

The Message of First Peter

by Ray C. Stedman

In the month of July in the year 64 A.D., a great fire broke out in the city of Rome and the entire city was engulfed in flames. Hundreds of public buildings were burned to the ground, hundreds of acres were blackened in the city, and thousands of homes were destroyed, so that there were thousands of the inhabitants of the city left homeless. History has concluded that the Emperor Nero set that fire in order that he might destroy the ramshackle buildings of Rome and give him room to erect some marble palaces and other monuments that he thought would establish his name in history. It was during this time, of course, that the story was born that “Nero fiddled while Rome burned,” but it has since been conclusively proved that the violin was not invented at that time. What he played is hard to tell, but it is pretty clear from some of the contemporary historians that the Emperor was seen looking over the city and enjoying the view while it was burning. There are some who claim that when the fire was put out in one part of the city, suddenly and mysteriously it was lit again, so the historians of that day seem to be almost unanimous in concluding that Nero did burn down the city.

The populace was incensed, they were ready to revolt and overthrow him, so Nero quickly looked around for a scapegoat that he could blame for the fire. There was in Rome a group of people who were just in the right situation to lend themselves to take the blame for the fire. They were called *Christians*. They followed a man named Christ, about whom strange things were said, and they themselves did very strange things. Rumors were flying all around Rome that they were cannibals, because they talked about getting together in their houses, drinking someone's blood and eating his

body. They spoke about “love feasts,” – at which they greeted one another with a holy kiss, and shared their innermost problems with each other. This soon became enlarged into stories of sexual orgies. So they were a people already under deep suspicion. When the Emperor needed a scapegoat, therefore, he started the rumor around Rome that the Christians had burned down the city.

There were a lot of people who refused to believe that, but there were some who did, and in order to enforce it the Emperor began a very serious series of persecutions against the Christians. It was during this time that Christians were dipped in tar and burned as torches to light the gardens of Nero when he threw an outdoor party. They were tied to his chariot and dragged through the streets of Rome until they were dead. They were thrown to the lions; they were tied up in leather bags and thrown into water so that when the leather bags shrank, the Christians were squeezed to death. In a hundred other delicate ways, Nero sought to impress upon them the folly of being Christians.

Now it was during this time of the outbreak of the persecution of Christians in Rome that the Apostle Peter wrote this letter. And he wrote it, most scholars believe, in Rome to “the exiles,” he says, or “the strangers in dispersion:”

To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood. {1 Pet 1:1b-2a RSV}

And thus we get this beautiful and wonderful letter – what we call *The First Letter of Peter*.

You will notice that, at the close of this letter, Peter says he wrote it from Babylon. There are some who say he meant the literal Babylon on the Euphrates River, but most scholars seem quite agreed that he was using the term that was common in the Christians of that century to refer to Rome, because all of the licentiousness and idolatry and evil of Babylon had now been transferred to the capital of the Roman Empire. So it is very likely that the Apostle Peter wrote this letter from the city of Rome in about 67 A.D. And he wrote it to Christians, mostly Gentile Christians, who were scattered about in cities in the northeast province of what we now call Asia Minor, or Turkey, and to them this letter came. They were being hounded and persecuted all through the empire because of Nero's proclamation, and so the apostle wrote to encourage them in the face of their difficulties.

This, then, is one of the letters of the New Testament especially helpful to anybody who is going through some difficulty. If you are facing the problem of suffering of any kind, I would urge you to read First Peter. If you are wondering what God is doing in the world of our day and what is going to happen in the face of all the tensions and pressures and possibilities of terror that await us in the future, this is an excellent letter to read because it was written to Christians under similar circumstances.

Peter begins with the greatest fact in the life of any Christian, his relationship to Jesus Christ with the new birth. Peter says:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy we have been born anew ... {1 Pet 1:3a RSV}

That is the greatest thing that ever happens to anyone. When I was a boy I remember Christians giving testimony and very frequently they would say, "The greatest thing that ever happened to me was the day I met Jesus Christ." Well, I was a Christian, but down deep in my heart I did not really believe that it was the greatest thing that ever happened to me. It seemed to be a rather minor incident in my life. I did not have any great experience. I was only 10 years old when I came to know Jesus Christ and though it was a very precious thing to me, yet it did not seem to be a very important thing. There were other decisions that I would have to make a little later on that seemed more im-

portant, like what kind of work was I going to do, who was I going to marry and where would I live – a few things like this. But now as I look back over more than half a century, I can say that unquestionably, beyond a shadow of a doubt, far and above every other decision I ever made, that decision I made as a lad 10 years old was the greatest decision of my life. Everything has been related to that some way or another.

