

I Peter 1:1-12

Greetings in the blessed Name of our resurrected Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I will, the Lord willing, have the opportunity in this and following broadcasts to introduce to you the two beautiful epistles of the apostle Peter. I will be using the King James Version of the Bible. I would request your active participation in this study. I would suggest that you carefully read the section we will examine. You might also underline some of the key words and phrases in the passage as we discuss these. Make note of the cross-reference texts mentioned. And if you have yet unanswered questions, I would be more than willing to try to answer them for you.

The first epistle of Peter was written by that great apostle of Jesus Christ. He identifies himself as such in the first verse. Peter was the disciple whose name was changed by Christ--^{from Simon to} Peter, that is, a rock. But Peter did not always appear to be rock-like. There was the ~~one~~ occasion when he made the beautiful confession, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God." But then there was also the time when Christ was on trial, that Peter ~~had~~ denied his Lord three times--declaring that he never knew Jesus. Yet Jesus had restored Peter and, after Pentecost, had sent him to the Jews but also to some gentiles to preach the gospel.

Concerning the epistle itself, it appears to be written about 65 A.D.--during the reign of that wicked Roman emperor, Nero. It was a time during which the church needed special encouragement and assurance--as many would have to suffer for the sake of their faith in Jesus.

Peter writes to a specific group of believers in Asia Minor, located in the various provinces mentioned in the first verse. He addresses the "dispersed"--a term which often applied to Jews who were scattered through many nations. Here, however, it refers to the children of God who live in many places on this earth as pilgrims. Their home is in heaven--and now, for the present time, they are scattered all over this earth.

The central thought of this epistle is the emphasis upon "suffering saints". In relation to that, Peter points out three principal truths: the fact that they are pilgrims; the fact that they have a living hope; the fact that they have an inheritance. Notice, as we study the epistle, how these thoughts are interwoven through the whole of it.

The first chapter in this letter can be divided into three sections. The first two ~~verses~~ verses constitute the greeting from Peter to a specific group of believers. Verses 3 through 12 emphasize the hope and the inheritance of God's children. Verses 13 through 25 apply the ~~th~~ truths of "hope" and "inheritance" to the lives of God's people. In this broadcast, I'd like to direct your attention to the first 12 verses of I Peter 1.

The first two verses of the chapter are the address of the letter. Peter writes to "elect strangers". The term "elect" emphasizes the fact that God has chosen His people, and that too, from before the foundation of this earth according to Eph. 1:4. Eternally God chose a people in Jesus in order that they might be holy before Him. Because God has chosen these, they are also "strangers" or "sojourners" on this earth. These now have their citizenship papers in heaven. While they live on the earth, they remain strangers or pilgrims. This fact that God's people are strangers on this earth is emphasized in several ways throughout the whole letter.

All of this is according to the "foreknowledge" of our God--He determined all this eternally for the glory of His Name and the benefit of His people. We might sometimes complain because, as Christians, we are strangers on the earth. We don't like being despised or mocked by men. Yet God, in His eternal wisdom, determined that we would be such. And the more one recognizes that he is a stranger on the earth, the more also he will look for the time that he can go home into the final kingdom of God.

Peter further reminds these elect strangers that they are such through the sanctification of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit works in the hearts of elect strangers so that they seek God and desire fellowship with Him. The Spirit works in the hearts of strangers both obedience and "sprinkling with blood"--the latter is a sign of incorporation into God's covenant. These are sojourners, then, not only in name, but they reveal this in their lives on this earth.

Upon all such, Peter prays for God's grace and peace. Grace is God's favor shown to His people for Jesus' sake. Peace is the result of such grace--peace is that which removes that which separates from God, and reestablishes harmony and oneness there. It is Peter's prayer that all this may increase--for the church already enjoy this, but in that they must grow too. So also does this Word of God address you.

Now note verses 3,4, and 5. There are two words which are especially important: "hope" and "inheritance". Underline those words. The two words are closely related: our "hope" is for the "inheritance".

The Christian's "hope" is called here a "lively" or "living" hope. This is to contrast it with earthly hopes of sinful man--which are not "living" hopes. The concept of "hope" as used generally by man, expresses at best a desire that something may happen. We might want nice weather tomorrow--and say: "I hope the sun shines". We are expressing a wish and desire--but that is all. Such hope is first, uncertain. One never knows whether it shall be fulfilled. Man may "hope" for so many things, he may have glorious dreams--but so many things prevent their realization. Disaster may strike. Wars may come. Children may be a great disappointment. Finally, death strikes. Man's hope is fragile at best, and ends at the grave.

But not so the hope of the Christian. This is a living hope. It has been described as "the power of the spiritual life of the Christian which causes him to soar above the earthly to have his heart fixed upon the heavenly." Simply put, the hope of the Christian is to be where his blessed Lord and Savior is. He awaits now the time that he may be taken ~~to~~ to Jesus. He looks for the time that he may enter the new heavens and new earth.

