

Place: Lurgan Baptist 11:5:2008

Readings: John 1:35-42 1 Peter 1:1-2

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH

1. PERSECUTED BUT NOT FORGOTTEN

Bearded, bedraggled men bearing signs stating, “*The end is near,*” have long been the subject of cartoonists. People have laughed and gone on their way, but recently the mood has changed. Many of the laughter’s, while they may not anticipate “*the end,*” are certainly not too happy about the present, mainly because life has become increasingly difficult. With the breakdown of marriage, the pressure of inflationary spirals, the increase in crime and violence, and the continual threat of nuclear destruction, more and more people are finding that the going is getting tough. Christians themselves are not exempt from hard times. Peter wrote this “**First Epistle,**” in a rough situation which he rightly suspected would get tougher. Severus, the Roman historian, tells us that Peter was crucified during the reign of Nero, after the fire which destroyed half the city.

You see what happened was this. In July AD 64 the great fire of Rome broke out, and the city of Rome was badly destroyed. The emperor Nero, was widely suspected of arson but managed to divert suspicion

from himself to the Christians. The result ? A savage outbreak of persecution began. Nero rolled the Christians 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. My this was the backcloth against which Peter wrote this letter. The gateway to persecution had been opened and for ever after the Christians were to live under threat. (2:19-23 3:14-18 4:1-4, 15-19) Thus Peter writes this letter out of a pastor’s heart to encourage these suffering saints.
(1 Pet 5:12)

Here were small churches throughout the regions of Asia Minor who were up against it and on whom worse things were still to come (4:12) So Peter encourages 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 “*exhorting,*” can be translated “*encouraging.*” Do you know how it feels to get a letter when you’re a long way from home ? I remember in 1983 when I was in South Africa for almost two months. I was preaching all over the country, in Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg and I can recall what an uplift it was to get a letter from home. Well, here was a letter from Peter to suffering saints which said, “*Be hopeful, for your suffering will one day be transformed into glory.*”
(1:6-7 4:13-14 5:10)

So it is to this letter of encouragement that I want to direct your mind over the next few weeks. We could write across these opening verses “ **Persecuted but not forsaken.**” Look at the,

(1) THE BEGINNING THAT PETER DISCLOSES

“ *Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ.* ” (1:1) Here he gives us (a) **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) This means he communicated God’s messages to the congregations as he was directed by the Holy Spirit. (1 Cor 14:3) The apostles and prophets worked together to lay the foundation of the church (Eph 2:20) and once that foundation was laid, they passed off the scene. There are no apostles and prophets in the New Testament sense in the church today. Now if you look closely at how Peter begins this letter you will notice that it underscores,

(a) ***THE POTENTIAL CHRIST RECOGNISED IN PETER:***

For he begins by simply saying “ *Peter.* ” (1:1) Peter is the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic “ *Cephas.* ” And this was the name given to Peter by Christ when he first met Him. Do you recall the Saviours words ? “ *Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas.* ” (Jn 1:42) “ *Thou art Simon,* ” vacillating and

unstable. “ *Thou shalt be called Cephas,* ” a rock, fixed stable. The Lord Jesus saw him not only as he was but as he would eventually become. He saw the actualities in Simon Peter, but he also saw the possibilities in Simon Peter. The Master would so exert influences in Simon’s life that despite his impulsive disposition and inconsistent deeds he would come to hold the faith with persevering strength. Who but Christ could see that one so impulsive, so fond of action, could be so transformed as to write some of the most comforting words that have ever fallen upon the ears of suffering saints ?

But my is this not how the Lord looks at us ? He sees in us the potentiality that His power can bring into actuality. Converted from a dissolute life Augustine one day met one of his earlier mistresses. Not knowing anything about his salvation, she proceeded to speak to him, calling him by name, but he walked straight on, and said nothing in response. Beguilingly, she called after and said, “ **Augustine, it is I.** ” Scarcely, turning his face backwards in her direction he said under his tongue, “ **Yes, but it is not I.** ” He had been transformed by Christ’s power ! Do you know something ? Christ sees the hidden potential within us. Someone once came to Michaelangelo while he was chipping away with his chisel at a Hugh, shapeless piece of rock. The man asked the Sculptor what he was doing. He replied, “ *I am releasing the angel that is imprisoned in this marble.* ”

My the Lord Jesus is the Master Sculptor who sees the hidden potential within us and patiently chips away

at those flaws that hinder our Christlikeness. Christ looks at us and sees what He can make of us if only we'll submit to His sovereignty. Yes (a) But also,

