

PETER, THE COMFORTER

1 Peter 1:1-2

Intro: Last week in our morning service we looked into the Gospel records to get acquainted with the Apostle Peter who wrote the two epistles in the NT which carry his name, *i.e.*, 1 and 2 Peter. We notice that the first time he met the Lord, the Lord indicated that there would be a change in his name. His name originally was Simon, the Lord said that he would be called “Cephas” in the Aramaic, or “Peter” in the Greek. The change was significant because both Cephas and Peter in their respective languages mean *a rock*. And, as we traced the early history of Simon Peter in the Gospels we saw that while he had a very strong personality and was very self-confident, spiritually he was weak. This weakness led to his tragic denial that he even knew the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Lord so worked in his heart that he became one of the mightiest messengers of the Gospel that we have in the NT. God truly did make him *a rock of spiritual strength*.

His particular ministry was to be with the Jews, but we learn from Acts 10 that he was the one whom the Lord used to open the door of the Gospel to the Gentiles. Nevertheless, as the Apostle Paul mentioned in his letter to the Galatians, that “He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision [or the Jews], the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles” (Gal. 2:8). Paul was giving God the glory for all that had been accomplished by Peter, as well as all that had been accomplished through himself. At the same time, we recognize that although Paul ministered to Gentiles, yet it seems that when he went to a new city he began his ministry in the synagogues, and among the Jews. In the same way, Peter ministered to Jews as well as to Gentiles. And that seems to be true of this epistle, although there was a special way in which the things he said applied to his Jewish brethren.

Jewish believers suffered greatly in the early days of the church, and many had to leave their homes to escape death itself. This was especially true of Jerusalem Jews. It may have been true, as Kenneth Wuest says in his commentary, that some Jews went to other parts of the empire to take advantage of business opportunities in Gentile centers. However, the fact that the Apostle Peter mentions trials and sufferings in each chapter of this epistle, shows that how they would fare under persecution was certainly one of Peter’s major concerns. Furthermore, it is important to notice, as we will see time and time again in going through the epistle, that Peter wanted them to know that their greatest source of strength during their times of trial and suffering, was in faithfully maintaining a vital fellowship with God and with the Lord Jesus Christ. This is one of the values of the

epistle for us, too. We never know how we are going to be tried, or what obstacles may fall across our paths. That is the reason we need to be concerned about being spiritually strong every day that we live.

This epistle was probably written about 30 years after the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ. This would place it somewhere between the early and middle 60's. Remember that Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 A.D., and this epistle was written before that. Nero was the Roman ruler at this time, and under his reign the Christians suffered greatly. And it was thought that both Peter and Paul were martyred during this time.

What the believers in those days needed was encouragement, comfort. And this is why the Apostle Peter wrote. That is why I have entitled my message on the first two verses, *Peter, the Comforter*. Of course, the Holy Spirit is our main Comforter, but Peter, writing under the direction of the Holy Spirit, was the human instrument the Holy Spirit was using to bring encouragement to those suffering saints.

Comfort and encouragement are both possible translations of the same Greek word, and it is from the same word that the Holy Spirit is called our Comforter. It can probably be said that all of us turn to the Word of God every day to find comfort for ourselves. We, like those early Christians, live in a wicked world, and there is always much to discourage us. That is why we need to be reading and meditating on the Word of God every day. And this is a good place for me to ask you to be reading 1 Peter during the weeks ahead when we will be considering together this very valuable portion of the Scriptures. Try to read it at least once a week, and more if you possible can. The more we all read it, the greater will be our blessing as we come together on Sunday mornings to consider it together.

But now let us turn to the first two verses of the epistle. (Read.)

The first information we are given has to do with:

I. THE WRITER: “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:1a).

We learned last Sunday (if we did not know it before) that Peter is the name that was given to this apostle by our Lord Jesus Christ to indicate what he would become by the grace of God. And to be able to say that he was “an apostle of Jesus Christ” was his authority for writing. He was one of a group of men, actually 13 in number, who was commissioned by the Lord Jesus Christ for the work that they were doing. It implies that he had been sent forth *from* Jesus Christ, as a personal representative of Jesus Christ. I have said many times that the authority of the NT rests upon the

authority of the apostles, and their authority was given to the by our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter, like Paul, undoubtedly wrote many other letters which did not come in the category of this epistle, and Peter's second epistle, but this one did, and it has been given its place in this book we call the Bible. Peter, like all of the other writers of the books of the Bible, used their own style of writing, and their writing reflects their own understanding of the truth, but they were guided by the Holy Spirit in what they wrote, preserved from error, so that what we have here is the very Word of God! No man had the right to take this office for himself; it was only for those who were specifically called by our Lord as His apostles. So Peter's concern for the believers to whom he was writing was an evidence of the concern which their Lord had for them. And it would have been Peter's concern that he write only that which the Lord would have him write.