It is this hope that is "living". It differs from ordinary hope in three ways: it is first an expectation. The Christian anticipates something. God's Word has told him of some glorious things--and he expects these to happen. Secondly, he longs for the fulfillment of these promises of God. Hope is longing or desire. And finally, hope is a certainly. The child of God understands that his hope shall be realized in fulness and glory. Neither death nor the grave can take this hope away.

And that's the only "hope" which matters. Often, all too often, our "hope" would be earthly. We have earthly desires and aspirations. ~~But~~ And we still have a sinful nature which would seek the things of the earth. But overagainst this, there is the living "hope" of God seen in His people. They begin to learn that only the heavenly and spiritual shall abide forevermore.

This glorious hope comes forth out of the glorious "abundant mercy" of God (vs. 3). This mercy of God is His eternal desire to bless His people through Jesus. By this^{is} mercy, we are "begotten again" unto the lively hope. We are "born again" into this hope. Mankind was dead in sins before God. In such a state, he is unable to have a spiritual hope at all. But God makes him alive again--as Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:3, "Except a man be born again, he can not see the kingdom of heaven." One is not, then, born again through his own efforts or willingness, just as one is not born on this earth through his own request--but rebirth is the fruit of God's "abundant mercy".

Not only so, but God also keeps His people by his own power unto final salvation according to verse 5. He Who sustains the universe, will ~~per~~ preserve His people unto the salvation which is shown in all of its completeness when Jesus returns. And God uses our faith, our believing, as the means of assuring us of that wonderful deliverance.

All of this is based upon Christ's resurrection. His resurrection is the seal upon the finished work on the cross. Christ arose because He made the payment for sin which God required. His resurrection is, therefore, ~~the~~ guarantee of ~~His~~ our hope.

This hope is the eternal inheritance of which verse 4 speaks. An inheritance is that which is not earned; it is not the fruit of one's own labors. An inheritance also usually is that of value. So it is spiritually. The inheritance of the saints is Father's house in heaven. There we dwell in His blessed presence eternally. We receive that because of the death and resurrection of Christ. We did not earn it--it is the gift of God.

This heavenly inheritance is described in a negative way--the only way we can begin to understand it. It is incorruptible, that is, it can not be corrupted by outside evil influences. It is not affected by the curse and the results thereof. Nor can this inheritance fade away; it can not wane or become less than it presently is. It is eternal. And it is undefiled--it is morally, spiritually perfect. There is no taint of sin there.

This is "reserved in heaven" for God's people. God watches and guards it--until the time that He is pleased to take His people from this earth in order to enjoy that inheritance perfectly. It must still be revealed or uncovered for our benefit and to enjoy in its fulness. This takes place when Christ returns to establish a new heavens and new earth.

And all this causes the apostle to exclaim in verse 3: "Blessed be God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." And we can only cry, "Amen!"

But for this ~~stranger~~ elect stranger, a problem often arises: why must I face many trials on this earth? There is often the "heaviness of manifold temptations". That troublesome question is answered in verses 6 through 9. Manifold temptations can be explained in light of a necessary testing of the faith of elect strangers.

Every child of God professes faith; he believes in Jesus as **His Savior**. Heb. 11:1 calls faith, "The substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Conscious faith is that tie which unites the Christian to his Savior. It is that which is seen here on the earth in the lives of pilgrims.

Very often, that faith of the Christian is sorely tried. There come all kinds of temptations--through that triumvirate: the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh. There are the temptations to let down one's guard; to join the world; to cooperate in ~~his~~ ways of wickedness; to seek earthly things. There are temptations to deny God's Word and set up our own standards of morality. But also temptations come in the form of sickness, suffering, persecutions, and death of the ~~son~~ child of God.

All these things ~~severely~~ test the faith of the Christian. Will he endure in his faith? Will he not rather curse God and die--as Job's wife urged her husband to do? For temptations are "heavy"; these are as tremendous weights which greatly press down upon the Christian. Often, Christians seem hardly able to know what to do or where to turn.

The problem is compounded by that awful question, "Why?" The almighty God surely has the power to deliver His people from all suffering, temptations, difficulties on this earth. He Who claims in His Word to love His people, ought to prevent suffering in their lives too! Can not God make provision for His people? Can He not isolate them from all trouble? One might even, perhaps, conclude that God does not show favor to His own people. Asaph in Ps. 73 at first complained that the wicked seemed to prosper far above the righteous. God has, apparently, forgotten to be kind. Many of you my listeners, may have gone through such experiences and periods of doubt.

But there is an answer: faith, like gold, must be tested as by fire. Gold, under heat, is both purified and tested for authenticity. The dross is skimmed from the top. So faith, which is far more precious than gold, must be tested. Its authenticity must be seen, and it must be strengthened in testing. The old dross of self-reliance and self-trust must be taken away. Testing does not destroy true faith, but rather makes it shine as gold.

