

November 1, 2009/ 1 Peter 1:13-25 (ESV¹)

we start a series of lessons from the letters of Peter this morning ... Barclay puts their purpose this way "1 Peter was written to meet no theological heresy; it was written strengthen men and women in jeopardy of their lives" ...

the best guess seems to be that this letter was written by Peter from Rome at about the time of Nero's initial persecution of the Christians ... it is a beautiful letter, written from the affectionate heart of a pastor and Apostle of Christ, to people that were going through rough times and on whom even rougher times were about to descend ... its keynote is steady encouragement to endurance in conduct and innocence in behavior ...

before Nero burned Rome in 64 AD and needed someone to blame the fire on, persecution suffered by Christians came principally from the Jews, but without the official sanction of the Roman government ... beginning with Nero, the persecution became government policy ... the situation was this ... up to 64 AD, the Romans treated Christianity as an offbeat Jewish sect ... Judaism was an officially permitted religion (as long as the Jews didn't cross Rome's authority) ... as long as Christianity looked to the Romans like a Jewish sect, it was given the same governmental indifference as Judaism ... the Jews had for a long time been claiming to the Romans that Christianity was not Judaism ... finally, with Nero's need for someone to blame for his torching of Rome, this Jewish argument was finally heard, with the effect that all Christians immediately became criminals and enemies of the Roman state ... we have all heard of the horrible things that Nero did to the Christian believers in Rome ... he rolled some in pitch and set them on fire to light his garden parties ... others were wrapped in the skins of wild animals and torn to shreds by his hunting dogs ... etc. ... but this persecution wasn't limited to Rome ... any place and time in the empire that someone chose to point out the fact that Christians were conducting illegal worship of Christ, believers were in danger for their lives ... they had the threat of deaths like the ones that Nero dreamed up always hanging over their heads ... if someone chose to make an issue of their faith in Christ, they were subject to immediate arrest and possible death ... it is as such times were beginning or just over the horizon that Peter writes ...

our lesson this morning begins at verse 13 ... we'll read the first 12 as background ... in it Peter speaks eloquently about the wonder that is our salvation in Christ Jesus ...

Read 1 Peter 1:1-12

the balance of this chapter concerns the implications of God's grace to us in terms of the quality of our behavior ...

1Pe 1:13 Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

therefore ... in light of the wonder of God's mercy/salvation blessings shown to us, unworthy and sinful creatures that we are ... in light of what Peter has said in verses 1-12 ... Scripturally, what God has done for us always precedes what we are called to do ... Benetreau: "Without the indicative of what God does, the imperative is addressed to a helpless sinner, the victim of his illusions; it becomes a commandment that crushes or that drives to vain and presumptuous efforts."

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preparing your minds for action ... Christians are not to live carelessly/aimlessly ... this phrase might in modern language be rendered "rolling up the sleeves of your mind for some serious work" ... the KJV "gird up the loins of your mind" refers to tucking the long skirts of a mid-eastern robe into one's belt so that one's legs are free for action ...

the media portrays Christian people as unthinking dolts ... and some mystical types within the bounds of the faith let on as if use of one's mind, reason, logic, etc. were "unspiritual," not at all the thing to do if one is really progressing in the "faith" ... the truth here is that God calls us to clear and hard thinking ... there is no excuse for intellectual slackness in believers ... we are to be ready for the most serious mental endeavors ... this goes in all areas of our lives ...

we are to be "sober" or self-controlled, steady and clear in mind ... we are to avoid not only the intoxication of alcohol, but the intoxication of exotic ideas and doctrines ... sobriety involves being realistic and without delusions ... we are not to run after the latest fashion or newest craze ... Clowney: "Christian realism knows the actuality of sin and the folly of utopian dreams." ... we are to be steady ...

set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed ... the command indicates a clear and decisive action, and Clowney: "It's not so much an attitude to be cultivated as it is a reality to be recognized." ... we can be sober and steady because we know where we are going ... the best is yet to come ... we have an "inheritance" in the sense that it is irrevocably promised to us, but not yet in our possession ... the athlete accepts his training because there is a goal, a trophy to win ... the believer knows that there is hope/confident expectation for eternity, that there is nothing more important or precious than the Gospel ...

1Pe 1:14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,

obedient children ... this isn't the greatest rendering ... it is rather "children of obedience" ... ones who are characterized by obedience, as if obedience were their father ... the word used for obedience is one derived from the word for "hearing" ... as ones who are characteristically obedient, as ones who are characterized by the fact that they have heard, don't keep on living as if you were in darkness ... rather, live as ones who have heard and responded to the Gospel ...

1Pe 1:15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,

but, in contrast to acting in the passions of your former ignorance ... be holy, set apart ... completely dedicated to the service of God ... set apart from sin and impurity ... living in ways that are set apart and different from the ways of the world, fallen humanity living in indifference to the Creator ... this concept has been twisted in a number of different ways ... some have treated it as almost some kind of mystical, unexplainable kind of state of mind ... others have sought it by withdrawing from the world where God has placed them and hiding out to avoid any contact with the world ... neither of these can be supported by Scripture ... the emphasis here is on how we behave ... it is on righteous behavior, a behavior that accords with the character of God and is unlike the standards of society, carried out in the midst of society ...

why? Peter begins a series of answers ...

