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A JOURNEY THROUGH THE BIBLE

Reading: 1 Peter 1:1-12

61. THE BOOK OF 1 PETER

David Pawson reminds us that on the 2nd September 1666 there was a great fire in London. It began in a baker's oven and caused tremendous damage. Two hundred thousand people lost their homes, since most of the houses were timber framed and so were unable to withstand the flames. It was estimated that the fire did £ 10 million worth of damage. Altogether 90 churches were destroyed although many of them were later rebuilt by Christopher Wren, including St. Paul's Cathedral. Of course, when there is a disaster, human nature tends to look around for a scapegoat. In the case of the great fire of London, the French Catholic's were blamed. Now as we come to this letter of 1 Peter I want you to think about,

1. THE ATMOSPHERE OF THIS LETTER:

The fire in London took place in 1666 but on the 19th July A.D. 64 a fire began in the city of Rome, which lasted three days devastating much of the city. It engulfed the centre of Rome destroying temples and houses. Now the citizens of Rome knew that Nero had ambitions to pull old buildings to and to erect new magnificent structures so they assumed that he was behind it. But Nero managed to divert suspicion from himself to the Christians. The

result ? A savage outbreak of persecution began. The believers faced awful times. The persecution started about November of A.D. 64 and lasted under Nero's death in A.D. 68. It was not just confined to Rome but it spread more or less throughout the whole empire. The Christians were tortured. Nero rolled them in pitch and then set light to them while they were still alive. He used them as living torches of flame to light his gardens. He sewed them in skins of wild animals and then set wild dogs upon them to tear them from limb to limb, while they still lived. The Romans tied Christians to chariots and dragged them through the streets of Rome until dead. They were thrown to the lions. *They were sealed up in leather bags and thrown into the water so that when the leather bags shrank, the Christians inside were squeezed and suffocated to death.*

My this was the backcloth against which Peter wrote this letter. Indeed there are clues here that tell us that persecution was raging when this letter was penned somewhere between A.D. 64-65. (1:7 4:12) Nero's persecutions, and this letter needs to be read in the light of that. 1.

2. THE AUTHOR OF THIS LETTER:

“ Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ.” Here he gives us **His name:** “ *Peter.*” (b) **His vocation:** “ *an apostle.*” (c) **His Lord:** “ *Jesus Christ.*” Sent by Christ to speak of Christ. (Jn 21:15) Now this letter is also associated with Silvanus or Silas. (5:12) He was one of the “ *chief men,*” in the early church (Acts 15:22) and a prophet

(Acts 15:32) So do you see how Peter begins ? “ *Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ,* ” (Mk 3:14) Not “ *Peter the bishop of the church at Rome.* ” Nor, “ *Peter the chief shepherd.* ” A title that he gives to Christ alone in (5:4) while he modestly styles himself an elder. (5:1) He is not writing as the Vicar of Christ, the Pope of Rome. He knows no such title, no such position. He has a greater position one he shared with the rest of the apostles but it was a disappearing office. The work of the apostle was to lay the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20) With the death of a dozen men this unique position would vanish forever from the earth. But while it lasted, it gave Peter a status not given to many but shared equally with others. My Peter was an apostle, one of a small group of men to whom the Lord Jesus entrusted the spread of the gospel, and these “ *sent ones,* ” could have in the strictest sense of the term, no successors. “ *Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ,* ” restored and reinstated and recommissioned by His Master.

Do you recall the Saviours words to him, “ *When thou art converted (turned back, restored) strengthen thy brethren.* ” (Lk 22:32) and later, Christ said to Peter “ *Feed my sheep.* ” (Jn 21:16) Do you know something ? The writing of this letter was part of that ministry. Now a lot of controversy surrounds ***the place*** where Peter wrote this letter. Look at (5:12-13) Now there are two main theories concerning this location. One is *literal Babylon* on the Euphrates River, and this would seem to be the natural interpretation. Other Bible scholars feel that “ *Babylon,* ” is an alias for Rome, perhaps even a code word for Rome. Dr. Charles Ryrie writes, “ *The place of*

the writing was Babylon (5:13) a symbolic name for Rome much used by writers who wished to avoid trouble with Roman authorities. ” You see, in times of persecution writers would exercise unusual care not to endanger Christians by identifying them. Where-ever we believe that Peter wrote this letter one thing is sure. These believers had had their backs against the wall. (1) (2) Consider for a moment,

