

## Introduction to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter – June 1, 2008

Today we begin a study of the General Epistle of 1<sup>st</sup> Peter. This study is a departure from my usual practice of preaching on one of the appointed lessons for the day. It is called a General Epistle, because unlike many of the letters of the Apostle Paul, it was not addressed to a specific church or a person – such as the Church at Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, Timothy, etc.

The almost unanimous opinion of the early church is that 1<sup>st</sup> Peter was written by Peter, one of the Twelve Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. I say almost unanimous because there is always some who will disagree.

First Peter was written to Christians who were experiencing various forms of persecution, men and women whose stand for Jesus Christ made them aliens and strangers in the midst of a pagan society. Peter exhorts these Christians to be steadfast in their faith, to have a behavior that is above reproach and to have joy in the midst of this persecution.

This epistle is a source of encouragement for all believers who live in conflict with their culture, as we do. All we need to do is read the headlines as to what is happening in California and New York, and what has already happened in our own State of New Jersey. It is a letter filled with hope in the midst of adverse circumstances – so much so that Peter has been called the Apostle of Hope.

Peter, whose name means “the Rock” is the same Peter who denied Jesus three times on the night of our Savior’s arrest. And this is the same Peter who after the resurrection was forgiven by Jesus.

We read these words in John 21:15-19: *“So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Feed My lambs.” He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep. Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”*

Tradition tells us that Peter was crucified upside down in Rome about 68 A.D. He requested that he be crucified upside down because he did not consider himself worthy to be crucified in the same manner as his Savior.

The date of his crucifixion would then indicate that this letter was written between 64 & 68 A.D. The general consensus is that it was written from Rome, which is identified as “Babylon” in 1 Peter 5:13.

One other note before we begin. First Peter is called an Epistle – which simply means that it is a letter written to a specific group of people with a salutation, the body of a letter and then a conclusion, similar to letters that we would write.

Today, we will be looking only the first two verses, where Peter identifies himself and tells us who he is writing to. I would encourage you to read through the whole Epistle in one sitting – it is only five chapters and it will

not take you very long. So let's begin – READ 1 Peter 1, 2.

We see immediately that Peter identifies himself and the authority that he has in writing this letter – “*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...*”

What made Peter an Apostle? An Apostle was one who had been personally chosen by Christ, who had been an eyewitness to the resurrection and had been commissioned by Christ to lead the early church. The Apostles were the original 11, minus Judas, of course. Matthias, who replaced Judas, and then Paul who was personally chosen by the Lord Jesus.

We remember the Great Commission that our Savior gave the remaining eleven Apostles just prior to his ascension in Matthew 28:18-20: “*And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age. Amen."*”

With this authority that Jesus had given them, also came the authority to teach and write about the things of Christ, and this is exactly what Matthew, John, Paul and Peter did.

The authority with which Peter writes is the authority given to him as “*an apostle of Jesus Christ...*”

He then tells us who he is writing to – “*To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,*” Notice what he calls them – “*pilgrims*”. The original King James translates this word as “*strangers*” – the idea is one who is a sojourner or an alien.

As Christians, this is exactly what we are – we are aliens ... we are just passing through this world because our true citizenship, as Christians, is in heaven. We will see this more next week, but listen to what Peter says in 1:3,4: “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you...*”

The Apostle Paul describes it this way in Philippians 3:20: “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ...*”

All that Peter says in the rest of this letter about joy in suffering and how we should be acting is based on this one foundational fact – that we are pilgrims on this earth, that we are just passing through and our true citizenship is in heaven.

He further describes who he is writing to – “*the pilgrims of the Dispersion...*” As we have seen in our study of the Book of Acts that when persecution arose against the Christians, that the believers – those who had trusted in Christ as Savior and Lord, were driven from Jerusalem to all different cities. God used this persecution to facilitate the spread of the gospel.

And that is who Peter is writing to – those who had to flee their homeland because of persecution. As we see they fled to “*Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...*”

As Peter goes on, he then reminds them of their privileged status — that they are “*elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...*” He reminds them that they had been chosen by God – that they had been the objects of God’s grace and sovereign choice in giving them salvation.

We remember the words of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:8,9: “*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.*”

Later on in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, he describes this election, in the same words that God used in making Israel his chosen people – 1 Peter 2:9,10: “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*”

Again, remember that he is about to address how to act under persecution and trouble – and so he reminds them of what God has done – that He has chosen them before the foundation of the world.

As Peter continues in his salutation, that is, his opening words, he then reminds them of the work of the Trinity in their election.

First, that they were elected according to the foreknowledge of God. It is God who has chosen us before the foundation of the world, as we have seen. They did not choose to follow God ... God choose them to follow Him.

Second, he says that this election was “*in sanctification of the Spirit for obedience*”. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity, to apply salvation or redemption to God’s elect. It is the Holy Spirit that gives us the faith to believe. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 we read: “*But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth,*”

To be “sanctified” simply means to be set apart for service to God. This something that is true of all Christians – we are set apart from the world to serve God – and one of the ways that we serve God is in obedience to Him and His Word.

The work of our Savior, the Second Person of the Trinity is seen in words: “*and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.*” We know, as we compare Scripture with Scripture that we are saved because of the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Our Savior had to shed his blood for our salvation, so that we could have forgiveness of our sins. We read in Hebrews 9:22: “*And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.*” It is the blood that purifies us.

Sprinkling of blood was part of the Old Testament purification ritual. So we see that all three persons of the Trinity our active in our salvation.

He concludes by pronouncing a blessing on them: “*grace to you and peace be multiplied.*” Grace is God’s unmerited favor towards sinners. It is something that comes entirely from God. Peace is that which we have

because we are saved through the blood of Christ. It is a peace that is there regardless of our outward circumstances. It means that we are at peace with God.

As you can see there is a lot in those two short verses, but then we have to ask, what does it mean for us? First, we see that we indeed are really strangers in this world. Our true citizenship is in heaven, we are just passing through. This is a true blessing considering all that happens and can happen in our lives. Just think of the November elections and what the various outcomes could mean.

Secondly, and very importantly we see that all three persons of the Trinity are active in our salvation. It is God that has chosen us, it is the blood of Christ that saves us, and it is through the Holy Spirit that we are able to believe.

As Christians we have been the recipients of a multitude of blessings. When we are dealing with the multitude of difficulties that arise in our lives, let us think on what we have received from God, remember always that it is He who has chosen us, through the blood of Jesus Christ and by the sanctification of the Holy Spirit.