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INTERNATIONAL

TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

1Peter - Lesson 1A

Chapter 1:1-5

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- As the Apostle John brought his remarkable gospel to a close, he chose to focus on a tender moment between the risen Lord and the most prominent apostle – Simon Peter
 - In Chapter 21, John records how the Lord appeared to Peter as he fished on the Sea of Galilee
 - Weeks earlier at the crucifixion of the Lord, Peter had been the most visible defector among Jesus’ disciples, though virtually all of them ran
 - And he denied Jesus three times publicly, despite having been the first among the disciples to confess Christ, the Rock upon which the church would be built
 - Now, at the end of John’s gospel, the humiliated Peter has retreated to his life of fishing
 - Wondering if all that he had followed after in the past three years had amounted to anything
 - Then the resurrected Jesus appears
 - And with a few simple words, Jesus restores Peter

John 21:15 So when they had finished breakfast, Jesus *said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me more than these?” He *said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He *said to him, “Tend My lambs.”

John 21:16 He *said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” He *said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He *said to him, “Shepherd My sheep.”

John 21:17 He *said to him the third time, “Simon, son of John, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” Jesus *said to him, “Tend My sheep.

John 21:18 “Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were younger, you used to gird yourself and walk wherever you wished; but when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will gird you, and bring you where you do not wish to go.”

John 21:19 Now this He said, signifying by what kind of death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He *said to him, “Follow Me!”

- In one powerful moment, Jesus picked up Peter from his despair and humiliation
 - He pierced his heart on the question of love and loyalty
 - Asking do you love me more than these fish?
 - Do you love me more than your work and way of life?
 - Peter responded emphatically, you know that I love you
 - To which Jesus commanded Peter, feed my sheep
 - Twice more Jesus asked the question did Peter love Him?
 - And twice more Peter declared insistently that he loved Jesus
 - And twice more Jesus gave the same command: feed, shepherd, tend my

sheep

- In that moment, Jesus erased the stigma of Peter's three denials with three opportunities for Peter to declare his faithful love for the Lord
 - And with that restoration fresh on his mind, Peter then hears the way he is to demonstrate that love: feed my sheep, shepherd my sheep, tend my sheep
- Of course, we know what Jesus meant
 - Jesus called Peter to act upon his love for the Lord by showing that love to the Lord's flock
 - And to do so in the way a shepherd shows love for his flock
 - By feeding them and tending to their needs
 - In Peter's case, the feeding was the teaching of God's word
 - And the shepherding was in directing their obedience to that word
 - And Peter was faithful to the end in his mission, never to deny or forsake the Lord again
 - And his first letter to the church stands proof of Peter's faithfulness to that commission
 - The letter we begin to study tonight
- We'll start our study by considering a little background
 - As with any epistle, we should begin examining the audience, the historical and social context of its day, and Peter's purpose in writing
 - Peter was the chief Apostle, both when Jesus walked the earth and afterward in the early church
 - He was appointed by Christ to be the Apostle to the Jews, and ministered for many years in Jerusalem
 - He was the one who preached at Pentecost and according to 1 Corinthians 15:5 he received a personal appearance from Christ
 - He was married and according to 1 Corinthians 9:5, he traveled with his wife when conducting ministry
 - Though we don't know when he died, well-founded tradition has Peter crucified upside down in Rome around AD 64.
- Peter's first letter doesn't dwell on lofty doctrinal issues for the most part
 - Like any NT letter, there is some doctrine teaching
 - But Peter's letter makes clear right from the start that his purpose in writing is not to teach principles the readers didn't already know
 - Peter wants to bring to mind things they already know to some degree
 - He 's going to talk of the challenges of living out the faith
 - Of practicing doing what's right, of living a holy life for Christ's sake
 - Of the necessity of relying on Christ's grace
 - And not merely the grace of our salvation
 - More grace in the practical sense

- Grace Christ provides to enable us to live out the holiness He requires
- And a grace to accept our circumstances as God ordained
- Really, Peter is preaching on recognizing and yielding to the sovereignty of God

1Pet. 1:1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen

1Pet. 1:2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.

