

## "A Christian's Spiritual Biography"

I Peter 1:1-2

Mililani Community Church

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May 17, 1998

Last night our family had a wonderful time at the Steve Green concert sponsored by KAIM. Steve shared with us that he grew up on the mission field. His parents were missionaries for 18 years in Argentina.

He told us the story of a missionary who was passing out little pocket New Testaments on a street corner one day. A man said "I'll take one, but I'll be honest, I'm just going to use the pages to roll my cigarettes." The missionary said, "Well, that's your prerogative, but let me ask you to do just one thing. Before you roll each cigarette, read the page.

A few years later the missionary was speaking at a meeting, and a man came up out of the audience to give his testimony. He said, "I want to give my testimony of how I came to Christ. You were the missionary who gave me that little pocket NT. I smoked Matthew Mark and Luke. But when I came to the Gospel of John, I read John 3:16 and God convicted me and I came to Christ.

Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."

This morning we begin a study of a new portion of God's living and powerful Word: the little New Testament letter of I Peter. I. Howard Marshall has said that if he was going to be shipwrecked on a desert island and allowed to have only one of the NT letters as a companion, I Peter would be his ideal choice--

So rich is its teaching

So warm its spirit

So comforting its message in a hostile environment.

I Peter is a letter of encouragement and HOPE!

Christians are not immune to problems and troubles and trials in this world. But we have something the world does not have. We have a living hope in Christ! Hope is in short supply these days. The world looks pretty hopeless. It has a lot of problems and lots of things wrong with it. But Peter tells us that as Christians we have a living hope because we trust a living Christ!

I Peter 1:3-4: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you..."

Another theme that runs throughout this letter is the theme of **SUFFERING** (mentioned 16 times); but along with suffering is the theme of **GLORY** (READ I Peter 4:12-13; 5:10). As we depend on the grace of God, we can glorify God in times of suffering. We have the assurance that our suffering will one day be transformed into glory (Paul says the same in Romans 8:18:

"The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us").

So as we study I Peter, we will see how the themes of **suffering**, **grace**, and **glory** unite to form an encouraging message of **hope** for believers experiencing times of trial and persecution.

Before we begin to study the details of this wonderful letter, let's briefly get acquainted with the **man** who wrote it, the **people** to whom he sent it, and the **situation** that prompted him to write it.

**THE WRITER:** He identifies himself in verse 1 as "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.*" His **given name** was **Simon**, but Jesus changed it to **Peter**, which means "a rock." When Jesus first called him, he was an impulsive, vacillating, man; but through the transforming power of the grace of God, he became as stable and reliable as a rock. Peter's life story in the Bible illustrates what can happen to a man whose life comes under the control of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the power of the Spirit of God.

Peter says he is writing in his role as "*an apostle of Jesus Christ.*" This means that he is conscious of his unique status and authority. An Apostle of Jesus Christ was personally commissioned by the Lord Jesus, and had authority at least equal to the prophets in the OT, because an apostle could speak and write the very words of God. The writings of the apostles became the part of the Bible called the New Testament. So this opening phrase reminds us that these words are not merely man's words or man's opinions; they are God's words from the pen of an apostle of Jesus Christ. The Lord had commanded Peter to **strengthen** his brothers and to **feed** his sheep. The writing of this letter was a part of that ministry.

**THE RECIPIENTS:** Peter calls them "*God's elect, strangers in the world.*" "God's elect" means that they have a privileged status before God. God has called them to be his people. Peter uses the word "called" or "chosen" at least 5 more times in this letter: 1:15; 2:9, 21; 3:9; 5:10 (READ and EXPLAIN).

Because God has chosen them, they are "*strangers in the world.*" The Greek word "strangers" refers to a **temporary resident**, a "sojourner;" "a person residing temporarily in a foreign place." They are called "aliens and strangers" in I Peter 2:11. They are "strangers in the world" or "sojourners," not in an earthly sense, but spiritually: their true homeland is heaven.