(3) THE AUDIENCE OF THIS LETTER:

Do you see (1:1) These believers lived in a far-flung region of the Roman Empire covering the area now belonging to Turkey. There were Jews at Pentecost from Pontus and Cappadocia (Acts 2:9) so perhaps they returned home with the message of Christ. Moreover Paul had founded churches in Asia Minor (Acts 18:23) You see, people were “ *on the move,* ” in those days and dedicated believers shared the Word wherever they went. (Acts 8:4) Now do you notice how Peter describes these believers ? He says they were,

(a) A Strange People:

“ *Strangers,* ” (1:1) The word means “ *resident aliens, sojourners.* ” In (2:11) Peter refers to them as “ *strangers and pilgrims.* ” Now most of the people to whom Peter was writing were Jewish converts. (2:12 3:6) But Gentile believers were also in the mind of the apostle. (1:14 4:3) In both cases however, the temporariness of their abode is implied by the word “ *sojourner.* ” Do you recall what Paul says ? “ *Our citizenship is in heaven.* ” (Phil 3:20-21) My we are a

little colony of heaven on earth. Do we not sing it ?

*This world is not my home
I'm just a passing through
My treasures are laid up
Somewhere beyond the blue*

The problem with many of us today is that where they spoke of passing through we talk about settling down. My are you cultivating the spirit of the pilgrim and stranger ? Or have you got your roots so far down in the worlds soil, that the temporal has crowded out the spiritual, the material has crowded out the eternal, the things of this earth has crowded out the things of God ? Peter says they were,

(b) A Scattered People:

“ *To the strangers scattered,*” (1:1) “ *Scattered,*” literally means Dispersion. This was a technical term for the Jews who lived outside of Palestine. (Jn 7:35) Here, however it applied to believers Jewish and Gentiles who were scattered in five different parts of the Roman Empire. Scholars tell us that the word dispersion is the Greek word *dia spora*. The word *dia* means “ *through,*” and the word *spora* means “ *spores,*” or “ *seeds.*” So it literally means “ *scattered seed.*” We are scattered as seed throughout the world so that we may sow seed in the world. Seed left in the barn is absolutely useless and ultimately will rot, but if it is scattered throughout the fields, it will bear fruit. Isn't it amazing where God in His providence places us ? Beside that needy neighbour, in that godless office, on that factory floor, in that hospital

ward. Providentially placed by God to sow the seed of the Word of God. We are not aliens in the world but we are to be ambassadors to the world.

*I am a stranger here
Within a foreign land
My home is far away
Upon a golden strand
Ambassador to be of
Realms beyond the sea
I am her on business
For my King*

Now why did Peter write this letter ? We have noticed the 1:2:3: but what about,

(4) THE AIM OF THIS LETTER:

Now remember again the background. Nero is doing terrible things to the Christians. They were up against it and so Peter writes to encourage them. He says in (5:12) “ *By Silvanus a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose I have written briefly exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.*” That word “ *exhorted,*” can be translated “ *encouraging.*” Peter is encouraging then to stand fast in the true grace of God. Did you know that the word “ *grace,*” is used almost in every chapter of Peter ? (1:2, 10, 13 2:9-10, 3:7 4:10 5:5 5:10-12) Moreover in the final chapter Peter speaks about “ *the God of all grace.*” (5:10) And what is grace ? It's the unmerited favour of God to undeserving sinners and needy saints. It's God's provision for our need when we

need it. And the believer is to go from grace to grace.
(Jn 1:16) James says “ *He giveth more grace.* ”
(Jam 4:6) It is grace alone that saves us (Eph 2:8-10)
but God’s grace can also sustain us in the trials of life.
Like these believers are you facing trials, hardships and
difficulties ? Well, look at this letter with me and let it
bring encouragement to your soul.