Now Peter goes on to point out here why this is true. He says that there are three things about this decision that are extremely significant, which you can get there and no place else:

- One is *a living hope*. What a word for this hopeless age! Peter says, (Verses 3-5):

... to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, {1 Pet 1:3b-4 RSV}

Did you know you had reservations in heaven already? Now some people say "That is pie in the sky by and by. That is opiate for the masses – you know, to keep us happy while we struggle along down here." That is what Karl Marx told the world. And I suppose it can be looked at that way, in a sense. Yet when you see young people who ought to be filled with a sense of life and living, lying sometimes for hours like zombies, corpses in our public parks because they have nothing to do, nowhere to go, nothing to live for, you can see what a living hope does. It activates us. It motivates us now. This is a great thing about Christianity. If you take away the hope of another world, another life, you destroy the meaning of this life. So Peter begins there.

- But that is not all. He says that we not only have a living hope, but *a present power*. We are kept by the power, Verse 5:

who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed ... {1 Pet 1:5a RSV}

A present power – a power that sustains us. It grips us when we are in terror or anxiety or

need and strengthens us and comes to us in spite of all the obstacles life throws at us.

- And third, *a rejoicing love*, for he says (Verse 8):

Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. {1 Pet 1:8 RSV}

I hope all of you know what he is talking about here. That kind of quiet joy that fills the heart inside simply because you know Jesus Christ. Not because of anything he does for you, but because he is, and he lives and loves you, and you love him. Even though you cannot see him you love him.

Now Peter goes on to say that all this has been predicted by the Old Testament prophets. This is not something dreamed up nor imagined – something that is cooked up in somebody's fantasmagorical pot. It is not a fable, he says a little later on, but it is the truth predicted, and it was confirmed exactly as it was predicted. It occurred that way and thus we can rest upon it. So in this way he encourages us by the fact that we have this inner witness and this outer testimony. These are the grounds upon which Christian faith always rests, in any age or at any time.

Peter goes on to show us that growing out of this there have to be certain changes in our life as a result. If this is what we are, then what we must somehow do is relate to that, or otherwise it really is not happening to us. All that, he says, and all the New Testament continually says to us is, be what you are. That is all. Just be what you are. Do not be hypocrites. That is being something that you are not. But be what you are.

There are three marks that he sets forth in this letter for these Christians and for us.

1. First he says, “Be holy.” Now what do you think when you hear that word *holy*? Do you think of someone who has been stewed in vinegar? Sour? So pious that he is always mouthing pious sayings and talking about religious things? Is this what *holiness* means to you? Well, obviously you have missed the whole meaning of it if that is what you think.

Do you know how the Old Testament refers to *holiness*? It calls it “the beauty of holiness.” And there is something beautiful about a holy person because *holiness* means “wholeness.” This is a real person. To me the ingredients of wholeness are basically first, single-mindedness. He is a person who has his eye on a goal, on a person whom he follows, and that person is so thoroughly all-important to him that he is not interested in anything that does not relate to that person. That is single-minded, dedicated. There is something attractive about that.

Any time you meet a Marine who takes pride in his outfit you can see the kind of single-mindedness I am talking about. He is proud that he is a Marine, and he walks like it, and he talks like it.

Now there is that same quality about a Christian who understands his Lord. He is holy, in the sense that he is dedicated. And then he is at peace with himself. He is not struggling with anyone, or certainly not within himself. He is at rest. He is adjusted. He does not get upset when everything around him starts crumbling apart. That is what holiness is.

Then he is interested in you. He is outgoing. He is not always thinking about himself and his likes and concerns and his comfort. But he is thinking about yours, and how you are doing. They are a most attractive kind of people to be around. I love holy people. I wish all you were holy. It would be so much fun coming to church!