These believers were "scattered" people as well as a "strange" people. "*...scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia...*" These five provinces of Roman Empire are now in the modern country of Turkey. The word translated "*scattered*" is the Greek word *Diaspora*. It was a technical term for the Jews who lived outside of Palestine. At the time of Peter perhaps a million Jews were living in Palestine, but another two to four million were scattered among the various provinces of the Roman Empire. They knew their true home was Jerusalem. They hoped eventually to return to Palestine--their homeland.

Peter here takes a title that referred to the Jewish people and transfers it to all Christians. We are people who are now living outside of our native land, which is not Jerusalem or Palestine, but heaven. We belong to Heaven. Philippians 3:20 (READ). We are "in the world" but no longer "of the world." (John 17:16).

"Because Christians are 'strangers' in the world, they are considered to be "strange" in the eyes of the world (I Peter 4:4). Christians have standards and values different from those of the world, and this gives opportunity both for witness and for warfare..." (Wiersbe, 389, Vol. II).

**THE SITUATION:** The important thing for us to know about these "scattered strangers" is that they were going through a time of suffering and persecution. At least 16 times in this letter, Peter referred to suffering, and he used eight different Greek words to do so. Some were suffering because they were living godly lives and doing what was good and right (2:19-21). Others were suffering reproach for the name of Christ and were being railed at by unsaved people (I Peter 4:14; 3:9-10)

Peter wrote to encourage them to be good witnesses to those who were persecuting them and to remember that their suffering would lead to glory.

Peter was writing just prior to the outbreak of the persecution of the church that took place during the reign of Nero --who ruled as emperor from AD 54 to 68 AD. In 64 AD a great fire swept through the city of Rome and almost the entire western section was destroyed. The people were convinced that Nero himself had deliberately set this fire--to make room for the rebuilding of Rome on a greater and grander scale. They were so incensed with him that he decided he had to find a scapegoat, and so he blamed the fire on the Christians. This began one of the greatest waves of persecution that the church has ever experienced.

Tacitus, one of the early Roman historians, said that thousands of Christians living in the city of Rome lost their lives during this time. And they died in the most sadistic ways: Tacitus says that Nero would roll them in pitch and then set them on fire to serve as living torches in his gardens at night. Some he nailed to crosses and crucified. Others he sewed up in the skins of wild animals and then turned his hunting dogs loose on them to tear them apart.

Christians were literally driven underground into the Catacombs. There they met to worship because they weren't able to meet openly. The Catacombs are still preserved today. They are tunnels under the city of Rome that served as ancient burial grounds. The secret sign Christian's used during those days was discovered on the walls of the catacombs by modern archaeologists: the sign of a fish: ΙΧΘΥΣ (Acrostic: Jesus Christ God's Son our Savior).

Peter himself was martyred during the first stage of this persecution, put to death by Nero. So was the apostle Paul. Paul was beheaded outside the city, and Peter was crucified. It was just prior to this, about 63 AD that Peter wrote this letter to warn them of the persecution that was coming. He said in 4:12, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as you are partakers of Christ's sufferings..."

**TRANSITION:** Today we are covering Peter's greeting, found in verses 1-2. In verse 2 we have a beautiful description of **the steps in the salvation of every Christian**. We can call this, "**A Christian's Spiritual Biography**." Also, we have outlined here, the work of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit in our salvation:

1. God the Father did something
2. God the Spirit did something
3. God the Son did something

So this verse is full of truth!  
Let's look at it:

## **I. FIRST STEP IN THE SALVATION OF THE BELIEVER IS THE WORK OF GOD**

**THE FATHER:** *"chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..."* God the Father did something in connection with our salvation. This takes our salvation back to eternity past. And in eternity past God DID something.

My salvation was not an accident of history. It was planned by God. The salvation of every believer is not something that is accidental. It is a part of God's plan. In eternity past God initiated it. What did He do? HE CHOSE! "God's elect." **Ephesians 1:4** is the parallel passage. *"We were chosen in Him before the creation of the world."*

The mystery of our salvation takes us back into eternity past. Those of us here this morning who are born again--who are believers in Jesus Christ--have the **thrill** of knowing that God chose us and planned for us to be part of his plan in eternity past.

And in TIME this plan came to fruition and we were brought to salvation in Jesus Christ.