(1) THE CHRISTIAN’S SALVATION 1:1-2:10

It’s as if Peter is saying to these suffering saints. “ *I want to remind you of what a wonderful salvation we have, a salvation that triumphs over even the terror of the grave.* ”
So what does Peter do ? He picks up three of Paul’s favourite words faith, hope and love and as John Phillips says “ *weaves them into a glorious garland of encouragement.* ” You see, Paul is the apostle of faith, John is the apostle of love and Peter is the apostle of hope. Faith that looks back to the past, hope that looks forward to the future and love that deals with the present. Past, present and future are all embraced in God’s “ *so great salvation.* ” Now in these opening verses we see,

(a) The Doctrine of Salvation Expounded: 1:1-5

And Peter relates the Doctrine of Salvation to our Past: I tell you these people may have been “ *nobodies,* ” in the eyes of the world but they were “ *special,* ” in the eyes of God, *for the Father Elected them, the Spirit Separated them, and the Son Cleansed them.* They were the objects of God’s electing love. ***Now election is a mystery in our comprehension, but a blessing in our apprehension.***

Election is one of those family truths that are taught in the Bible that we cannot understand fully yet because God teaches it we accept it and we are blessed because of it. My does this not warm your heart and uplift your spirit this ? You were in God’s plan from all eternity. Then God the Spirit set you apart to Himself, and the blood of Christ cleansed you. Is it not great to be saved this ? And this salvation is the work of the Triune God bringing us to salvation. **The Father Thought it. The Plan. The Spirit Brought it. The Power. The Son Bought it. The Price.** As far as God the Father is concerned I was saved when He chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world. As far as the Son is concerned, I was saved when He died for me on the Cross. As far as the Holy Spirit is concerned I was saved when I as a lad of 9 years of age I received Christ as my Saviour.

And do you know what we have now ? New life. The word “ *begotten,* ” in (1:3) reminds us of Christ’s statement to Nicodemus, “ *ye must be born again.* ”
(Jn 3:7) My can you lift up your heart in praise to God for new life ? Are you a new creation in Christ ?

Peter relates the Doctrine of Salvation to our Present: For he says we “ *are kept by the power of God,* ” (1:5) That word “ *kept,* ” is a military word. It means “ *guarded, shielded.* ” It would have been used in the context of keeping prisoners in a castle. There was absolutely no chance of them escaping. (2 Cor 11:32) Don’t you ever get the idea that you keep yourself saved. You don’t for we are kept by the power of God.

Peter relates the Doctrine of Salvation to our Future: For he says we have a “ *living hope*” (1:3) because this hope is grounded on the living Word of God (1:23) and is made possible by the living Son of God who triumphed over death. You see, because of Christ’s resurrection we are absolutely sure of future glory and blessing. Now Peter describes this glory as an “ *inheritance.*” (1:4) An inheritance is something you get. It is something that is yours out there in the future. Do you see how Peter describes it ? *Undying: undefiled: Unfading: and Unfailing.* My do you ever pause to count your blessings ? Do you lift up your heart in praise to God ? (a)

(b) The Doctrine of Salvation Experienced: 1:6-9

For here Peter talks about the trials of salvation. Do you recall the context ? These Christians to whom Peter writes were in the throes of a violent persecution that robbed them of all their earthly comforts. Their faith was being tested but then the faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. That word “ *trial,*” in (1:7) conveys the picture of a precious metal being heated until it is liquid and its impurities rise to the top and are scraped off. Only pure metal is left. Is this not the purpose of our trials ? To purge us of impurity ? To burn out the dross and to leave us cleansed and purified ? My there is a dependable wisdom that chooses every thread in the pattern, so that we may confidently say, “ **The dark threads are as needful In the weavers skilful hand As the threads of gold and silver, In the pattern He has planned.**” Now Peter is still writing about this wonderful salvation and in (1:10-12) he reminds us that the Old Testament prophets

spoke of the salvation we enjoy.

