I want to begin a series of messages from 1 Peter entitled "Keeping Hope Alive". Before I get into the heart of this first message, I want to share with you some background information about 1 Peter. The Apostle Peter was writing to a group of Christians that were being persecuted because of their faith. The Apostle Peter wrote his letter around 64 AD during the early reign of the Roman Emperor Nero. At the birth of the Christian church the Christians had little to fear from the Roman government. In fact in the book of Acts it was the Roman magistrates and the Roman soldiers and officials that rescued the Apostle Paul and some of the other Apostles from the fury and anger of the Jews and gentiles. However, when Nero became the Emperor of Rome this changed. History tells us that on July the 19th in 64 AD that a fire broke out in Rome. The Roman population had no doubt as to who started the fire and put the blame on Nero. Nero had a passion for building and the people believed that he started the fire to burn Rome to the ground so he could rebuild it. The anger and bitterness of the people against Nero was so great that Nero had to divert attention away from himself: A scapegoat had to be found and the Christians became the scapegoats. This was the beginning of suffering and persecution of the Christians from the Roman government.

All of us can relate to 1 Peter because it is about problems which we encounter on a regular base. As we study the Apostle Peter's letter to these suffering Saints, we will discover that these problems are not accidents but appointments. Appointments arranged by our Heavenly Father to help us grow and develop into mature responsible Christians. Being a Christians does not eliminate our problems. In fact, many times the problems that we encounter happen because of our Christian faith. Why? Because we refuse to be conformed to the attitudes and ways of the world. Problems can cause us to become very discouraged even to the point where we lose hope and that hope dies. That is why we need to take and in depth look at 1 Peter. The Apostle Peter wrote his letter under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to encourage, strengthen and to keep hope alive in the heart of these suffering Saints.

Hope is essential to our survival. I like what Warren Wiersbe has to say about hope. He says, "Hope is not a sedative; it is a shot of adrenaline, a blood transfusion. Like an anchor, our hope stabilizes us in the storms of life; but unlike and anchor, our hope moves us forward, it does not hold us back." Hope is just as important to our lives as the air we breathe. Without we would die.

It is Hope that keeps us going:

- When we are trapped in a tunnel of misery, hope points to the light at the end of the tunnel.
- When we are discouraged, hope lifts our spirits.
- When we are tempted to quit, hope keeps us going.
- When we lose our way and confusion blurs our destination, hope keep us from panicking.
• When we must endure the consequences of a bad decision, hope fuels our recovery.

• When we fear the worst, hope brings reminders that God is still in control.

Webster defines hope as: Desire accompanied by expectation of or belief in fulfillment... to desire with the expectation of obtainment... to expect with confidence.

We all are different in many ways. We do not look alike. We have a different taste in the foods that we eat. We come from different backgrounds. Our financial and social statuses are different. Our gifts and talents are different. But there is one thing that we all have in common. We all have those tough moments in our lives that cause us to become discouraged. We need to study the Apostle Peter's inspired letter to keep hope alive in our hearts.

In the first two verse of his letter, the Apostle Peter shares with these suffering Saints three reminders about them that will encourage them to keep hope alive in their hearts. These three reminders are just as important to you and me today as they were when they were first penned. Let's examine these three reminders.

I. WE ARE THE CHOSEN PEOPLE OF GOD:

1 Peter 1:1-2 1 Peter 1:1-2 (KJV) 'Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.

A. He reminds them that they are "STRANGERS" in the world that they are living in. Listen to how he addresses them, "to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia:" Because of the persecution they were scattered throughout what is today our modern Turkey. When the persecution broke out, Christians were being arrested, tortured, beheaded, fed to wild animals, and even crucified for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. When arrested they were given the opportunity to choose between the Caesar or Christ. If they chose to deny Christ and be loyal to Caesar they would be released and allowed to live. If they chose to remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and deny Caesar they were tortured to death. Because of the persecution the Christians were forced to run for their lives.

The word Stranger comes from a Greek word that means resident foreigner: - pilgrim, stranger. It describes a person who is a foreigner living along side of the native people of the land. Peter was reminding the Saints that the land that they were living in was not their homeland. They were just pilgrims living temporally in this foreign land.