Our Lord's full name and title is, the Lord Jesus Christ. However, the writers of the NT epistles do not always use His full name. And yet we must believe that just as the Holy Spirit guided them in all that they wrote about, so He guided them as to how they were to refer to our Lord. Sometimes it is "the Lord Jesus Christ" (as in verse 3 of this chapter), sometimes "Jesus Christ" (as here in verse 1, and again in the latter part of verse 3), sometimes just "Lord," sometimes just "Christ," sometimes "Christ Jesus," sometimes just "Jesus." But always as directed by the Holy Spirit.

I have just concluded a series on the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ in which we paid particular attention to the Names and Titles of our Lord. And we learned that "Jesus" was the Name given to Mary's first child because He would "save His people from their sins." And we all should know that "Christ" means *the Anointed One, the Messiah!* The Name Jesus is an indication of His humanity, and "Christ" is an indication of His Deity. The Jesus Christ about Whom Peter was writing here was the same Jesus Christ he had known while our Lord was here on earth. He was at the time of Peter's writing the risen, glorified, and ascended Son of God. And it was primarily that same "Jesus Christ," mindful of every need of His people, who was now speaking through his servant that message which He wanted the to have. Those believers to whom Peter was writing obviously had written and received many letters, but none which carried with it authority and blessing such as this letter!

So even though we are accustomed to such a greeting from other epistles in the NT, let us dwell on each of these words until their authority and love is deeply impressed upon our own hearts.

But now let us consider:

II. THE ONES TO WHOM THIS LETTER WAS WRITTEN: “To the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1 Pet. 1:1b).

Now I hope that all of you will take the time to consult a map in the back of your Bible, or in some Bible Atlas, to locate the places that are mentioned here. You will find that they are all areas, not cities. And so many cities were included. It would be impossible for us to find out how many individual believers Peter had in mind, but you can be sure that there were many of them. The Gospel had borne much fruit in just the thirty years or so since the Lord Jesus had returned to heaven. It is in that area now occupied by Turkey. Paul had ministered also in many of those cities. The cities mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 were all in this area. And so this letter was to have a wide circulation. It was the equivalent of what Peter would have written today if he were writing to us: Oregon, Washington, California, Idaho, etc. And this epistle indicates that the situation in all of those places was basically the same. They were “strangers scattered.”

“Strangers” – The Greek text would allow the translation, *to the elect strangers*. But our translators have seen fit to move the word “elect” down into verse two. But perhaps it belongs here. And so then we would have the statement, *to the elect strangers*. Wherever that word belongs, it is important to know that it is here in this passage.

A stranger, according to the Greek word that Peter used, is a citizen of one country who moves into another country and settles down with the natives of that country. Then Peter added the word “scattered.” And Wuest adds, “scattered as seed” (p. 18).

Now it is very likely that many of those to whom Peter was writing were like Paul, and perhaps the same was true of Peter, citizens of the Roman Empire. But their greater citizenship was a heavenly citizenship, and this latter citizenship is what made them strangers and foreigners regardless of where they lived on the earth.

The same is true of us today. I was born in Tacoma, Washington. I am, like most of you, a citizen of the United States by birth, but, because I belong to Jesus Christ Who is my Savior, I am also a foreigner in my own native country. That does not mean that I don’t have responsibilities here, but it means that my eternal citizenship is in heaven. This is what the Apostle Paul declared in Phil. 3:20-21. Let me read it to you in the NKJV:

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

21 who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

The KJV has “conversation,” but it is the Greek word for *citizenship*.

I met a pastor the other day whom I have known for many years, and he was lamenting how the work of the church has changed in recent years. And he said, “I don’t feel like I belong any more.” You see, when we bring the world into the church, we don’t belong in a situation like that. We are citizens of heaven. Spiritually we are strangers and foreigners here on earth. Peter referred to this same truth in 1 Pet. 2:11-12. (Read.)

Peter was seeking to encourage those believers throughout that whole area, and this is where he started. We are here as “seed.” We are here to bear witness to the truth of the Gospel. But this is not really our home. Heaven is our home. We are only here for a short time. And we have this position here on earth because we have been chosen by God to belong to Him and to the Lord Jesus Christ. This is our first line of encouragement.

But how did we get to have this position?

The Apostle Peter described what has made us citizens of heaven in verse 2.