2. Then Peter says, “Be fearful.” Yes, he does. (Verses 17-19):

And if you invoke as Father him who judges each one impartially according to his deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your fathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, {1 Pet 1:17-19a RSV}

What does he mean “fearful”? Well, he means have an honest respect for the kind of

Being God is. Remember whom you are dealing with. You are not dealing with another man who can be fooled by your actions and attitudes. You are dealing with One who knows you more thoroughly than you know yourself, and he is no respecter of persons. You cannot buy his favor. You cannot trick him into treating you differently than he treats anyone else. You cannot become his favorite. God does not act that way. Now if you begin to play fast and loose with him, the results that he says will happen will happen to you just as surely as to anyone else.

Now that kind of a being knows us so well that it kind of frightens you, doesn't it. That is what Peter means. "Conduct yourself with fear," remembering that you are dealing with One you cannot fool. Therefore, be honest, remembering that you have been bought, not with things men use in the market, but with something that no one else could have given, the precious blood of Jesus Christ.

3. And third, as a result of belonging to him, he says, "be priests," Chapter 2, Verse 4:

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices ... {1 Pet 2:4-5a RSV}

This, by the way, is the answer to the question that many people ask today. What did Jesus mean when he said to Peter, "Peter, your name is Peter, and upon that rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Now, we know that the word Peter means "rock," and the Catholic Church tells us that Jesus meant that he was going to build his church upon Peter. But Peter says, "No." He was there. He ought to know. He says, "Jesus is the rock," and every believer who comes to Christ is like a stone built upon that rock, that great underlying rock upon which God is erecting the building called the church today. But Jesus is that rock, and you are built up upon him like stones upon the great rock in order that you might be a priesthood, says Peter, in order to offer something unto

God, something that God greatly desires and wants. What is it? What can you give God that he wants that he doesn't have? Think of that. What can you and I, mere human beings in this great universe give to the One who flung the stars out into space – something he very much wants. What is it? Here Peter tells us, (Verse 9):

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. {1 Pet 2:9 RSV}

That is what God wants. He wants you to talk about what he has done for you and tell others what he is like to you. And when you do you offer a sacrifice unto God that is like a sweet-smelling offering and a savor of worship unto him.

Peter now goes on now to deal with the more practical aspects of life. He deals with how they should live their life as citizens. Here these people were living in the Roman Empire, and under this persecution, and yet they had certain obligations. In Chapter 2, Verse 11 and on, he deals with these obligations. He says as citizens submit yourself to the government and the powers that be. Verse 17:

Honor all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear [love] God. Honor the emperor. {1 Pet 2:17 RSV}

What emperor? Nero, who drags Christians around behind his chariot and burns them as living torches in his garden? Honor the emperor? In these days when young people, even sometimes Christian young people, think they have the right to take the law into their own hands, disobey the powers that be, and do so in the name of God, ought to read a passage like that and remember that it was of the very emperor who was causing the heartache among Christians that Peter wrote these words, "Honor the emperor."

Then he talks on about servants.

Servants, be submissive to your masters. [Do not boycott them, or riot against them, or demonstrate.] ... not only to the

kind and gentle but also to the overbearing. For one is approved if, mindful of God, he endures pain while suffering unjustly. {1 Pet 2:18-19 RSV}

And then he reminds them of the example of the Lord Jesus. He says, "That is what he did." Verse 23:

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; {1 Pet 2:23a RSV}

He committed himself unto the Lord.

Then he moves from that into the home. Just as the Lord took the unjust treatment that was accorded to him, he says,

Likewise you wives, be submissive to your husbands. {1 Pet 3:1a RSV}

– even though they are not always right.

Likewise you husbands, live considerately with your wives. {1 Pet 3:7a RSV}

– even though they sometimes nag you and disturb you and bother you, "bestow honor on them," just as you Christians are to honor this monstrous wretch who sits on the throne of Rome, where Peter says: so you husbands should honor your wives. Verse 8:

Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. {1 Pet 3:8 RSV}

That is the mark of a Christian in society.

Then comes this difficult passage about spirits in prison and baptism now saving you and all these things many have struggled over. But the key to that whole passage in Chapter 3 is Verse 18:

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God. {1 Pet 3:18a RSV}

That is the key. He did this in order that he might bring us to God. Christ underwent suffering. He came in the flesh. He died in the flesh. He did all this that he might accomplish the great end that he might bring us to God.

