in control rejoice in our new birth through Jesus and in the salvation that it brings us let's pray father we come to you confessing that we more often than not probably look down rather than up we focus on our problems on the here and now rather than on your glory and what awaits us so we ask you to forgive us and we ask for your help to just lift our eyes and be joyful because we're part of your family and because you've saved us father so we just thank you because you're in control we thank you for your amazing plan and we thank you for Jesus' sacrifice and the salvation that it's given us amen