

**Oct 6<sup>th</sup> 2013 1 Peter series #1 "Encouragement For The Journey" 1 Peter 1:1-12**

This morning we begin a study of a letter written nearly 2,000 years ago to groups of Christians living in parts of modern day Turkey. A letter that was inspired by God the Holy Spirit and preserved by God in His Word, which means that we can be confident that it has something of great importance to say to us today.

This in itself is an immense miracle of God's grace, for the people addressed in this letter were extremely different to us in terms of social position and the times in which they lived. They struggled with things as Christians that we have never experienced and they were treated by others in their society in a manner which the majority of us never have had to contend with.

Yet despite the differences they, like us, were Christians. Followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Children of the Father. Indwelt by the Holy Spirit. And they like us needed to be encouraged to persevere in their journey of Faith through this life unto eternity. And this letter is first and foremost a letter of encouragement written by one who himself had been encouraged when he was at his lowest point, by Jesus Himself.

For the very first word tells us that this letter came from Peter. From the rock. Yet everyone then who had heard about Peter would have known about the time in his life when he had acted more like a bowl of jelly than a rock. When he had witnessed the pain inflicted on Jesus by the Jewish soldiers and had denied knowing Him. And after the crucifixion Peter had obviously felt so guilty that when he realized that the resurrection was a possibility, he would have been scared stiff that he had blown his chance of a relationship with Jesus forever.

Why would a triumphant Jesus want a loser like him in his kingdom? And then the women returned from the empty tomb with their message from the angel. ***"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. <sup>7</sup> But go, tell his disciples and Peter"***

Peter knew what it meant to let Jesus down when the pressure was there, and he knew what it meant to receive encouragement from Jesus when he didn't deserve it and when the future looked so dark and bleak.

So being led of the Spirit, Peter, in about AD 62, just a year or so before he was crucified by the Roman Emperor Nero as a martyr, sent this letter to Jewish Christians who had initially been scattered from Jerusalem because of persecution, and were now beginning to experience it all over again from the insane and wicked Roman Emperor. And he writes as an Apostle. Proclaiming a message that was not from Him but from Jesus. And this is how he begins.

***1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,***

***To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup> 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.***

The opening description of those to whom this letter was written contains both good and bad news about their situation.

The good news was that they were the elect. They were the chosen of God. He alone had saved them, they had not saved themselves. God had first called them into His love and Grace. He had prompted their faith by His Holy Spirit. He claimed their allegiance as His children. And He would never let them go.

(Just imagine that you have been befriended by this extremely important and powerful person.....)

(This picture hangs in my office.....)

If you today know in your heart that you are a Christ-one. Know that you have received a forgiveness from sin that is awesome because at some point in your past history you responded to the touch of God's love upon your life. Then you too are elect. And when God looks upon you, as He does constantly, the foremost thing He sees is not your mistakes, your failures, your inadequacies or even your good works. He sees you as chosen. As elect.

He sees you as a picture that has already been painted. A tapestry that has already been completed. A prince or princess. A son or daughter.

The initial readers of Peter's letter needed so much to hear that description of themselves, because the news that follows concerning their current life situation is not good.

Peter refers to them as ***strangers in the world, scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.***

Now there is a sense that every Christian is a stranger in this world. As the old Gospel song says;

**This world is not my home,  
I'm just a passing through;  
My treasures are laid up,  
Somewhere beyond the blue;**

**The angels beckon me,  
To heaven's open door;  
And I can't feel at home,  
In this world anymore.**

But the Greek word stranger that Peter uses here and in two other places in this epistle, was used then to describe people that were rather like refugees today. They were there because they had no other place to go. Forced to leave the land of their birth they had been scattered through all these other places where they were seen as temporary residents. Their rights were few and they struggled to be accepted. Poverty and rejection were their close companions.

Along with that they were beginning to know the impact of the Roman Empire's persecution of Christians. Life for the stranger in those lands was already hard but it was that much worse for the professing Christian. And no doubt they were starting to wonder whether what they had in Christ was worth all they were suffering. Whether in fact God was still with them or maybe He had judged them for their mistakes; for the times they had given into the pressures around them and let Him down; and had abandoned them.

They needed to hear from Jesus that they were the elect, and nothing would ever change that. And Peter goes on to emphasize that when he says of them in v2. ***You who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood:***

Note how God the Father, Son, and Spirit are all involved in the life and destiny of every believer.

We are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.

The Spirit has already done His sanctifying work in us by setting us apart as belonging to God. He has put God's seal of ownership on us.

And the Son has sprinkled us with His blood that so completely cleanses us that we have the privilege of being obedient to His will for us. It doesn't matter who we are, or where we live, or how talented we may be, Jesus has a plan and purpose for our life.

Those people living in such a difficult situation then needed to be reminded of that, so that they could keep on doing and being for Jesus because God was working through them. He was still with them for they were just so important to Him and He was using their obedience to complete His plans for this world.

And even though our situation is nowhere near as drastic and terrible as theirs, there are for us all times when being a Christian is tough. And even more times when we forget how special we are to God and how living for Jesus is actually more important than anything else we can ever do with our lives.

And that is why we need to hear again that we are called, we are sanctified, we are cleansed and therefore obedience to Jesus is not a choice, it is a requirement.

We can in fact learn a good deal from those ancient believers who had it so hard yet were encouraged by this letter to persevere in their acts of obedience for their Saviour.

And it was for them that Peter prayed a blessing that he knew would come to pass: **"Grace and peace be yours in abundance."**

Note the words...***be yours in abundance. Be multiplied to you.***

Grace is all the goodness of God's love poured into the believer's life without them needing to do anything to deserve it. It's God's help for everyday.

Peace is the sense of quietness in the midst of the storm. Of well being despite the pressures that come so quickly. Peter knew just how much they needed it, and He knew it would be theirs in abundance.

And it's the same promise for us. Our circumstances are not as tough as theirs, although I know some of you are having it hard at the present. But when we are obedient that abundant grace and peace will be ours too.

And herein is our challenge. For we have to admit I'm sure, that at times we hold back full obedience from Christ because we sense that what He wants from us is hard. It will involve inconvenience, maybe suffering. The demands and the cost will be high. We feel that we are not able to do what He wants.

So we back away and miss out on His abundant Grace and peace, and we may at times wonder why.

This morning the Lord Jesus reminds us who belong to Him that we are chosen and called to be obedient. Not just when it suits us either, but in all things. And His promise is that when we are obedient His grace and enabling will abound, and we will know his peace more than ever before.