- Like all epistles, this one begins with a salutation, where the author identifies himself and his audience
 - But Peter's salutation begins the teaching right from the beginning
 - He starts with a simple identifying statement
 - An apostle of Jesus Christ
 - Twelve men selected from among all men of all time to become his representatives among men
 - Peter being the chief of those selected, the rock
 - His name in Aramaic, Cephas, means rock
 - Peter, his Greek name, means stone
 - The man who's unshakable faith looked so shaky in the hours before the crucifixion
 - Yet he was to be the first among the Apostles in authority and honor
 - Now he brings all that authority to bear in his letter
 - As the Apostle of the Jews, Peter ministered first in Jerusalem
 - By the end of his life, tradition says he was living in Rome where he was eventually crucified upside down
 - But some believe that Peter left Jerusalem earlier and traveled throughout the regions where exiled Jewish believers lived, including Babylon and the Diaspora
- This has led to some controversy regarding the audience for this letter
 - Some scholars consider the audience to be primarily Gentile Christians
 - The second view says that the audience Peter had in mind was specifically Jewish believers scattered outside Jerusalem
 - In general I don't find this issue to be significant to our interpretation of Peter's letter outside a few key passages
 - Because whether to Jew or Greek, the teaching instructs us equally well today
 - So let's move past the point for now and look more closely at Peter's opening statement to the believers

- Peter himself says he is writing to aliens in these cities and regions of Asia minor
 - The first question that raises is, why were they considered by Peter to be aliens?
 - Well, if Peter was talking to Jews, then he could mean the readers were aliens in the places they lived because they had left their homeland
 - And certainly some scholars see the letter this way
 - But regardless of whether the audience were Jew or Greek, the term alien has a spiritual meaning that is far more meaningful and it's one we need to consider
 - These believers were aliens spiritually
 - They were not residents of the cities or towns in which they lived
 - Some lived in Pontus or Bithynia, regions in northern Asia Minor on the Black Sea
 - Some lived in Galatia in central Asia Minor
 - Some lived in Cappadocia in eastern Asia Minor
 - This letter, by the way, was an encyclical letter, which traveled from city to city to be read in each one in turn
 - But no matter where they lived, they were aliens
 - They could remain in these towns
 - They could return to Jerusalem
 - They could move to Rome
 - They could move to San Antonio/Austin
 - But regardless, wherever they lived, they would be aliens
 - And Peter wants to remind them that they are aliens
- A believer's allegiance is no longer to this world or to what can be found in the world
 - Remember Jesus' words to His disciples in John 15

John 15:19 “If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.

- The moment we believe in the Gospel and become a child of God, we are granted a new citizenship
 - From God's perspective, we are no longer a citizen of the world
 - While we once belonged to this world, and even to the prince of this world, the devil (sons of disobedience)
 - At the point we believe, we immigrate into Heaven
 - We are now a citizen of the Holy City in Heaven which we will one day inhabit for eternity
 - And though we are still waiting the reality of that new place, you are no less a citizen of Heaven even now as we wait
 - If you were born to American parents living overseas, you would be born

into American citizenship

- And though you had never set foot in America, you would be no less an American
- And so it is for you and I as citizens of Heaven

Heb. 11:13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Heb. 11:14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

Heb. 11:15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

Heb. 11:16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one.

Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

- The saints of old lived with this thought ruling their lives
 - They lived in such a way that by their lives they proved what was in their hearts
 - Their hope was not found in a country on earth
 - They placed their hope and future in a heavenly city they knew awaited them in glory
 - So at the moment we are saved, we become citizens of heaven
 - The flip side of that conversion is also true
 - The moment we believe we become foreigners in this world
 - We instantly become tourists, strangers, or sojourners the Bible calls us
 - The fundamental question that Peter is going to raise over and over again in this letter and the issue we are each going to need to consider and wrestle with
 - Are we living as tourists and sojourners in this world
 - Or are we putting down roots?
 - Are we settling in?
 - Have we forgotten where our true hope lies?
 - Have we begun to buy into what the world tells us should matter?
 - Peter is going to bring this issue up time and time again in the letter, so I won't belabor the issue here
- So Peter begins the letter introducing his first theme: the reality of our separation from the world
 - But we'll put that aside only for a moment so we can consider the second major theme Peter introduces
- His readers as those who are were chosen by God
 - The believer is God's elect