Now this reminds Peter of the way the gospel was preached in Noah's day and how the Spirit of

Christ, speaking through Noah, preached to the people of his day in order that he might bring them to God. But they refused, and so the ark came in as a picture of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ to carry them over the floods of judgment and bring them to God. Baptism, which is also a picture relating to the ark, now saves us just as the ark saved Noah. Baptism (not water baptism, and it says so, not as a removal of dirt from the body, but the baptism of the Spirit which puts us into the ark of safety, our Lord Jesus) is that which now saves us as an appeal to God from the clear conscience through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If you read the passage in that light, I believe you will have no difficulty with it.

So Peter concludes this matter of suffering, exhorting the Christians to remember that though they walk in honesty and faithfulness to God, not living like the Gentiles do, and all of the biblical writers say this, "You are to no longer live like the Gentiles do but you are to return good for evil." That is the idea. We are not to be concerned about our own satisfaction and our own rights. We are so concerned aren't we, that we get what we have coming. This is the spirit of our age, that we get our rights, that everything we have coming, we receive. But this is not the spirit of a Christian, and we Christians must learn that and begin to operate on that level because until we start acting like Christians, we have no testimony at all before the law. If we start insisting upon our rights, even in little ways, we cancel out what witness we have.

You have perhaps read of the story of the boy who got concerned about all the work he had to do around the house. So one morning he laid beside his mother's breakfast plate a little list of things: for mowing the lawn, \$1.00, for cleaning the room, 50 cents, for vacuuming the rug, 50 cents, and several other things and then he drew a total and put it down there and laid the bill beside his mother's plate. And she read it. She did not say anything. But the next morning he found a list beside his plate. It said: for washing your clothes, no charge; for fixing your meals, no charge; for taking care of your room, no charge, and a list of other things. And then she drew a total and wrote underneath, "No charge. Done out of love." She laid it beside his plate. That day he did everything he had to do in the house without a word of complaint. He got the point.

This is what a Christian is to do. He returns good for evil. And this letter of Peter's is to people who are undergoing real punishment.

The last section deals with life in the body of Christ. It is a wonderfully helpful section that starts with Chapter 4, Verse 7:

The end of all things is at hand: {1 Pet 4:7a RSV}

And if that was applicable to his day, think what it is for today.

... therefore ... {1 Pet 4:7b RSV}

What is the first thing now? What if the Lord came next year? What if we are at the end of the age? "The end of all things is at hand." What is the first thing that ought to be said? Well, Peter says it,

... keep sane and sober for your prayers. Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. As each has received a gift, employ it for one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: {1 Pet 4:7c-10 RSV}

That is his program for the end of the age. It does not look tremendously impressive in the eyes of the world but it is tremendously impressive in the eyes of heaven. And this is what will accomplish the will of God –

... that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. {1 Pet 4:11b RSV}

And then he speaks about the suffering and the way to rejoice – because we share Christ's sufferings –

not to suffer as a wrongdoer but to rejoice in the fact that God is at work.

Peter then speaks of the mutual ministry of the elders to the members, and the members one to another. And he closes his letter (5:10):

And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you. {1 Pet 5:10 RSV}

Can you ask anything better than that?

To him be the dominion for ever and ever. Amen. {1 Pet 5:11 RSV}

Well, those are wonderful words, aren't they? – for people living in the close of an age. Let us take them to heart.

Prayer:

Thank you, our Father, for this look from the 1st century to us in this 20th century. We pray that these words which were true then and are still equally true today may find a response in our hearts, young and old alike. Lord, help us to remember that we are strangers and exiles. This is not our home, even though we are temporarily assigned here on duty. Help us to be faithful to you and obedient to your Word and responsive to your grace and your love until him whom we have not yet seen but love with a full heart shall welcome us and restore to us more than all we could have ever dreamed of above that which we think has been taken away. We ask in his name, Amen.

