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The Mission
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1 Peter 1.1

The year is A.D. 64. Arsonists have set fire to the city of Rome and by the time it's brought under control three fourths of the city has been burned to the ground.

Now, most don't believe it was just a coincidence that the property which was mostly affected was the same area where the Emperor Nero wanted to build his new imperial palace – and historians have long believed that he was, in fact, the arsonist.

But to avoid suspicion, his propaganda machine began spreading the news that Christians had started the fire. Those Christians, as he put it, who were strange people and who never seemed to fit in to society; those strange people who gathered together to worship a dead carpenter – those strange people who were unpatriotic and would never swear allegiance to the Emperor, or go along with all the moral degeneracy of the Empire; those strange people who wouldn't give the time of day to all the Roman gods and goddesses.

And so this is a time of great persecution for the Christian, though up until this time, that persecution had been very random and unorganized. But now it was about to ramp up, because now they faced a new crisis; and of course his name was Nero.

And so their world is about to change very dramatically! And they're no longer going to be tolerated in the Roman society, much less welcome.

I was watching Mike Huckabee the other night and he was talking about all the anti-semitism going on in America. And he said the first thing we as Christians need to do; is to stop using that word. That term anti-semitism is a word that the liberals made up; to make the problem not sound as bad as it really is. He said, we need to just call it what it really is; the “hatred of the Jewish people”. It’s just Jew hatred plain and simple.

It’s the same type and level of hatred that Hitler and the Germans had for the Jews a few centuries ago. And no doubt some level of that hatred still exists in Europe even today.

And then he said, “we also need to educate ourselves on what’s being said so we can defend it, because what the jew haters are saying about Israel are not just exaggerations, they’re out and out lies. And then he began to give some statistics to back that up.”

The jew haters keep talking about the genocide that Israel has imposed upon Gaza and the people of Gaza. And if you don’t know what the term genocide means. I’ll give you a simple definition. Genocide is an international crime that involves specific acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group. Which is exactly what Hitler and Germany were doing back in the 1940’s during WWII when they murdered over 6 million Jews.

Well, that genocide though mostly verbal in most parts of the world, at least for the time being, is still going on. And these liberals in America and other parts of the world are still trying to destroy the jewish people. And make no mistake about it, next on their list is Christianity.

When they get through with the Jewish people and even before they’re through, they’re going to turn their anger toward Christians. And of course

that's already started to some degree as well. And to a high degree in some foreign countries.

And so we need to pay very close attention to what happened in Rome during this time period shortly after the church began, because history has and always will repeat itself. And I believe we're on the front end today of the same type of persecution that the early church experienced.

Now, around the same time all this persecution of Christians was taking place, there was an old fisherman, one of the original Apostles of Jesus Christ, who under the direction of the Holy Spirit, begins to write a letter. And he writes this letter, actually two letters, because he knew that Christians would be asking questions – the same questions in fact that many of us are asking today. And that is;

How do you respond when people think you're strange for worshipping God? Or how do you react when government officials penalize you for your beliefs? Or how do you work with employers who demand that you make concessions or else? Or how do you move on after a spouse rejects you, because you won't reject Christ.

Well, no doubt, the Letters of the Apostle Peter could have been, and really have been written to us today. Because the same things that were going on in the early church over two thousand years ago are still going on today.

And if you'll take the time to listen to what's going on around the world today, and especially in Israel, you'll realize that what I'm saying is true. And you'll also realize that suffering for the sake of Christ is not just something that was real to the early church, but it's something we too are going to have to face if we're sincere about following Christ.

We no longer live in a world where we can be comfortable, and culturally acceptable, and at the same time, be a committed Christian. In other words, like somebody said, “the day of the casual Christian is over.”

It’s no longer possible to just carry on your Christian life with ease and think that you’ll not have to make any tough choices. We’re in a battle, a spiritual battle! And though most of the time it goes on behind the scenes in an unseen world, it also goes on out in the open for everyone to see.

And with the way social media works today, these battles many times become public especially with people who want to harm the church, or harm some leader in the church. And with lies and deceit people are continuously trying to destroy someone’s reputation in the church. And either way, whether it be public or private, to be a follower of Jesus Christ is going to cost you something.

And for that reason; because of all this impending persecution, never before has it been so important for a Christian to be connected to a Bible believing, Bible teaching/preaching church and church body; and to participate on a regular and committed basis with other believers; in worship, in encouraging each other, in instruction, in prayer, in discipleship training and in the spreading of the gospel to others, because the darker the night, the more important every single candle becomes.