III. THE SPIRITUAL DESCRIPTION OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD (1 Pet. 1:2).

It is not our doing, but you will notice that this position that those believers had in this world was the work of the Father, of the Holy Spirit, and of Jesus Christ.

A. “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father” (1 Pet. 1:2a).

This does not mean, as it is often interpreted, that God chose us knowing that we would turn to Him. It is the forethought that God had in choosing us knowing that because of the depravity of our sinful hearts, we would never have chosen Him. One Greek scholar (Thayer) calls it God’s pre-arrangement of our salvation. Another (Wuest) called it God’s foreordained plan to save us.

If we leave the word “chosen” where it is in the Greek text, it indicates that it was all according to God’s plan that those believers were where they are according to the foreordained plan of God. How wonderful it is

to be able to say, “I am here where I am by the will of God.” Perhaps those believers, as they faced their trials and their persecution, were wondering if they were where they should be. Peter said, “You are.” It was God’s plan to save them, and it was God’s plan to place them where they were. Talk about encouragement, this is encouragement!

And will you and I take this to heart as we face our circumstances today? Regardless of what happens in the so-called trial that is going on in Washington, we as Americans better realize that we are not going to get away with all of the godlessness that is going on in this nation today. No other nation has done what we are doing, and has survived. How thankful we ought to be that the Lord has chosen us for salvation, and that He has placed us here, where we are, at this stage in our nation’s history, to be salt and light to a nation enveloped in intense spiritual darkness. God could have placed us all at any other time in history, but we are here now, and our task is the same that the people of God in every generation have had: we are here to bear witness to Christ by our lives and by the testimony of our lips.

But let us notice the next phrase.

B. “Through sanctification of the Spirit” (1 Pet. 1:2m).

Let us give this word “sanctification its full meaning here. The Holy Spirit is the One Who sets us apart from the people of the world and set apart for God, and His purpose in doing so is that we might be a holy people. From the moment we receive Christ, the Holy Spirit goes to work in us to make us like our Savior. He prays for us. And He works in us. He teaches us the Word, and then empowers us to live according to the Word. Our only hope of surviving in a world like this is that the Holy Spirit is sanctifying us. He not only strengthens us to do God’s will, but He restrains us when we would turn away from God.

Can’t you see how this very truth would be an encouragement to those people, just as it ought to be an encouragement to us? Not only do we have God the Father on our side, but we have the Holy Spirit on our side. We belong to God, and He keeps us. We are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and He is sanctifying us.

But there is even more here.

C. “Unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:2m).

The result of the Spirit's sanctifying work is obedience to the Lord and to His Word. And that which keeps us walking in fellowship with the Lord is the continuing effect of the blood of Jesus Christ which was shed upon the Cross.

This was Peter's version of what the Apostle John wrote in 1 John 1:6-7,

6 If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Lenski makes this comment in his comments on 1 Peter 1:2:

Living in obedience and constantly being cleansed with Christ's blood, we are what God intends for us to be: total strangers to the world of men around us, wherever we may live (p. 27).

In trials you and I have one major responsibility. It is that we keep walking in obedience to the Word of God. This is the purpose of the Spirit's ministry in our lives. Our circumstances never relieve us of this responsibility. There is never any excuse for disobedience.

Finally, Peter's introduction to this epistle closes with:

IV. PETER'S PRAYER FOR THE BELIEVERS TO WHOM HE WAS WRITING (1 Pet. 1:2b): "Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied."

Doesn't this sound like the Apostle Paul? And wouldn't it be encouraging to the people through all of that area to know that Peter was aware of their circumstances, and praying for them. And often the most effective prayers are the shortest prayers. The frequent repetition of this prayer by the Apostles is an indication that in all of our circumstances, whether viewed by us as good or difficult and hard, there are two basic needs which we have: "Grace ... and peace." And the words, "be multiplied" apply both to "grace" and to "peace." And "be multiplied" means "in a multitude of ways" (Lenski, p. 28).

Concl: We are saved by grace, and we live by grace. While we may seek to live to please God, we do not merit His blessings. They are all given in grace, and equally accessible to every believer. And to receive grace from the Lord each day is to be made strong – strong to endure the trials, strong to trust the Lord, strong to be faithful when nothing seems to be going right. And as we draw upon the grace of God, that wonderful

peace of God which passes all of our ability to understand why we have it, will, as the Apostle Paul said, “keep”our “hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:7).

Let us pray that the Lord will enable all of us to draw comfort and encouragement from this words which came to suffering saints from our Lord Jesus Christ, but was delivered by His rock-like servant, the Apostle Paul. These truths belong just as much to us today as they did to the saints so long ago for whom Peter carried such a great burden.