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2 PETER: In The Face of Falsehood

by Ray C. Stedman

It almost seems that Second Peter was written for us today, in the present hour in which we live. Every word of it is so pertinent, so contemporary, so filled with practical advice for the day in which we find ourselves, that it is at once confirmation of the freshness and the vitality of the Word of God, which never gets out of date. It also suggests that perhaps the cycle has come full turn – that we are now living in days very similar indeed to those in the 1st century, and that the conditions we are facing in our world are almost the same in kind, if not in expanse, as the conditions that were faced then.

There is a considerable difference between Peter's two letters. The first one was full of rejoicing hope in the face of suffering. But the theme of this second letter is that of faithful truth in the face of falsehood; how to detect error, how to live in the midst of deceit, how to distinguish between right and wrong, when wrong is subtly alluring and deceptive.

First, let me give you just a brief outline of the letter. It falls into three chapters, each of which strikes a different note. In the first chapter, the apostle is giving his readers a word of exhortation on what the Christian life is all about. In the second chapter, he gives a word of warning on how to recognize and handle false teachers. And in the third chapter, he gives us a word of certainty about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the facts that underlie our faith. And then he draws a conclusion. It is a very simple outline, isn't it – a very

practical letter, as you might expect coming from such a practical, hard-headed Christian as Peter.

This letter was very likely written from the same place as the first letter, when Peter was a prisoner, perhaps of Nero of Rome. At least, it is evident that he is in great danger, because in this letter he says that he feels the time is drawing near when he is to put off his body – his tent, his habitation – to go and be with the Lord. And he says the Lord himself showed him this, as recorded for us at the close of the Gospel of John. The Lord Jesus had said to Peter that there would come a time when men would bind his hands and lead him where he did not desire to go.

Peter understood this to mean that he was to suffer and die as our Lord died, on a cross. And tradition tells us that Peter was indeed crucified, that he was so humbled by the fact that he was counted worthy to die the same kind of a death that the Lord Jesus did, that he begged his captors to crucify him upside down.

In writing to these Christians in the midst of trouble, he is not in this letter trying to encourage them with how to rejoice in the face of suffering, but rather he is trying to help them to be **true in the face of falsehood**. In this opening chapter, there is a wonderful word in the first verse; the letter is addressed,

to those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours ... {2 Pet 1:1b RSV}

Think of that! We have been so tempted to think of these mighty apostles as men of such sterling character and of such abundant faith that they are far above us in their grasp of knowledge and truth, but the apostles themselves never thought of themselves that way. They regarded themselves as nothing but ordinary believers with the same equality of opportunity in faith as any other believer enjoyed.

Years ago, I ran across this expression, and it has been an encouragement to my own heart ever since: “Even the weakest believer holds in his hands all that the mightiest saint ever possessed.” That is the theme of Peter’s opening chapter. Listen to these words:

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, {2 Pet 1:3a RSV}

All the necessities both for handling life and for manifesting righteousness, or godliness – godlikeness – in this world are ours. That means that everyone who has genuinely come to Jesus Christ, without exception, has all that it takes to handle all that life can throw at him.

Do you believe that? A lot of people do not; they are always looking for something more – some new experience, some different reaction, some further revelation, some outstanding feeling of some kind – and they think that without these things they can never be the kind of Christian they ought to be. But do you see how flatly Peter denies this? He says, if you come to Christ, you have him; and if you have him, you have all that God is ever going to give you. You have all power and all things that pertain to life and godliness though the knowledge of him.

Now if this is true, then there is no excuse for failure, is there? That means if we have everything in Christ, we only need to know more of him, and we will have all that it takes to solve the problem we may be confronting.

I wish I could drive that home in some practical way. To me, the great thing about being a Christian is that, in Jesus Christ, I really am finding practical answers to every problem that I am confronted with. Now, of course, when you become a Christian you do not automatically know everything in all the books in the world. But you do gain an insight and an understanding, as you grow in the

knowledge of Christ, to handle all of the difficulties, heartaches, and problems, and to understand life and yourself.

His divine power has already granted to us everything we need. But when you first come to know Christ, although you have all that it takes, you have not yet discovered it – you have not yet found all this in terms of experience. There are two channels by which it comes:

First, the promises:

... by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, {2 Pet 1:4a RSV}

These are not just mere glowing words; this is not just so much theological twaddle designed to stir your heart a bit. These are sure and certain guarantees that God has given us, that he will honor with all that he has. His very nature, his very character, his magnificence is at stake in these words; they refer to promises that are sure and certain.