**So, first of all**, we have been "chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father." That is the Father's work (I will explain the meaning of the word "foreknowledge" a little later)

## **II. THE SECOND STEP IN THE SALVATION OF THE BELIEVER IS A WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

And this brings us from eternity into time----*"by the sanctifying work of the Spirit."* What is the sanctifying work of the Spirit? The word "sanctify" means "to set apart." The believer, chosen by the Father, is in time set apart by the Holy Spirit. How? **John 16:7-11** describes the sanctifying work of the HS. He reproves of sin, righteousness and judgement. He convicts. If you look back to the time when you were saved, you will recall the convicting work of the Spirit in your heart. The Holy Spirit draws you to the Savior. That is the sanctifying work of the HS. When the gospel is preached, or you read the Word of God, and you come under conviction, under the wooing and winning ministry of the Spirit of God. That is how God brings a person to salvation.

A man does not come to God unless the Spirit of God works in his heart and brings him to Christ. As the Word of God is read or the Word of God is preached---God the Holy Spirit reveals Christ to the human heart. He holds up Christ as the only Savior. And man sees himself as a sinner. And he sees Christ as the Savior. This is the work of the H.S. And this is why when we talk to people about Christ, WE can't lead them to Christ ourselves! All we can do is sow the seed. All we can do is be the channel or instrument.

You have had the experience, as I have, of talking to people about Christ and sensing that there is absolutely no response. And you come at it from all angles and there is absolutely no response. Because the HS is not wooing that person to Christ----at least at that time.

It's not a matter of persuasion and force.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Constantine thought he could make his army Christian by forcing them to be baptized. But that didn't make Christians out of Constantine's army! It has to be the supernatural, sanctifying (setting apart) work of the God the Holy Spirit.

And we are very much dependent upon this in our witnessing. Many times this is the missing ingredient in the exhortations to get out and evangelize and to propagate the gospel and do personal work. But my friends---apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit, there will be no fruit! There must be the sanctifying ministry of the Holy Spirit. It is very essential.

So that is the second step in the salvation of the believer.

1. We are chosen by God the Father.
2. We are "set apart" by the Holy Spirit. Which means the sanctifying, the wooing, the drawing ministry of the Holy Spirit.

### **III. THEN IN THE THIRD PLACE, WE ARE CLEANSED BY THE BLOOD OF CHRIST**

*"set apart...for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood."*

The work of God the Father: HE CHOSE US.

The work of God the Spirit: HE SETS US APART.

The work of God the Son: HE CLEANSSES US...by means of His sacrifice.

"The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from every sin." I John 1:7.

Jewish believers would understand the reference to the sprinkling of the blood, because in Exodus 24:7-8 the Old Covenant was established by the sprinkling of blood. In order for the OT believers to enter into the blessings of the Old Covenant and to come under all its provisions, they were **SPRINKLED WITH THE BLOOD OF SACRIFICE** by Moses (Ex.24). In order for a believer to come under the blessings of the New Covenant in Christ, we must be sprinkled with the blood of Christ. Jesus said in **Matt. 26:28**: "This is the blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

So this is the spiritual biography of Christians.

The salvation of the Christian in three steps:

1. Chosen by the Father
2. Set apart by the Spirit
3. Cleansed by the blood of Christ

And every believer who is saved follows those same three steps. The experience of each believer may vary, but from God's standpoint that is the order. Of course, until points 2 and 3 happen...until we are set apart by the Spirit, and cleansed by the blood of Christ we don't know anything about the first step (that we are chosen by the Father). After we are set apart by the Spirit and cleansed by the blood of Christ, and become members of God's family--then we come across this glorious truth that God chose us long before we thought about choosing him.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Dr. Harry Ironside loved to tell the story of the masses of humanity traveling down the broad road and there comes a fork in the road. To one side is the broad path leading to destruction. And on the other side is the narrow road that leads to life. There is an **archway** spanning the narrow road that leads to life. And across the top: "Whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely." "Whosoever will may come." It is the invitation to eternal life addressed to whosoever will. Most of the people of the world, as they travel down and come to this fork in the road see the narrow road....But it is not attractive to them. They see the archway and the invitation, but they spurn it. The broad road is so much more attractive, and pleasing to the eye ...and so they choose to travel the broad road that leads to destruction. But