As Christians we need to remember that we are strangers in this world. This world is not our home. We may be in the world, but we are not of this world. We are the chosen people of a Holy and loving God living in a strange land. Because we are Christians
living in a strange land, our values and standard of living is different than that of the world that we live in. As a result of this we will be talked about, mocked, ridiculed, and sometimes persecuted. When this happens and we are tempted to become discouraged, we need to remind ourselves that we are God's chosen people. We need to remind ourselves that our citizenship is not of this world, our citizenship is in heaven. We are just temporarily living here until the Lord Jesus returns to take us to our Heavenly Home.

When an individual is saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ their citizenship is transferred from this world to Heaven. As Strangers there are a few truths that we need to look at.

1. We must set our minds and affections on Heavenly things.
2. We must maintain our Identity as the People of God. Refusing to be corrupted by the values and systems of the world in which we live.
3. We must be an example and a reflection of the King and Land that we represent in this strange land that we are temporally living in.

B. Elect According to the foreknowledge of God. The word elect means chosen. Here the Apostle Peter specifically reminds them that they were chosen by God. Our election or the act of God choosing us originated in the heart and mind of God. We were not chosen by our church organization or the will of the flesh. We were chosen by a caring and loving God.

I am not going to get into the theological debate about the Election of the Saints because time will not permit me to do so. Allow me to explain what it means to be chosen according to the foreknowledge of the Father. It simply means that God the Father took the initiative to choose us before we could ever do anything to deserve His choosing us.

A little boy was being teased at school because he was adopted. He put up with the teasing and the jokes very patiently until he could no longer endure it. One day in self defense he blurted out to his persecutors, "You can say what want. All I know is that my parents CHOSE me. Yours couldn't help having you."

What is really encouraging is that God knew us and still chose us to be a part of His Holy people. God knew about our sin, our corruption, our short comings, and failures and yet He took the Initiative to choose us to belong to His family.

Doesn't that just rekindle the flame of hope in your life to know that we are chosen of God?

Before I move on, I want to say something without getting into it to deep. There is teaching that has been going around for centuries that says that some are chosen to be saved while others are chosen to be lost. No where in the scripture is this taught: No one, and I repeat NO ONE is chosen by God to die without Christ and go to hell. God's word is clear that WHOSOEVER will, may come. God's word is also clear that we are to make our election and calling sure. In other words when you feel the tug of God on your heart
it is up to you to respond. God's desire is for everyone to be saved. He offers forgiveness to everyone, but not everyone will accept His offer of grace. The Bible says, "Now, he (God) commands all people, everywhere to repent." (Acts 17:30) "He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (II Peter 3:9)

Let me move on to the Second Reminder:

**II. WE ARE THE CONSECRATED PEOPLE OF GOD:**

The word Sanctification means to make holy; to separate from the world and consecrate to God. 2. The act of consecrating or of setting apart for a sacred purpose.

The Apostle Peter says that the act of sanctification is brought about in the lives of those chosen of God by the creative power of the Holy Spirit. This was a reminder that the work that was going on in their lives was the result of the work of the Spirit. They were being changed and becoming more and more like Christ. Peter is telling them that as they go through the problems of suffering and persecution that the Spirit of God will use this to purify them. During our pain, the Holy Spirit is working in us to mold, shape and mature us. Every circumstance, every sorrow and every hardship is a tool that is used by the Holy Spirit to accomplish maturity in our lives. We will be able to see this more clearly in later messages.

The Holy Spirit is essential to every part of the Christian life. It is the Holy Spirit that awakens within us a desire to be saved. The Holy Spirit gives us the desire to know God and His goodness. The Holy Spirit draws us into a saving relationship with God by convicting us of our sins and brings us to Calvary's cross. It is the Holy Spirit that changes us from a sinner to Saint. It is the Holy Spirit that frees us from sin and liberates and enables us to live for God.

We must understand that the Spirit of God is presently active in our lives to finish what was started when we were saved.

Philippians 1:6b that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

Unless you are already perfect like Jesus, you are still a work in progress. Do you remember the song we taught our children? He is still working on me. What is the Spirit of God working in us to do?