Therefore, the first thing we need to do is to learn what he has promised, which means acquainting ourselves with the Scriptures. That is why it is impossible for you to find fulfillment in your life, and really discover the kind of person God wants you to be, unless you understand the Word of God.

You can take as many courses as you like, and all you will get is the accumulation of man’s knowledge with its mixture of both truth and error, with no ability to distinguish one from the other. That is why even the most educated person who does not know the Bible can make the most grievous and atrocious blunders, and it happens all the time. But if we begin to understand these great and mighty promises, then we will understand what life is all about. That is what they are for, to reveal things as they really are.

Now, notice the effect of relying on these promises:

that you may escape from the corruption that is in the world ... {2 Pet 1:4b RSV}

That sounds inviting, doesn’t it? There is so much corruption around. Corruption means anything that defiles and pollutes and destroys. How will you escape from it unless you have the truth from God? No escape is possible. We would all be caught inextricably in a mesh of lies and deceit

without the truth from God. Corruption is in the world because of passion. Three passions are at the root of all human evil:

- Lust, which means sexual passion, in a wrong sense – which destroys the body;
- Greed, which is materialism; and then
- Ambition, the pride of spirit that seeks popularity and fame and the praise of man.

Those three things are wrecking the lives of men and women all over the earth, and those are the three things which the truth of God particularly delivers us from as we understand and obey it.

Now the second avenue of discovering all of these things that are available to us is found beginning in Verse 5:

For this very reason make every effort [be diligent] to supplement your faith [literally, “to round out” your faith] with virtue [that means, basically, “the courage to face life”], and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness [patience], and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. {2 Pet 1:5-7 RSV}

Now you have all this in Christ, but you need to work at discovering it and applying it in your life. That is what we are all engaged in doing now, trying to apply these in practical terms with the people we live with and work with, and the irritating folks that are always rubbing our fur the wrong way – our in-laws, and our out-laws – no matter who they may be, we are to apply this there. And what is the result?

For if these things are yours and abound, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful ... {2 Pet 1:8a RSV}

as a Christian. Do you want a recipe for success as a Christian? Well, there you have it – faith and obedience. The knowledge of the promises of God and the application of them in specific situations – these will keep you from being unfruitful and ineffective.

Furthermore,

whoever lacks these things is blind and shortsighted; [even though he’s a Christian, he is living just like anybody else, and he has apparently forgotten that] he was cleansed from his old sins. {2 Pet 1:9 RSV}

Even his regeneration has seemingly had little effect upon him.

... be the more zealous [says the apostle] to confirm your call [make it sure] for if you do this you will never fall; so there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. {2 Pet 1:10b-11 RSV}

That means, when it comes time for you to go home, the trumpets will be blowing in glory at your entrance into that kingdom because you have found the secret of successful living.

Peter goes on now to show us the two guarantees that undergird this statement:

- First, the eyewitness account of the apostle himself: He says,

We did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, ... {2 Pet 1:16a RSV}

And then he recites an instance: He says, “I was with him on the holy mountain when he was changed before me, and I saw him – I was an eyewitness of that event – and I’m making known to you what I saw, the coming and the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ. We were eyewitnesses of his majesty,” {cf, 2 Pet 1:18}

And that is where Christian faith rests – on the eyewitness accounts of men and women who were there and who simply reported what they saw and heard, and what Jesus did.

- Peter goes further to say that this is confirmed by another voice – the voice of the prophets of the Old Testament. These men wrote not by their own inspiration – they did not write their private opinions – but they wrote what they were given by the Spirit of God, and they accurately predicted events that were to follow

centuries afterward. If that is not confirmation of the truth of this thing, what could be?

Two things – eyewitnesses, and prophetic words – underlie our faith.

In the second chapter, Peter gives us a warning against certain **false teachers**. Again, this sounds as though it were written for our own hour:

But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, ... {2 Pet 2:1a RSV}

What a strange thing that we have reached the stage today when a great denomination is now trembling on the very verge of declaring that there is no such thing as heresy, because actually everything is true, or at least nobody is certain of anything, and therefore, how can you charge anyone with heresy.

