

## **1PETER 1:1-2    CBC 19.4.2020am**

We're starting today a new series of studies in the two letters of Peter which are found towards the end of the New Testament. It's remarkable to think that we have any letters from Peter. He was the disciple who once denied knowing Jesus. Yet here he is 30 years later, restored by God, and caring for the church at a time when persecution was growing. The very existence of these letters is an argument for the transforming grace of the gospel. Peter was a changed man! That should encourage us, because it reminds us that whatever we've done in the past, failure needn't be final.

In fact, Peter's failure prepared him to be a shepherd of God's flock where people often struggle. As we study these two letters, we'll find Peter leading us by the hand, deeper and deeper into the gospel, and showing us that God has given us in Christ all the resources we need not simply to survive, but to thrive as Christians living in a fallen world.

We're going to read just the first two verses – I'd intended to look at twelve verses this morning, but vv.1-2 exploded with life and filled all the time available to us!

***Read 1Peter 1:1-2: Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.***

So what have we got here?

- There's Peter, writing as an apostle with the authority given him by Christ.
- And there's the people he's writing to: Christians scattered across modern-day Turkey.
- And then there's the circumstances they were facing. They were having a tough time. Peter describes them as "exiles" - not meaning exiles geographically, but spiritually. It's a common theme in the Bible that in this world, God's people never quite fit.

All God's children are called to cross-cultural living, not just overseas missionaries. We live by different values, with Jesus as Lord – and that puts us on collision course with the world around us. The people to whom Peter was writing found themselves marginalised. Full-blown persecution by the Roman state hadn't yet begun, but the social pressure was making life uncomfortable.

We can relate to that. *If we say, "Jesus is MY Lord", people may say, "That's very nice for you!" But if we say, "Jesus is THE Lord" - that gets us into trouble.* Our faith makes us strangers in our own land. *Well, I hope you know that Jesus is worth dying for socially as well as physically. But it's uncomfortable.*

There are no easy times in which to be a Christian. So Peter underlines in this letter that we ought never to think of trials as a strange thing. But he wants us to know that we don't have to be knocked off our feet when trials come, because the gospel puts a firm foundation under us and gives us everything we need to go forward with wisdom, hope and joy.

You see, real security in life can only be found in one place: in relationship with God. And that's what we've been given. So Peter reminds his readers – all of us – that no matter

where we live or what pressures we're under, our life is rooted in God. Look what he says:

### **1. "Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the FATHER" (v.2)**

The story of your life didn't begin when your mother got pregnant. It came out of the mind of God in eternity. In one of the beautiful mysteries of grace, God looked on you in your brokenness, and chose to rescue you. He decided to do for you what you could never do for yourself. His choice should humble us, because it means we owe every bit of our salvation to Him.

And wonderfully, this means so much more than simply "God drew me to Himself and so I became a Christian." God's foreknowledge covers our entire life. You have a Father who knows all about your needs, and has designed your story to bring it to a glorious ending.

Our lives may be out of our control, but they are always under His control. You'll never find yourself in a situation that is outside of His rule. Everything you ever go through, you can say "My Father knows all about this". No exceptions.

The financial struggle you face ... the difficult relationship you're living in ... the health problem you're enduring ... your struggle to home-school your kids ... whatever is troubling you today: you can comfort yourself with these words: My Father knows. And He knows what He's doing to bring my story to a good ending.

### **2. "through the sanctifying work of the SPIRIT" (v.2)**

Here's another great privilege that's ours, another priceless part of our identity as children of God. We're sanctified by the Holy Spirit, i.e., set apart for God.

Commentators are divided as to whether Peter is referring to our conversion, or the Spirit's ongoing work of making us progressively more like Christ. But in fact, we can't really separate these two things: All whom the Spirit first sets apart, He then continues to grow in the likeness of Christ.

For as Peter says, we've been set apart "to be obedient to Jesus Christ" - not simply to have a new name, "Christian", but a new character, "like Christ" - a broken life restored to its intended beauty. And I think most of us would admit that when it comes to being like Christ, there's plenty of room for growth! Every day we give evidence that we still need to change.