(c) The Doctrine of Salvation Explored: 1:10-12

They explored it, but often did not understand what they had written. (Matt 13:17) They could not unravel words from God that spoke of a *Sovereign Christ* and a *Suffering Christ*. They knew they had written Scripture but they could not grasp its significance. But says Peter the Holy Spirit has made it clear to us. The sufferings of Christ were to come first, the glory was to follow. First, the cross, then the crown. Christ came first to redeem, He is coming back to reign. The literal fulfilment of the one is the guarantee of the literal fulfilment of the other. Then Peter adds something of great interest. “ *Which things the angels desire to look into.*” (1:12) Is this not amazing ? That the angels are absorbed with the suffering, glory story of Christ ? Why if the angels find ever fresh fields of interest in the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow, should not we also ? (a) (b) (c) but,

(d) The Doctrine of Salvation Exhibited: 1:13-2:10

In other words how does salvation manifest itself in our lives ? Well, there will be A Holiness like the Lord: (1:13-21) What do you think when you hear the word holy ? Do you think of someone who has been stewed in vinegar ? Sour, always speaking a super-religious language. Well, actually this word holy means “ *different, or set apart.*” Holy people are set apart in that their lives are different from the world and are dedicated to God. Do you know what would motivate you to be holy ? If you

thought of the *Lord's Return*: (1:13) the *Lord's Character*: (1:15-16) the *Lord's Judgment*: (1:17) and the *Lord's Death*: (1:18) Do you recall the prayer of Robert Murray McCheyne “ *Lord me as holy as it possible for a saved sinner to be.*” How does salvation manifest itself ? There will be a *Harmony in the Church*: (1:22-2:10) You see we are children in the same family: (2:1-3) stones in the same building (2:4-8) and priests in the same temple. (2:9-10) should that not motivate us to “ *love one another.*” (2:22)

How does salvation manifest itself ? There will be a *Hunger for the Word*: (1:22-2:3) Do you see that word “ *desire,*” it means “ *to long for.*” It's the picture of an earnest intense desire for the Word of God. Do you want to know if you are saved ? Do you want to know to know if your sins are forgiven ? Do you want to know if you are heaven bound ? Have you an appetite for the Word ? (1)

(2) THE CHRISTIAN'S SUBMISSION 2:11-3:12

You see, though these first century Christians lived under persecution they still had certain obligations. Here Peter talks about our responsibilities,

(a) CIVILLY: 2:11-17

That is as citizens. The word “ *ordinance,*” means “ *creation or institution,*” it does not refer to each individual law, but to the institutions that make and enforce the law. Is it not important that we respect the office even though we cannot respect the man or women

in the office ? (Dan 1:8 Acts 5:29) My God does not promote anarchy. The Lord Jesus Christ said, “ *Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.*” (Matt 22:21) Honour the King. But the King here is Nero. He is the one dragging Christians to their death behind his chariot and using them as living torches in his garden. Honour him. Surely Peter must be out of his mind. Yet that is God's Word to us. We are not told to fight, to demonstrate, to organize protest rallies and marches. We are told to submit. Do you see the motive ? “ *For the Lord's sake.*” We obey because we want to honour the Lord and imitate the Lord Jesus “ *who when he was reviled, reviled not again when He suffered he threatened but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.*” (2:23) My are you an example in civil obedience ? When it comes to filling in the tax forms, to driving the car, to keeping the law are we model citizens ? (a)

(b) SOCIALLY: 2:18-25

Peter is taking us to the workplace and telling slaves to be submissive to their masters. (Acts 5:29) The word “ *forward,*” means “ *crooked, perverse, dishonest.*” Those who are unreasonable. Do you have an uncaring boss ? Do you have a supervisor or manager who isn't fair ? Do you have to deal with unreasonable people ? Do you feel like fighting back against unfair treatment ? Don't. Anyone can hit back, but it takes a Spirit filled Christian to submit and let God fight his battle. You see, no one was ever more “ *ripped off,*” than Christ. He was the only perfect man who ever lived yet He was

misunderstood, maligned, hated and arrested, tortured and crucified. And Peter says we are to walk in His steps. *Now its important that we distinguish here between the expiatory nature of Christ's sufferings and the exemplary nature of His sufferings.* His ***expiatory suffering*** as the one sacrifice for sin finds no parallel in our sufferings. But the ***exemplary nature*** of Christ's suffering is set before us that we should "*follow his steps.*" He suffering *Sinlessly:* (2:22) *Silently:* (2:23) and *Submissively:* (2:23) My He has left us an example. Are we following His steps ? (a) (b)