(b) THE POSITION CHRIST RESERVED FOR PETER:

For it 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) Of course the Roman Catholic system has made many extravagant claims for Peter, alleging that he had a primacy over the rest of the apostles and was therefore the sole universal pastor over the entire Christian world. **From this they argue that the popes of Rome succeed to him and derive from him a universal supremacy and jurisdiction over all Christians in the world.** My in answering these claims we must positively assert that Christ never gave Peter any pre-eminence of this kind, indeed He forbid it among the apostles. (Matt 23:8-10 Lk 22:42) Neither did the other apostles concede this primacy to Peter, thus Paul was not afraid to withstand Peter when necessary. (2 Cor 11:5 Gal 2:11) 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 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. Could it be that like Peter you have failed the Lord ? Have you denied the Lord ? Have you grown cold spiritually ? My are you following the Lord afar off ? Do you think that because of what you have done that Christ has written you off, give you up, and left you to your own devices. My such is His restoring grace that He will not only forgive you, but restore and reinstate you in His service. (1)

(2) THE BELIEVERS THAT PETER DESCRIBES

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 (2:9) so perhaps they returned home with the message of Christ. Possibly Jewish believers who had been under Peter’s ministry in other places had migrated to towns in these provinces. You see, people were “*on the move,*” in those days and dedicated believers shared the Word wherever they went. (Acts 8:4) The important thing for us to know about these believers is that they were going through a time of suffering and persecution. At least fifteen times in this letter Peter referred to suffering, and he used eight different Greek words to do so. Now notice how Peter describes these believers. He says,

(a) THEY WERE “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.*” Like Abraham, they had their eye of faith on a city whose builder and maker is God. (Heb 11:10) My does this not describe us ? Now some believers are strange, very peculiar in the wrong sense of the word. But In the right sense of the word we are “ *strangers.*” 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. I heard about a drifter who came into a town and stayed for awhile and made some friends and became very popular. Later he was seen to be packing his bags and one of his neighbours came up to him and said, “ *Why don't you settle down ?*” He said, “ *Because I'm a pilgrim not a settler. I was just passing through.*” 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 ?

(b) *THEY WERE “ 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 Gentile 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

There is no doubt that life was not easy in those days for believers living under Roman domination, but did you notice how Peter spoke of these believers ? He spoke of them in such a way, to take their minds of their troubles and place them firmly on their privileges. For he says they were not only “ *a strange people,*” and “ *a scattered people,*” but they were,

(c) *THEY WERE “ A SPECIAL PEOPLE,”*

What made them so special ? Well, they knew the Father’s Electing Love, the Spirit’s Quickening Power, the Son’s Cleansing Blood. My do you see here that our salvation is a salvation in which the three persons of the Trinity are involved, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Now Peter does not raise the doctrine of Election in order to ***Confuse these saints, but rather to Comfort these saints.*** He would have these scattered and persecuted believers appreciate their every sorrow and consider their every pain beneath the over-spanning rainbow arch of the divine election. I tell you these people may have been “ *nobodies,*” in the eyes of the world, but they were “ *special,*” in the eyes of God.

(1) THE FATHER ELECTED THEM: (1:1)

There’s a lovely touch here in the Greek text which makes it abundantly clear, that the divine election precedes their historical scattering abroad. It’s as if

Peter is concerned to assure these persecuted saints that their every sorrow and suffering comes within the scope of God’s sovereign choice and absolute control. “ *Sojourners of the dispersion,*” they may be, but let them realise from the very outset that they are “ *the elect sojourners of the dispersion.*” Now according to Dr. K. Wuest that word “ *elect,*” means “ *to pick out,*” or “ *to select out of a number.*” The verb is used in (Eph 1:4) where it is rendered “ *chosen.*” “ *Chosen in Him before the foundation of the world.*” The word “ *foreknowledge,*” does not suggest that God merely knew ahead of time that we would believe, and therefore He chose us. No, in the Bible “ *to foreknow,*” means “ *to set ones love on a person or persons in a personal way.*” It’s used in this way in (Amos 3:2) “ *You only have I known of all the families of the earth.*” God set His electing love on the nation of Israel.