Now, I’ve not told you all that to cause you to fret or to fear. And when we read and or listen to the news around the world and the news with respect to our own country we don’t need to panic, or become angry or resentful; we need to do what Peter in 1 Peter chapter 4:13 tells us to do.

1 Peter 4:13, but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.

In other words, in the face of all this testing we're experiencing as a follower of Christ, we need to keep on rejoicing. In verse 14 he goes on to say,

14 If you're reproached (or reviled) for the name of Christ, you're blessed and God is glorified because of your faithfulness.

And so as we open Peter's first letter today, there's no guessing why he wrote it. If you'll turn to 1 Peter and chapter 5, he tells us in verse 12.

1 Peter 5:12, By Silvanus, our faithful brother as I consider him, I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God in which you stand.

The NASB puts it this way, He says, Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!

In other words, he says, you are people who have been redeemed by the grace of God; and you belong to a good and gracious God; and so I have written to you, so that in the midst of this changing world, you won't lose hope and you won't lose sight of His grace, or give up and stop living out this gospel of grace.

So turn back to chapter 1 and verse 1 and we'll get started.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

And we're going to stop there, because that's as far as we're going to get tonight.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. It could be read like this.

"Jesus Christ's apostle".

In other words, Peter was sent out – which is what the term “apostle” means, he was sent out as an agent of Jesus Christ, and he had been personally commissioned by Jesus.

And of course we know from the gospel records that Peter was among the group of men who had been chosen and discipled by the Lord Jesus before His death, and we also know that Peter was among those who had seen the Lord Jesus after His resurrection.

Now, one thing worth noting is that Peter and the early church are the ones who originally combined the human name of Jesus with the Messianic title of Christ. Now, for us today, we don’t think anything about that. The name Jesus Christ just goes together in our minds like a first and last name would go together– and so to us they’re inseparable. And rightly so.

But in ancient times the term Christ wasn’t a name; it was a title! It was a title that was reserved for the Messiah – or the anointed One. In other words, it was a reference for the One who would die for the sins of the whole world.

And so when the church was formed on Sunday, on the Day of Pentecost, this was one of the early creeds. In fact, it was their first confession of faith in Acts 2:36.

Acts 2:36, “Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

So, they knew Him first as Jesus the man; but eventually they would come to know and understand that He was actually the Son of God incarnate. He was their living Messiah. And He was, and He still is the Christ.

And so by the time Peter writes this letter, the name Jesus and the title of Christ, have become inseparable terms when referring to the Lord Jesus.

Now, something else I learned as I study this was that when it comes to this title assigned to Jesus, the Apostle Paul is the only writer to ever reverse the order. There are many times in the writings of Paul that we'll find where he refers to Jesus as Christ Jesus instead of Jesus Christ.

And the reason he did that, is because for all the other Apostles, it was Jesus who came first, and then their understanding that He was the Christ or the Messiah came second.

But to the Apostle Paul, his experience was reversed. He came rather suddenly into an awareness that Jesus was the Son of God and the true Messiah. And of course that happened as you know on the road to Damascus as he was hunting down Christians to persecute.

The sky suddenly blazed with light and Saul fell to the ground and then he heard the voice of God saying, "Why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "**Who are you, Lord?**" And then a voice came down from heaven, that probably stopped his heart from beating, and the Lord said, "**I am Jesus.**"

And so the first time Paul meets Jesus is as the Son of God, the Christ, and the true Messiah. And so there was no question in his mind as to who Jesus was. He was the Son of God and the true Messiah.

It would only come about later he would know Jesus personally like all the other disciples had known Him.

And so for all the other commissioned apostles who had followed Jesus as their teacher, they came to know Him over time as Jesus the Christ; But Paul, who hadn't met the Lord prior to His crucifixion, came to know Him first as the Divinely Anointed Christ; and then only **after** his Damascus

road experience, he came to know Him as Jesus. And I thought that was interesting.

So, what Peter is saying here in this opening statement is very important, especially for his readers who will soon encounter persecution for their faith in Jesus and their belief that He was actually the Christ – the Messiah and the true and living Son of God.

And so in this opening statement, Peter is trying to reinforce their faith by saying, “Jesus not only was, but still is the Lord of the universe. He still is the one and only true Messiah, and He still is able to save mankind. And He is indeed, Jesus Christ.

And like we learned a few weeks ago in our study of the Beatitudes in Matthew chapter 5, to truly follow Christ, and to believe in Christ and to lift up the name of Jesus, is offensive to the world. It always has been and it will always be.

And to preach and teach and testify that Jesus is more than just another prophet or teacher; and that there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven, given among men, whereby we must be saved; well, that’s going to offend people! And it’s especially going to offend those in the world who refuse to believe.

