

Who Are We in This World?

I Peter 1:1-2

I Peter, Day 1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

- I Peter 1:1-2, ESV

U.S. Senator Tim Scott from South Carolina is the only black Republican serving in the U.S. Senate. In his first five years in the Senate, he was stopped and questioned at least three times, his identity as a senator challenged. He was essentially asked, "Who do you think you are?" Racial profiling is ugly, but it's still an ongoing reality some people face.

For Christians living in this world, we can often be on the receiving end of scorn and contempt. The world often looks at Christians and essentially asks, "Who do you think you are?" The world may label us as hypocrites, because we are religious and yet sinners. The world may call us intolerant haters, because we cannot approve of the things the world approves.

What should matter to believers is not what the world says we are but what God says we are in this world. In the opening verse of I Peter, God calls us "elect exiles of the Dispersion." What's interesting about this title is that it's very Jewish, but it's being assigned to a mostly non-Jewish group of Christian believers. As Peter will make very clear later in his letter, this is very intentional, as believers in Jesus are the heirs of all the covenant promises and identity the Jewish people of God had under the old covenant.

But what is this identity? "Elect" means chosen by God. If we believe in Jesus Christ, it is because God has chosen us to be His own. "Exiles" means people living in a land that is not their home. This world is just the site of our pilgrimage; our true home is with the Lord. "Of the Dispersion" means we are scattered as a people among the peoples of the earth. Rather than having a particular nation-state on earth that is ours, we are a scattered people, spread among the peoples of the world.

How did we become this special people, the "elect exiles of the Dispersion"? It was "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." Foreknowledge is not fore-sight, as in God looking ahead and seeing what is going to happen. It refers instead to God loving us in advance, before we were even born. It's a powerful word that tells when we were elect (before the creation of the world) and why we were elect (because God loved us).

That's a pretty wonderful identity: Loved by God before the world began and chosen by Him in love, yet for a time living in a world that's not our home and scattered among people who are not really our people. Learning to see ourselves as we really are in the eyes of God is key to living faithfully in this crazy, fallen world. Let's not let the world define us, but let's walk in the truth of who God has made us by His grace!