1Pe 1:16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

Peter quotes a central verse from the OT, **Lev 19:2 ... You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.** ... the complete moral perfection of the one true and living God should move His people to be like Him ... to be set apart from corrupt practices ... only God is completely holy, but it is our calling to reflect

His nature to our world ... when we act like members of His family He is honored ... when we don't, we dishonor Him ... God is holy by nature ... if we truly love Him, are His, are part of His redeemed family, our heart's desire and behavior will be consistent with His nature ... here is the final and only basis for morality ... what is right is right because it is consistent with His nature ...

1Pe 1:17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,

if our responsibility to correctly represent our Holy God to the world isn't motivation enough, there is the real fact that our thoughts and actions are out in the open before Him ... and He is as impartial as He is perfect ... He can't be fooled or bribed ... He won't play favorites ... He sees our work, and that ought to cause us to behave reverently, to act with a proper respect and awe of God ... Peter says that those who call on Him as Father, who habitually appeal to Him in prayer, ought to live in a way that evidences a real respect for Him ... indeed, how could we possibly figure that we have any business addressing God as Father in prayer and living as if He's not the One with whom we must do? ... the reference here is not to final judgment (as if the final fate of a believer is in doubt), but rather to God's continual present judging, acting, and disciplining in His world ... and the "fear" includes the reality that God will not just wink at the disobedience of His children in this life ...

1Pe 1:18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold,

1Pe 1:19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

here's a third reason for Christian holiness ... the cost to God of our redemption was huge ... to act in any but a grateful and holy way reveals that we fail to appreciate the infinite cost to God of our being able to approach Him and have fellowship with Him ... no honorable person squanders what is of infinite worth ...

ransomed from futile/empty ways ... futile/empty in what senses? ... empty in the sense of going nowhere, amounting to nothing ... a life lived to any other purpose than the Glory of God ultimately counts for nothing ... therefore, also empty in the sense that we will find no satisfaction in it ... the simple fact is that we were made to love and serve our Creator, and there is nothing else that we will find to do that will bring us long term satisfaction ...

1Pe 1:20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you

Peter expands some on the nature of Christ's sacrifice for us ... this is an important verse for us to understand in order to get a glimpse of the sovereignty of God ... the cross and the empty tomb were not "plan B" ... God was not somehow caught off guard by the transgression of Adam and Eve and had to think up some kind of patch job ... rather, God knew from eternity past that man would willingly turn his back on Him and that Christ's sacrifice would be necessary to restore a path of fellowship ... the cross is the symbol of God's active love reaching towards us *from before time began* ...

made manifest/revealed ... God has given us brains and expects us to use them ... but we never would have guessed or figured out His plan for our redemption ... rather, we are dependent upon God's revelation of His Son ... salvation was revealed for our sake ... and not only was our salvation accomplished and made possible through Christ, He is the One through whom it comes to us ... He is both the source and the agent (through His Spirit) of our salvation ...

1Pe 1:21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

it is characteristic of apostolic preaching and teaching that the crucifixion is always coupled with the resurrection ... through His death, Jesus emancipated men from their bondage to sin and death ... through the resurrection He gives us a life which is as glorious and indestructible as His own ... Jesus is not only the Lamb that was slain, He is the triumphant risen One that God has given glory ...

1Pe 1:22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,

here's an implication of our salvation ... an implication of holiness ... having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth ... Jesus, said in **John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life"** ... He meant that He, God in human form, is the reference point ... His character is the definition of goodness, and what is right and to be emulated ... He is the definition of the way things really are ...

Peter says our obedience to Him and the Gospel produces "sincere brotherly love" ... one of the measures of the genuineness of our Faith is the extent to which we love the brethren ... it is to be sincere/unfeigned ... the "deeply" or "earnestly" denotes supreme effort ... it means with every muscle straining ... this is not a comment to blow by or toss off ... it is to be taken seriously and worked at ... we share a life and we share truth that is eternal ...

1Pe 1:23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

our relationship to each other and to God is not a finite one ... its source is an eternal one ... that Word which has given us new life both lasts/is alive forever and is completely unchanging/abiding ...

this picture of seed is instructive ... the notion is that God's eternal Word has planted in us something that is from God and indestructible ... it is God's seed ... when we plant a seed, that seed has no say in what it's going to grow into ... the young plant has no latitude in what it will become ... the point is that the seed must produce what the genetic material in it calls for ... in the same way, the Word of God working in us will produce the character of Jesus, if we will cultivate it, or at least not trample it down ... the character of Christ includes a love for the truth and for the church ... living and abiding ... God's Word is both alive and enduring ...

1Pe 1:24 for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls,

1Pe 1:25 but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

the main point of this quote from **Isaiah 40:6-8** is the enduring and dynamic quality of the Word of God ... it's this kind of preaching and teaching the early Christians heard, and by the grace of God, that's the kind we too will hear ...