And so Peter opens up this letter with the shortest, yet most important doctrinal statement of the Christian faith– that Jesus Christ is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. The God, the Man, our Savior, and our one and only true Messiah.

Now there’s something else in this opening phrase, which by the way, is one of the greatest examples of God’s grace in all of the Bible. It says;

Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ.

Now, why is that statement an example of grace?

Well, if you know the man Peter, before he was the Apostle Peter, then you already know why!

I mean, if you didn't know about Peter beforehand and you were to read through the four Gospels and read about how Peter, time and time again would mess up; and how he was always putting his foot in his mouth, and saying things he shouldn't say, and then read how he denied Christ three times, and then how he abandoned Him at the cross; and then you turn here to 1 Peter, and read that he was claiming to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ, well, you'd probably be very surprised that Jesus had chosen to use him!

Kind of like when somebody that knew me all my life, finds out that God saved me, and called me to preach. That's hard for some folks to believe, especially if they know nothing of God's grace themselves!

But friend, that's the grace of God! That's God's grace in action. It really happens and it happens in the lives of people we least expect. That's why you hear me so often tell you not to give up on your loved one, because there is power in the gospel! Power enough to save even the most vilest of sinners. Amen?

So with that said, let's just take a few minutes and see how Peter got here. How he got from where he was, to where he is here. And the reason it's important to look at this, is because his journey from where he was to where God has brought him here, has everything to do with what he's writing in this letter.

His past life – his past failures and disappointments – all his past mistakes have all contributed to the words that he has written in these two letters.

So just who was Peter, the Apostle?

Well, if you could picture in your mind a fourth grade student who is constantly raising his hand in class to ask questions, well, that's Peter. And most times when the teacher calls on him, he can't even remember why he raised his hand. And more times than not he has nothing intelligent to say. Only on a rare occasion does he say something, and almost always it's something he shouldn't have said.

John MacArthur, describes Peter as "the Apostle with a foot-shaped mouth".

Howard Hendricks, who was the author of the book we used to learn how to study the Bible a few years back and also a professor in a seminary. He would tell his students that the only time Peter ever opened his mouth was to swap feet.

Peter was the disciple who would rush in where angels feared to tread. He was inquisitive, impulsive, and daring. And while we often fault him for sinking beneath the waves, we sometimes forget that he was the only disciple to climb out of the boat and even attempt to walk on the water toward Jesus. All the other disciples stayed in the boat hanging on to their life preservers.

And while we fault him for denying the Lord three times in the courtyard, again, he was the only disciple willing to follow the Lord into that courtyard.

And so no disciple speaks as often as Peter does; but at the same time, no one is spoken to by the Lord as often as Peter. And no disciple is corrected more often than the Apostle Peter!

Also Peter is the only disciple to have ever tried to correct the Lord – which as it turned out, was not a good idea. Also no one verbally denied

Christ more publicly than Peter, and yet no disciple ever confessed Christ more boldly, than did Peter.

J. Allen Blair wrote decades ago that probably no other person, characterized in scripture, appears so impetuous, so unstable, and so distrustful; yet at the same time so bold, and fearless, and devoted.

And by the way, all of the above are among the reasons why most of us love the Apostle Peter.

When we study the life of Paul, most of us are intimidated. I mean, he was a brilliant attorney, very educated, and extremely bright, and he just seemed to have it all together.

But Peter, he was just an ordinary man. He was a fisherman. He was crude. He was average. He was seemingly unintelligent and very unpredictable. And for every surprising success in his life, he seems to match it with an equally stunning failure.

And that's why we love him, because that's something most of us can identify with.

Now, when Peter was born, his given name was Simon – or Simeon, in the Hebrew. His father's name was John. We also know that he had a brother named Andrew, who was actually the one who introduced Peter to Jesus.

We also know he grew up in a fishing village on the Sea of Galilee and that he had developed a fairly successful fishing business along with his brother Andrew. And they, along with two other brothers, named James and John, worked this business together. But when they met Jesus, they all four left that business to follow after Jesus.

Now, we also know that Peter was married and that his wife would often travel with him. We read about that in I Corinthians 9:5.

We also know that they probably didn't have any children, which may have been the reason she was able to travel with him.

We can also assume that his fishing business was lucrative enough for he and his wife to own their own home in Capernaum. We read about that in Mark 1:21. Also that this home was large enough to accommodate not only his wife, but also his mother-in-law.

Now, I'm not sure if Peter thought that to be a blessing or a curse, but at any rate, his mother in law lived with them. And we know that because Jesus healed her when she had become ill with a high fever. That's in Mark chapter 1.