Yet when necessary testing comes, we are assured of two significant limitations. First, these temptations are "for a season" (verse 6). That suggests that they are limited in time and scope. These do not last forever. The apostle Paul stated it this way in II Cor. 4:17, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." It is then for a season--soon these are all taken away and the Christian is brought to glory. But the apostle adds, "If need be." That thought too must not be ignored. What God sends is necessary for the Christian. God does not send that which is useless or hurtful. What God sends is to prepare His people for their heavenly home. It tests and strengthens their faith. It turns them from the things earthly to that which is heavenly. He gives only as much testing as is necessary for us. Then we need not complain when testing comes--but thank our God Who so kindly deals with us for Jesus' sake.

This trial of faith involves also "approvedness". Faith is seen as genuine. It endures even through every trial to the end. It shines ever more brightly in the face of temptations. The devil intends to destroy the child of God, but his very attempts work in the opposite way.

You can, then, rejoice in the testing of your faith through manifold temptations. Final approval of this faith is given in the last day when Jesus comes again in glory. We are looking for His return--the return of Him whom we love. Soon Jesus will be revealed to us--uncovered and exhibited for view. And when He comes, He does so in judgment. He will declare who belong to Him--and who do not. He will tell His faithful servants to enter the joy of their Lord.

When Christ so judges, it will then be clearly seen that the ~~own~~ honor and glory for our enduring faith is not of man. It is rather to the praise, honor, glory of God. He saves His people, He preserves them in a living faith, and He brings them finally to glory. All things serve this glorious purpose of God for His people. Some saints have suffered much on this earth; others face times of difficulty and trouble. But these understand that in it all, God is good ~~kind~~ to them. He tries their faith and thus brings His own to heavenly glory.

In verses 10 through 12, the apostle reminds us of the tremendously great salvation this is which God has provided for His people. That salvation is the sum-total of our inheritance; it is the object of our hope. That salvation is the cross and all that is involved in the suffering and death of Jesus thereon. It is the full payment of the sins of God's people--so that there is nothing held against them anymore. It includes the right to dwell with God in the new heavens and earth when Christ returns in the last day. Elect strangers are naturally interested in that. These have really nothing here on this earth. But they have rather their hearts set on that which is heavenly. This salvation is their treasure.

The apostle Paul emphasizes the tremendous greatness of that salvation by reminding of two facts: the prophets themselves enquired and searched diligently into the very things concerning which they prophecied, and, the angels also desire to look into these things.

The prophets of the Old Testament spake clearly of the coming of Jesus. A prophecy such as Isaiah 53 comes to mind. It is as though the prophet stood at the foot of the cross as he described the suffering Savior. Yet, even these Old Testament prophets did not always understand that of which they prophecied. These too made diligent effort to study their own writings in order to discover the time and the manner of the fulfillment of their own prophecy. You see, these men were directed to write by the Holy Spirit. What they wrote, was the Word of God--not the word or idea of men. They were themselves then obliged to study that which they wrote to discover the meaning of the Spirit. They wondered too when all these things would be fulfilled. They wondered just what events would take place before the fulfillment of the prophecies. ~~They~~

These prophets understood that what they spoke of, they themselves would not see fulfilled with their own eyes. Rather, what they declared, would be that which another age and another people would observe. The apostles, the Jews of Jesus' day, and the gentiles after Pentecost came to see the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. When the gospel of Christ was preached, it declared that which had been foretold.

The apostle further points out that the angels themselves desire "to look into" these things. That statement fascinates me. We think of the angels as in a realm far above this earth--and far above the events of this earth. And in a sense, this is true. Yet their central concern is the development of God's promise here on this earth. They are not

interested first in scientific development of man, nor in the history of this or that nation. But they are concerned with the coming of Jesus too--with His suffering, death, and resurrection again. They do not, evidently, know any more than we do how things shall unfold. Only God knows this, But they, as we, have the testimony of God in Scripture. And the angels eagerly anticipate the development of this plan of God for the salvation of His elect strangers. The angels was present to announce the ~~birth~~ conception of Jesus. The angels sang at Jesus' birth. The angels were present in Jesus' temptation and at His death. The angels were seen in His resurrection and at the time of His ascension. These angels came to announce to men the glorious fulfillment of the plan of God. And also these came to see for themselves what God is working to save His elect strangers. Angels are deeply interested in all of these things!

What ought that then to say to us? So often we can regard matters of eternal salvation as prosaic, perhaps uninteresting. Even children of God do not always eagerly study the Word and anxiously hear the preaching of the gospel. All too often one's heart is set on other, earthly things. Yet if the Old Testament prophets who wrote Scripture, if the very angels of God desire to study these very things--ought the same not be true for us? This salvation is the salvation of elect pilgrims--the salvation of God's people. It involves eternal life; it transcends all that which is earthly. We have every reason to be very interested and deeply concerned too with the realization of God's promise.

Next time, the Lord willing, we shall continue with I Peter 1 in order to see just how the Christian is to show his faithfulness and diligence in a spiritual life on this earth.

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