It would be massively discouraging if it were all down to us - a programme of self-improvement. But Peter reminds us we're not on our own. The Holy Spirit lives inside every Christian, and He fights for our holiness. And He won't quit till the work is complete. You're not just left to a lonely struggle with sin, bound to be defeated.

What are you battling today and it seems too big for you? Have you got used to an ugly marriage and now you can't imagine it ever being different? Have you given up trying to reflect the beauty of Christ to kids who bring you more grief than joy? Have you thrown in the towel in your struggle with pornography? Have you surrendered to self-pity over the things in your life which God hasn't arranged the way you wanted Him to? Are you turning in on yourself, rather than taking up the cross and following Christ?

Listen: there's more to you than just a person who struggles with sin. If you're God's child, you've got a mighty warrior inside you. The Holy Spirit battles on your behalf, transforming you by His grace. And that means there's hope for every one of those situations that gets you down. The Spirit will fight for you till sin and suffering are no more, because that's why He set you apart: for obedience to Christ.

But perhaps you're thinking, "OK, I've been set apart for obedience, but I fail very often. Is there any provision for that?" YES:

### **3. "to be obedient to JESUS CHRIST and sprinkled with His blood" (v.2)**

**"sprinkled with His blood"** is an Old Testament image. Peter is probably alluding to Exodus 24, where God made a covenant with the people of Israel. He pledged to be their God; they promised to obey His laws. And Moses sprinkled the people with the blood of a sacrificial animal. And Peter says that we too have now been sprinkled – but with a better blood, the blood of Jesus.

What does that mean? It means that a covenant has been made and Christ has promised never to leave us nor forsake us. And therefore we can lift up our eyes when we're in despair and know that the Christ who died for us to put us in a right standing with God has promised to go on cleansing us.

The Good News is that right here, right now, our Saviour Jesus is willing to love you on your very worst day. He is willing to forgive you again and again. And no matter how great your ongoing struggles, He'll be patient as you continue to grow and mature. And that's a great incentive to me to get up when I've fallen. I don't have to run from God – I can run to Him in Jesus Christ.

### **CONCLUSION**

DO you see your privileges as a Christian? Chosen by God the Father, set apart by the Holy Spirit for Jesus Christ, cleansed by the blood of Jesus. It's trinitarian. Peter wants you to know that whatever you're facing, all of God is working for you!

Are you still amazed by this? When we're familiar with things, we tend not to celebrate them as we once did. I know how easy it is for me, on any given day, to forget who I am as a child of God, and what I've been given in Christ. **And that never takes me to a good place.**

Last week I was reading a book by Paul Tripp, and was struck by these words: "I can't tell you how many times in counselling I have heard people – people who seem to have a rather well-developed theology – recount their stories but omit God from them entirely. I have thought many times, the fact that they assess their lives in such a God-absent way explains much of the distress, confusion, and despair they are experiencing. They are not discomforted simply because life has been uncomfortable. They are discomforted because they have brought a fundamentally unbiblical worldview to the uncomfortable things they are facing." (*Paul Tripp, "Awe" p.137*).

How about you? What's your functional theology? What do you preach to yourself when you are facing things you didn't want, didn't expect, don't like? Things that threaten your sense of well-being? Things that make you afraid? Do you preach a message without God that leaves you feeling alone and overwhelmed, or the gospel of His presence with you,

and His promise never to leave you, never to quit working in you and for you, till He's rescued you completely?

If there is anything that will give us stability in a time of crisis, it's this: that we're rooted in the heart of God from eternity to eternity – to bring us to salvation. What could give you more stability than that?

If you're not sure of your identity as a child of God, cry out to Him now for rescue. And if you're learning to rest in this identity, as Peter urges you to, then you'll understand His benediction (v.2): *May the grace and peace that you've already tasted be multiplied to you, more and more, day after day.*

That's all you need for today and tomorrow.

**PRAYER:** Father God, thank you for giving us everything we need in the gospel. Take these truths from our heads to our hearts, so that they may shape our lives for your glory. AMEN

### **QUESTION FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION:**

- How does it comfort and challenge you to know that you have been chosen by the Father, set aside by the Spirit for Christ, and cleansed by Jesus' blood?