Moses says, “ *The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people, for ye were the fewest of all people. But because the Lord loved you.*” (Deut 7:7-8) And God set His electing love on these believers who were “ *scattered abroad.*” Yes, they were despised, maltreated, persecuted, but here was something to warm their hearts. They were the objects of Gods 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 Gods plan from all eternity. God set His love upon you before He created the world. I tell you you may be despised, maltreated, you may have poor health, few talents, be discouraged, and lonely but my ... remember you have a special place in Gods plan in this world and in the world to come. A young man came to Spurgeon one time with a problem of God's sovereignty versus man's responsibility. Spurgeon explained it this way. He said, "*When you go to heaven you will come to a door and over it will be these words*

"*Whosoever will may come,*" but when you enter and shut the door, on the other side you will see these words, "*chosen in Him before the foundation of the world,*" (Eph 1:4) (1)

(2) THE SPIRIT SEPARATED THEM: (1:2)

We tend to think of sanctification as that process which goes in the believer's life by which he is made a better Christian. In the context, here sanctification seems to have a wider reference. The idea behind the word is that of "*setting apart,*" for God. It refers here to the whole work where God the Spirit sets us apart to Himself. This begins with our being made aware of our sinful condition, leads to concern about this, to repentance and faith, and then to a life of consecration. Yes, (1) (2)

(3) THE SON CLEANSED THEM: (1:2)

You see its not enough that the blood of Christ be shed

it must be applied and this is what the word "*sprinkling,*" signifies. My it was not the blood of the Passover Lamb in a basin which guaranteed the safety of the Israelites, but it was that blood on the doorposts that preserved them from the angel of death. (Ex 12:22 Lev 14:1-7) My has the blood of Christ been applied to your sinful life ? 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. My do you realise that you're special this ? The Father choosing you, the Son redeeming you, the Spirit quickening you. (1) (2)

(3) THE BLESSING THAT PETER DESIRES

"*Grace unto you and peace be multiplied ,*" (1:2) or "*May grace and peace be multiplied unto you.*" You see though Peter is convinced of their divine election, that does not lessen his concern for these believers. Divine Sovereignty never negates Human Responsibility. Peter is writing out of a very real sense of responsibility, perhaps remembering his Masters words to shepherd the sheep and lambs. (Jn 21:15) Now its interesting to note that to these believers who were "*scattered abroad,*" Peter does not seek their

restoration to their native land, nor does he seek their temporal welfare but rather that grace (the Greek form of salutation) and peace (the Hebrew form of salutation) may be conferred abundantly on them. You see Peter wants them to know,

(a) THE PROVISION OF GOD:

“ *May grace be multiplied unto you.* ” (1:2) What is grace ? Grace is God’s generous favour to undeserving sinners and needy saints. The word “ *grace,* ” is used in every chapter of this letter. (1:10, 2:19, 3:7 4:10, 5:5) What is grace ? Its Gods provision for our every need when we need it. Did you know that is there more than one kind of grace ? ***There is saving grace:*** (Eph 2:8) ***There is serving grace:*** (1 Cor 15:9) ***There is sustaining grace:*** (2 Cor 12:9) Here were believers who were sailing through stormy seas and riding over rough roads and Peter says “ *May grace be multiplied unto you.* ” My are your circumstances such this that you need His grace ? Well, He says, “ *My grace is sufficient for thee,* ” (2 Cor 12:9) Peter wants them to know also,

(b) THE PEACE OF GOD:

“ *May grace and peace be multiplied unto you.* ” (1:2) That peace of heart that over-shadows all difficulties and trials and which is produced by the Holy Spirit in the heart of the Spirit-filled man. (Gal 5:22) Here they were “ **Persecuted but not Forgotten.** ” My does this passage not bring ***Comfort to your heart ?*** I tell you, you may be *a nobody* as far as the world is

concerned but you are *a somebody* as far as God is concerned. The Father Choosing you, The Son Redeeming you, The Spirit Quickening you, and this Triune God will see you safely through all the vicissitudes of time. But does this passage not bring ***Challenge to your heart ?*** For Peter expresses the purpose for which we have been chosen by the Father, and quickened by the Spirit. He says we are “ ***elect unto obedience.*** ” (1:2)

You see the proof of the Fathers election and the Spirits sanctification is found in a persons willing obedience to the Son. As Glyn Owen says “ ***Obedience is on all counts a most crucial factor in the outworking of salvation in the life of every Christian.*** ” Indeed the main highway along which the early church travelled according to the book of Acts, was the highway of obedience. For “ *they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine, and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers.* ” (Acts 2:42) And in a word that mean obedience. My in light of that, can I ask. Do you claim to be one of God’s special people ? The Father choosing you, the Son redeeming you, the Spirit quickening you ? Is your life then marked by obedience and holiness ?