(c) DOMESTICALLY: 3:1-7

The trouble with most marriages today is that folk are standing up for their rights, but this passage has all to do with responsibilities. What's the responsibility of a wife ? *Submission, even to unconverted husbands.* When a wife gets saved before a husband she thinks that the one thing she must do is preach at him. Peter says "*Stop nagging at him and live Christ before him.*" Such a lifestyle has been called "*the silent preaching of a lovely life.*" Does your spouse see that in you ? Conversely, husbands are to be considerate, for Peter says " *dwell with them according to knowledge.*" (3:7) Get to know your wife. Find out what makes her tick. My how are we getting on in the home ? (a) (b) (c) and then submission,

(d) CORPORATELY: 3:8-12

Peter says be of one mind, love each other, show compassion and do not return evil for evil "*but*

contrariwise blessing." (3:9) To return evil for good is unnatural, to return evil for evil is natural, to return good for evil is supernatural. My we are to cultivate Christian love. Vance Havner once said that " *the Christian ought to develop a hide as tough as a Rhino and a heart as tender as baby but the trick is how to toughen the one without toughening the other.*" My its takes a Christ-like spirit to submit ourselves to those who are over us, but the great incentive to such a life is the knowledge of the Omniscience of God, *for His eyes see us: His ears hear us: and His face cheers us.* (1) (2)

(3) THE CHRISTIAN'S SUFFERING 3:14-4:19

Now in the midst of Peter's teaching on suffering Peter made a statement that is difficult to understand. Do you see what Peter says ? " *Being put to death in the flesh but quickened by the spirit, by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.*" (3:18-19) Now scholars tell us that the end of (3:18) should read like this. " *being put to death with reference to the flesh but made alive with reference to the spirit.*" Let me quote Robert Gundry this "*probably means that during the time between His death and resurrection Christ descended in spirit form into hell (2 Pet 2:4 tartarus Jude 6 Gen 6:1) to proclaim His triumph over the demonic spirits whom God had imprisoned there because of their corruptive influence among men in the time immediately prior to the flood.*" (A Survey of the New Testament p, 351) Now the point of the passage is this. *That just as God had vindicated Christ before the very spirits who had tried to thwart God's purpose in history so also the Lord will*

someday vindicate Christians before their persecutors. Now although the United Kingdom is generally free of persecution I can anticipate increasing pressure. The liberalization of marriage laws, as churches face pressure to change their stance on homosexuality. Can you foresee a day when preachers will be put in prison because they refused to marry those of the same sex ? Can you see a time when God's servants will be harassed because they criticized another faith ? I can. “ *Suffering for righteousness,*” (3:14) could increase in our land. Now Peter tells us that suffering does three things.

(a) Suffering Purifies the Believer: 3:13-4:6

You know, when life is easy we drift into carelessness and sin but suffering changes our values and goals. Suffering identifies us with Christ. (4:1) Christ suffered for us that He might save us from sin. As we suffer for Him and with Him, we learn to hate sin and love Christ more. Suffering changes our perspective. We take life for granted until we have to suffer, and then our values change. Suffering points ahead to a coming judgment. You know we all live by the judgment of men or by the judgment of God. *Have you discovered that your close friends have changed now that you are in Christ ?* Are they judging you ? “ Oh Suzy's got really weird become a Bible thumper. She was once a ton of fun. Now she's Miss Goody Two Shoes.” My God is going to judge them. You see, it's better to suffer for Christ and go to be with Him than to follow the world and go to hell. (4:6) (a)

(b) Suffering Unifies the Church: 4:7-11

Peter reminds them that Jesus Christ is coming soon and that in the midst of their suffering the believers have responsibilities to one another. They are to *live consistently:* (4:7) *they are to love continually:* (4:8-9) *and they are to labour conscientiously:* (4:10-11) The great preacher F.B. Meyer once asked D .L. Moody “ *what is the secret of your success ?*” Moody replied, “ *for many years I have never gave an address without the consciousness that the Lord may come before I have finished.*” Does that explain the intensity of Moody's service or the zeal of his ministry for Christ ? (a) (b)