The Spirit of God is working to create an obedient heart within us. Peter said, "Through sanctification of the Spirit unto obedience. Obedience conveys the idea of listening and submitting to what is heard. It involves a change of attitude in the life and heart of the Christian.
When we are hurting and discouraged it is hard to listen to and submit to what God is saying to us through His word. In the midst of our pain, it is hard to listen to God let alone obey Him. That is when we need the quicken power of the Holy Spirit. With the assistance of the Holy Spirit, we can listen to and obey what God is saying to us.

The moment you gave your heart to the Lord Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit took up residences in your life. He lives in you to work in you the will and purpose of God. The Holy Spirit is not like employees that come and go to a job. He is constantly at home within us because He Lives in us. He is always there to help us to listen to God and to strengthen us to obey Him.

Before going to the next point let me say that we have "BEEN CHANGED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT!" The third reminder is:

III. WE ARE THE CLEANSING PEOPLE OF GOD:

Notice the last part of verse two, "Sprinkling of the blood Jesus Christ."

As I thought of this phrase, I was reminded of the Old Gospel song that we sometimes sing, "Nothing But The Blood." Allow me to share with you the first verse and the course.

What can wash away my sin, nothing but the Blood of Jesus?
What can make me whole again, nothing but the blood of Jesus?

O precious is the flow that makes me white as snow.
No other fount I know nothing but the blood of Jesus.

Praise God for the precious cleansing blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. The blood of the spotless Lamb of God was shed for our sins so that we could have cleansing and forgiveness of our sins. God's word tells is that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. The shed blood of animals was not sufficient to cleanse us of our sin. The blood of the Old Testament sacrifices could not remove the stain or guilt of our sin. But the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ can both cleanse us of our sin and remove our guilt. The blood of the Old Testament sacrifices could not secure for the one who offered it the eternal blessing of salvation. But the blood of the Lord Jesus secured for us a far greater plan of salvation and rewards.

The Sprinkling of the blood is reference to the cleansing that we receive when we come to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Old Testament makes references to the Sprinkling of the blood on three different occasions. These references give us a picture of what takes place in our lives when we are saved. Let's take a quick look at this threelfold picture that we have in the Old Testament and see how they apply to us under the New Covenant of the New Testament.
1. The first reference is found in Exodus 24:3-8 where God through Moses sealed His covenant with His people by the sprinkling of the blood, both on the alter and on the people.
   Christians under the New Covenant are sprinkled with the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit sealing God's New Covenant with them.

2. The next reference we see is in Exodus 29:21 at the ordination of the Priest.
   Under the Old Covenant only the decedents of Levi could be ordained as priest. Under the New Covenant every Christians is ordained as a priest. 1 Peter 2:9 says that we are a royal priesthood. Under the Old Covenant only the priest could be an official in offering a sacrifice to God in the temple and only the high priest could go into the Holy of Holies. Under the New Covenant all believers have the privileges to offer up sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God. Also, under the New Covenant all Christians have access to the throne of God through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. The third reference is found in Leviticus 14:6-7 where we find the cleansing ceremony of the leper who had been healed of leprosy. Christians have also been healed and cleansed of a deadly disease, the deadly disease of sin. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ heals us and cleanses us from deadly power and punishment our sin. When the Lord Jesus returns for us we will be completely and totally delivered from the presence of the sin that is in this world and the threat of sin in our own lives.

While we are still in this world and living in this fleshly body, we still have the opportunity to sin. Many times, we do sin, but thank God for 1 John 1:9

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. The same blood that cleansed us and brought forgiveness of our sin at the beginning of our salvation can be appropriated and applied through our journey through this strange land that we are living in.

The Apostle Peter then says, Grace unto you, and peace be multiplied. Grace and peace are the two things we need as we live our as strangers in a strange land. Grace is God's unmerited favor and peace is the result of God's grace in our lives. The more grace you and I experience the more peace is multiplied in our lives.

Conclusion: We are strangers living in a strange land. This world is not our home because we are: The chosen people of God; Consecrated by the Holy Spirit and Cleansed by the Blood of Jesus Christ. Let these three reminders rekindle the fire of Hope in your life and keep it alive until the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Before closing I want to give everyone an opportunity to come to the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are not 100 percent certain that you would go to heaven if you were to die or if the Lord Jesus returned, please come and receive His gift and offer of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation can be yours today if you will accept it. You can know the joy of sins forgiven, of guilt and shame removed by accepting God's gift of salvation.