occasionally there is someone who sees the invitation: "Whosoever will let him come" and he says, "Maybe that's what I am looking for. I don't have any satisfaction in this life. There is a hunger in my heart. I will come." So he passes through the archway, and when he gets on the other side, he pauses and he looks back and on the inside of the archway, he finds the words, "chosen in Him before the creation of the world." So he was drawn in the direction of that narrow road and set apart by the Holy Spirit. And then cleansed by the blood of Christ. And then when he is on the inside he discovers this precious truth: that the salvation of the believer is not an accident, it was planned by the Father. We have been chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world.

But you may say, "According to verse 2 it says we are chosen '*according to the FOREKNOWLEDGE OF GOD*'..." and that means God simply knew ahead of time who would believe and then He chose them. In other words, he looked down through the centuries and he saw what you would do and that you would believe. Because he saw that you would do that he chose you. But it's not that simple. If we just look at a couple of other passages where the word is used we can see that "foreknowledge" does not mean "foreseen faith". The word "foreknow" is found in verse 20. The NIV translates it "**chosen**" but it literally says, "*He was **foreknown** (proginosko) before the creation of the world, but was **revealed** in these last times for your sake.*"

It was decided in eternity past that Jesus Christ would come and offer the sacrifice for sinners. It was all planned in advance, and then in time Christ was revealed. It was not an accident or an after-thought that Christ came into the world to be the sacrifice for sins. It was foreordained by God to happen just as it happened.

Peter says in Acts 2:22-23: "*Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. **This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge**; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead.*" So foreknowledge is just another word for **CHOICE**. Let's be careful in the matter of election to stick with what the Bible says. The Bible teaches that God has chosen SOME to salvation. We can't get around it. We don't understand it. But we can't get around it. There are many passages in Scripture that teach that God has chosen some to salvation.

Some people say, if he hadn't done that, everybody would be saved! Not true! If God hadn't chosen some, no one would be saved! Because all men are lost. All are condemned. If God hadn't chosen some to salvation, no one would be saved. Everyone would be lost. God has chosen some to be saved. He has NOT chosen some to be lost. The Bible does not teach that. The Bible teaches that if anyone is lost, they are lost because they have rejected the offer of salvation.

Man is a free moral agent, responsible for his decisions. God extends the invitation, "whosoever will may come." "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes on him shall not perish but have everlasting life." If we are lost it is because we decide to reject that offer. On the other hand God has chosen those who will believe. He chose them before the foundation of the world.

### **So these two truths pervade the Bible:**

1. If we are **saved** it is entirely of God's grace.

2. If we are **lost** it is because we have rejected Christ.

These two truths are like two railroad tracks that run parallel to each other. They don't come together in our minds. We cannot reconcile them. But if you stand and look down the tracks, far in the distance they seem to come together. In the mind of God these two truths come together, but we cannot reconcile them in our finite minds. They are what theologians call an **antinomy**. Two truths clearly taught in the Bible that we cannot comprehend with our finite minds. Just like the Trinity. The Bible teaches it but we cannot really comprehend it. Charles Spurgeon was once asked, "How do you reconcile the doctrines of the sovereignty of God and the free will of man." He answered, "Oh, I never try to reconcile friends."

So the Bible teaches:

God has chosen some to be saved.

Yet the gospel is to go to everyone and whosoever will may come and be saved!

We don't understand this, and God said that we wouldn't:

Isaiah 55:8-9: *"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts."*

God's thoughts are higher than ours. We must leave it there! What is our responsibility?

To pray, to witness—because God says to do these things. His business is election. My business is the "whosoever will"

**CONCLUSION:** Don't miss the blessing and glory of the fact that your salvation is not an accident of history. This is part of God's plan for you. You are part of God's eternal plan. Our salvation began in eternity past: God the Father chose us. Then the Holy Spirit in time set us apart to believe, and when we believed we were cleansed us with the blood of Christ. Next week we will begin to study the first great section of this letter, in which Peter lays out for us the great truths concerning our SALVATION.

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