(c) Suffering Glorifies the Lord: 4:12-19

Mind you, make sure you don't deserve your suffering. If you go to prison for a crime then you certainly can't say that you are suffering for Christ. You see, there is a suffering that is **deserved** that comes into the life of a believer. Did you catch (4:15) There are lots of Christian's who are busybodies. They are always sticking their noses in someone else's business. They go around prying when they should be praying. Then someone fires back at them and they say “ *Oh, I am suffering for Jesus.*” No you're not. You're just a meddler. Mind your own business. There is a suffering that is deserved, but there is a suffering that is derived that is, it comes because we are Christ's and we should seek to glorify Him. “ *Not be ashamed,*” that's the negative. “ *Glorify God,*” that's the positive. Do you see Peter finishes this section ? He says trust the faithful God. (4:19) My in the midst of your

“fiery trial,” this say “ Lord I don’t know what You are doing, and I don’t know the purpose of all this in my life but Lord I place my life in your care.” My God is faithful and He will hold you, sustain you and keep you.

(4) THE CHRISTIAN’S SERVICE 5:1-14

For as Peter closes this letter of encouragement he speaks about,

(a) SERVING AS A SHEPHERD: 5:1-4

Not easy to be a shepherd/pastor/elder in ordinary times but in times of persecution there is added danger for the leaders are always haunted down. Can you see here the Duty of the Shepherd: “ Feed,” it means protect, discipline, restore, feed. Can you see here the Manner of the Shepherd ? We are to serve the flock Effectively: “ taking the oversight,” we are to serve the flock Willingly: “ not by constraint,” we are to serve the flock Selflessly: “ not for filthy lucre,” (5:2) Can you see the Sphere of the Shepherd ? “ Heritage,” means “ lot,” for there are lots or portions entrusted to the elders, places of God’s choosing. Can you see the Reward of the Shepherd ? “ A crown of glory,” (5:4) unlike the other crowns this is an exclusive crown. It is reserved for those who faithfully shepherd God’s flock, God’s way. Elders, is this reward not worth striving for ? To hear on that day the “ well done,” and the unfading crown of glory that goes with it.

(b) SERVING AS A SAINT: 5:5-7

As Peter commands all Christians, to submit to each other and to the Lord. How are we to do this ? The answer is “ be clothed with humility.” (5:5) And humility is not thinking poorly of yourself its simply not thinking of yourself at all. (Phil 2:5) (a) (b)

(c) SERVING AS A SOLDIER: 5:18-24

For we are in a battle against an enemy who is the accuser (5:8) and the devourer. (5:8) I mean do we not need to be watchful and hold our ground ? (5:8-9) My The roaring lion is still abroad. “ Never mind,” says Peter. For “ the God of all grace,” (5:10) What trials these believers faced, what suffering they endured, what deaths they died. Was there a crumb of comfort for them ? Yes. There was God’s Care: “ Casting all,” (5:7) or “ you are His concern.” Did you notice that there are two cares in this verse. There is *Anxious Care*, that is ours, but there is *Affectionate Care*, that is His. Dr. S. Baxter says “ Think of it, He who carries the universe on His shoulders carries you and me continually on His heart.”

There was God’s Control: For these trials are purposeful. Is this not what Peter says in (5:10) ? The Lord uses the fiery trials of life to give us stability and steadfastness. My nothing touches you that has not come through the sovereign hand of the Lord. God is always in control. There was God’s Glory: “ His eternal glory,” My no assault from hell, no affliction on earth can hinder this wonderful consummation. No wonder Peter breaks out in thanksgiving and says “ To Him be glory,” (5:11)

Oft times the day seems long
Our trials hard to bear
We're tempted to complain
To murmur and despair
But Christ will soon appear
To catch His bride away
All tears forever over
In God's eternal day

Life's day will soon be o'er
All storms forever past
We'll cross the great divide
To glory Safe at last
We'll share the joys of heaven
A harp, a home, a crown
The tempter will be banished
We'll lay our burdens down

It will be worth it all
When we see Jesus
Life's trials will seem so small
When we see Christ
One glimpse of His dear face
All sorrow will erase
So bravely run the race
Till we see Christ