Now, when the Lord meets Simon, he immediately nicknames him Peter. That's Petros in the Greek, and Cephas in Aramaic.

Petros, or Peter, means "stone" or "rock". And in time it would prove to be a prophetic name change – because Jesus would eventually take this impetuous, and unstable, and unpredictable, and emotionally unstable man, and make him like a rock – stable and steady.

Now, we could spend hours talking about all the times Peter acted like Peter, but let me just remind you of a few. And again, this is so we can appreciate even more what he's about to write in these two letters.

The first example, we find in Luke chapter 9. And I'm not going to read these verse by verse for sake of time, but here Peter, along with James and John, who were obviously the leaders of this group of disciples, have hiked up the slopes of a nearby hill to what would later become known as the Mount of Transfiguration.

Well, when they get to the top, the Lord begins to pray, and Peter and other two disciples fall asleep, which is their normal pattern.

Well, sometime later, Peter wakes up. And the first thing he sees is Jesus, talking to Moses and Elijah. And of course their garments are shining like the noonday sun, and they're having this serious conversation with Jesus, when Peter all of sudden inserts himself in this conversation: without an invite.

And then he blurts out in verse 33, he says, "Master it sure is good for us to be here!" And then he says, "let's make three tabernacles, or tents! We'll make one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah."

Now, if you really think about what he just said then you'll realize that he's just reduced Jesus to the same level as Moses and Elijah. And truth is, that's what every false religion in the world has been trying to do for centuries.

They've always considered Jesus to be just another prophet or teacher.

And then Peter tries to make some sort of permanent dwelling place for them, like they're going move from heaven back here to the earth, and not ever return to where they came from, which again was just nonsense.

And of course it got so bad that finally, God the Father to intervene. He had to call down from heaven, to get Peter to stop talking! And in so many words, God told Peter, He said, Peter! This is my Son . . . be quiet and listen to Him!"

And then we have another snapshot of Peter in Matthew 16. The Lord's asking His disciples who people think He is. And some say, John the Baptist, others say Elijah, others Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.

And then comes the major question on this examination of faith – and Jesus says to them, **"But who do you say that I am?"**

And Simon Peter answers – **You're the Christ, the Son of the living God."**

What a great answer! And then Jesus commends him for his answer and He tells him, only God the Father could have provoked that answer in your heart!

And then Jesus makes that famous statement about Peter that everyone knows and he says in verse 18

18 And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.

What a great mountain top experience for Peter!

But then just a few verses later, Peter, who is evidently already filled with **arrogance and** thinks he's smarter than Jesus attempts to rebuke the Lord for something He says. In verse 21 Jesus tells them about the future.

21 From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.

And then in the next verse

22 Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"

Now, just try and imagine that scene in your mind. After Jesus says that, Peter says, hey Jesus, step over here for just a minute.

Listen, all this talk of dying, don't you worry about that! That's not going to happen as long as I got your back! No way am I going to let anything happen to You!

And then Jesus responded.

23 But He turned and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men.”

And all of sudden, Peter goes from defender to devil, because he didn't understand that this was the reason Christ came! He came to die. He came to save mankind from their sin.

And so the reason Jesus rebuked him is because this had nothing to do with Peter's plan! This was God the Father's plan. Peter's picture of the future was that Jesus would end the revolution and end the repression of the Jewish people and defeat the Romans and become the reigning King of Israel and make all things right and usher in this glorious kingdom where Peter and his friends could go back to fishing and fish fry's on the beach and life would be without any cares whatsoever.

But Jesus saw a different future. Jesus saw the nation screaming for his crucifixion. Jesus saw the cross and the nails and the blood and the corpse and the tomb, but none of that did Peter expect.

And in John 13 when Jesus tells His disciples He must go and where He goes they cannot come, Peter still doesn't understand.

In John 13:36, Simon Peter said to Him, “Lord, where are You going?”

Jesus answered him, “Where I am going you cannot follow Me now, but you shall follow Me afterward.”

37 Peter said to Him, “Lord, why can I not follow You now? I will lay down my life for Your sake.”

38 Jesus answered him, “Will you lay down your life for My sake?”

Most assuredly, I say to you, the rooster shall not crow till you have denied Me three times.

And then five chapters later, in John chapter 18 it happened. Three denials . . . and then the rooster crows to signal Peter's crushing defeat.

The truth is, it doesn't take long for any of us to take our eyes off the Lord and get our focus on our plans and our expectations. But then when we do, it doesn't take long for us to regret it, because it always in one way or another comes back to haunt us.

Well, may the Lord help us to keep our eyes on Him and may the Lord give us the strength and the courage and the fortitude to keep Him first in our lives.

Amen?