But Peter says some will arise in church who “will bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them,” which tells us that these men are not mere atheistic antagonists of Christianity – we have always had those – but these will be men who claim to be Christians, who profess to love the Lord Jesus, who profess to be followers of Christ; yet the things that they teach will deny everything that he stood for. What echoes of some of the voices that are raised in our day!

And many will follow their licentiousness, and because of them the way of truth will be reviled. {2 Pet 2:2 RSV}

People will look down on those who believe the Bible as being simple-minded, ignorant folk who have no understanding of the great issues of the day, who are back in the dark ages.

And in their greed they will exploit you with false words; from of old their condemnation has not been idle, and their destruction has not been asleep. {2 Pet 2:3 RSV}

Then he passes to the certainty of the judgment on these men, and he recounts three instances from the past which prove that God knows how to handle a situation like this. Do not be alarmed when false

teachers arise and scoff at your belief. God knows what he is doing, and he will handle them.

- He did not spare the angels when they sinned, but he judged them.
- He did not spare Sodom and Gomorrah when they sinned, but he judged them; and
- He did not spare the ancient world, but he judged it in the flood.

And yet, through all of them, he preserved a remnant of integrity. Therefore, his conclusion is,

... the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment. {2 Pet 2:9 RSV}

Then follows a very vivid description of the characteristics of these false teachers:

1. First, they will be presumptuous; that is, they will be eloquent with impressive words about things having to do with life and death and salvation and other great themes, but they will really be ignorant – they will not know what they are talking about.
2. They are like animals, says Peter, who are “creatures of instinct, born to be caught and killed, reviling in matters of which they are ignorant,” {2 Pet 2:12b RSV}. The second characteristic, then, is ignorance; and
3. The third is shamelessness; they will encourage licentiousness and sexual misconduct. They will openly urge people to indulge their lusts freely and shamelessly.
4. The fourth mark is that they will be greedy;

They have hearts trained in greed. {2 Pet 2:14 RSV}

For the sake of money, they will teach almost anything they think people want to hear.

5. And, finally, they are pretentious:

... uttering loud boasts of folly, they entice with licentious passions ... men who have barely escaped from those who live in error. {2 Pet 2:18 RSV}

And then we have this word, most illuminating in our day: They promise freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. Doesn't that sound like some of today's proponents of drug use, such as the so-called *mind-stretching* hallucinatory drugs? "You will experience an opening of the mind," they say, "and enter into an experience of liberty such as you have never had before." And when people try it, there is indeed a sense of freedom, but with it comes an increasing bondage that destroys. So the apostle concludes with some of the most sobering words in Scripture:

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overpowered, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. {2 Pet 2:20-21 RSV}

Think of this. Men who work with the Scriptures, who have in their hands the Word of God; who study it, and attempt to explain it, who hold the position of teachers of the truth – they themselves deny all they have taught and learned, and become victims of their own delusions.

The final word then, is a note of **certainty**. Do not be discouraged, he says, by this prevailing atmosphere of error. Remember that One is coming who will settle the whole thing. He speaks of the assurance of the coming of the Lord. He says there will be scoffers who will base their arguments against the second coming of Christ on the fact that all things have continued as they were since the beginning of creation.

This is a stable universe, they will say, nothing ever happens out of the ordinary; there can be no intrusion into this universe of a divine power that operates in any way differently than what you can observe around you. But, says Peter, they are

wrong. They have been wrong in the past, they will be wrong in the future.

This is not a stable universe. This universe has been upset terribly in the past, and it will be upset again. The flood is the record of the past and it points to a day in the future when the world will be destroyed again – not by water, but by fire. And in a most unusually descriptive passage here, many of our nuclear scientists who are Christians have seen a description of a nuclear explosion:

But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist have been stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. {2 Pet 3:7 RSV}

And then skip to Verse 10:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up. {2 Pet 3:10 RSV}

Very instructive, isn't it? Now, he says, you need to remember two things about this:

1. Remember that the past has proved what the future will be and the record of the flood is the guarantee that God is going to move as he said he would in the future. And the world that now exists is kept together by the same word as the world that existed before the flood. The one thing that keeps life operating at all is the Word of God, the authority of God. Therefore, all God needs to do is to alter things in our physical universe, and the whole thing begins to fall apart. And Peter says, if you get impatient and wonder about the time, remember this: God does not look on time as you do. A day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years is as a day; therefore, what seems to drag on endlessly for us is but a few moments for him.
2. Second, remember that God has a purpose in delaying, for which we ought to be very grateful; once God begins judgment, everyone will be included. He delays his judging hand in order to give us all a chance to think over what

life is all about. That is what the word “repentance” means; it means to think again; to take a good square look at the facts, and act upon that basis. God withholds his hand in order that men might have a chance to think things over and change their ways. Isn’t that wonderful? Aren’t you glad he waited for you?

A man told me some time ago that he was walking with a friend past a church, and on the bulletin board out in front he noticed the subject of the message for next Sunday. It was, “If I Were God,” and it started these men thinking. One of them turned to the other and said, “Do you know what I’d do if I were God? I’d just lean over the battlements of heaven and take a great big breath and blow it out of existence!” Well, we know how he feels, don’t we?

Why does God put up with the insults of men? With the violence, and the cruelty, and the injustice and the darkness, and the deviousness, and the impurity, and the shameless things that go on in our world? Why? Because he is a loving God, and he is not willing that any should perish. He waits and delays, in order that men might have a chance to think things through, and see where it is all going.

The apostle’s conclusion raises a searching question:

Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of persons ought you to be? {2 Pet 3:11a RSV}

Since this is how the world is going to end, what kind of a person ought we to be right now in terms of holiness and godliness, waiting for and (this is almost incredible, isn’t it?) hastening the coming of the day of God.

How do we hasten the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ? How do we bring at last into being what men have hoped and dreamed for for centuries – a world at peace, a world of plenty, a world of blessing and quietness and joy, and unlimited opportunity for all? How do you bring about a world like that? During an election year, every politician promises this, doesn’t he? And we do not know which one to believe, because frankly, down deep, we suspect that they are all phonies – none of them can produce what they promise, because they are not getting at the heart of the problem. But this

word says that we, the people of God, have the ability to hasten the coming of this day.

How is it done, then? Three primary things are suggested in the Scriptures:

1. First, prayer: Remember what the Lord Jesus taught us to pray? “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven,” {Matt 6:10, Luke 11:2 KJV}. That is a prayer for hastening the day of God.
2. Second, by witnessing: This gospel of the kingdom must be preached to all the nations, and then shall the end come, says the Lord Jesus {cf, Matt 24:14}. So as we share our faith, not in a mechanical way, trying to hammer the truth into people, but in genuine love and compassion, administering to the needs of others, and speaking of a hope that enflames us and engages all our heart, we are hastening the coming of the day of God. And,
3. Third, by obedience: There is a saying among the Jews that if all of Israel would obey the Law fully for one day, the Messiah would come. What God is looking for is men and women who will be obedient, who will be His. The only freedom that men have at all is the freedom either to serve God or to serve the Devil, one or the other. That is the only choice afforded to us. And the freedom that comes from serving the Devil is only a temporary, apparent freedom which soon vanishes in a darkening despair leading to nothingness. But the freedom that the Lord Jesus provides is a growing, enriching freedom that widens out to the fullness of life. It never ends until all things are yours; all things present and things to come; the world and everything else is yours who know Jesus Christ.

Therefore, beloved, since you wait for these, be zealous to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace. {2 Pet 3:14 RSV}

Then in a final P.S., he says that Paul agrees too. Those things which our beloved brother Paul has written, he says, some people twist and distort as they do the other Scriptures {cf, 2 Pet 3:15b-16}, but do not pay any attention to them.

And then he closes with two verses which I feel should be written large across the present lawlessness of our day:

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, beware lest you be carried away with the error of lawless men and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. {2 Pet 3:17-18 RSV}

Stability is based on knowledge, Peter says – knowledge of all the unchangeable truth as it is in Jesus Christ. Since we have the facts then, we must not allow ourselves to be carried away, deceived, by those who seek to undermine us. In a time of very real attacks on the truth, now as in Peter's time, we must exercise our freedom in Christ and choose to remain faithful and obedient to him.

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