- His readers were the ones God has appointed to believe and to become His children
 - And we are brought to faith by God's gracious choice
- Peter didn't just describe the believer as the elect in passing
 - He takes a moment to elaborate on what it means to be the elect
- We are brought to this life as a believer, as an alien by a God who determined to accomplish this work from the beginning
 - Verse 2 declares that it was according to the foreknowledge of God
 - Our election into the family of God has its beginning in the eternal purpose of God's will
 - Our inevitable adoption as sons and daughters of God was a decision formed in the will of God and executed before even the foundations of the world were laid, according to Ephesians 1
 - When Peter talks of God's foreknowledge, he is speaking of more than merely an awareness of what will happen (as some try to explain it away)
 - In Biblical terminology, God's foreknowledge is a way of saying that what God knew beforehand is what He purposed to happen

Acts 2:22 “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know—

Acts 2:23 this Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

- God's foreknowledge is always connected to God's sovereign power to bring about that which He knows or sets His mind upon
 - Paul puts it simply in Ephesians 1:5

Eph. 1:5 He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

- To suggest that believers are called the elect simply because God knew in advance who would believe is not only unbiblical, it's nonsensical
 - Do we call someone the “president-elect” merely because one day the man woke up and decided he wanted to be president? And once he decides he wants the office, we start to call the person the president-elect?
 - If that's what the term meant, then we would be calling Hillary Clinton, Barak Obama, John McCain, Mike Huckabee, and the rest of the crowd president-elect, right?
 - They would all be the elect because they decided they wanted the job
 - Of course, that's utter nonsense
 - Any grade school student knows what we mean by the term president-elect

- because they know what elect means
- The definition of the word elect means to make a decision to select someone for a new position
 - In the case of a president, it means that a group of voters made a decision to select someone to be president
 - And in Biblical terms, it is a reference to God choosing men and women to receive His grace
- If fact, notice in verse 3 that Peter says God the Father has caused us to be born again to a living hope
 - And even before that, Peter describes the means by which God achieved that purpose
 - Verse 2 says that our salvation came about:
 - Because of the foreknowledge of the Father
 - By the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit
 - Made possible by the cleansing of Christ's atoning blood sprinkled on the heavenly altar
 - God the father chose us
 - God the Spirit changed our hearts so that we would receive the truth
 - God the Son cleansed us of our sin by His blood
 - All three persons of the Trinity were involved in the work of redemption, working a plan that God foreknew, anticipated, and intended before we ever took our first breath
 - There is simply no doubt in scripture that God appoints believers to faith and then brings that plan into reality
 - Now I realize that this doctrine may raise more questions in your mind than answers today
 - And though I believe those questions deserve answers, I am not going to address them now
 - And the reason is because Peter himself isn't raising the issue of election for the purpose of a doctrinal discussion
 - Remember, the prospect of God electing believers to faith would not have been news at all to the early church
 - Especially to a Jewish church that knew very well the principle of God choosing people
 - God calls the nation of Israel His elect, and we know that He calls them this because He chose them, as He says in His word

Deut. 7:6 “For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

- So if Peter isn't intending to launch into a discourse on the doctrine of election

- Then what is his purpose in raising this issue especially at such an early point in his letter?
- Well, in a word: perspective
 - He wants to develop a little perspective in these believers
 - In fact, Peter was already at work building perspective when he began the letter in reminding them of their alien status
- And now Peter combines the idea of being a stranger in this world with the reality that they are in this situation because of God's sovereign choice to place them there
 - The readers were in their situation by His doing and by His will according to a plan that started long before they came along
- In the early church, life as a Christian could be hard
 - As a Jew, believing in Christ brought rejection from most if not all your family and your culture
 - You lost connection with your friends, your way of life perhaps
 - As a Jew you were already subject to persecution at times, but now even Jews persecuted you
 - And as a Gentile, you lost the ability to do business in a pagan culture
 - Where allegiance to pagan gods was a prerequisite for conducting commerce in many places, especially in the regions Peter mentions
 - Though these new Christians had been taught that they should be prepared for these hardships
 - They had learned first-hand that faith in Christ brought trials
 - They learned how hard it was at times to persevere in this new life
- And when the times get tough, faith can falter
 - And we begin to see our troubled circumstances as a kind of problem that must be solved
 - We interpret bad circumstances as a sign that something isn't right, and we need to fix it
 - Wives and Husbands in bad marriages seek escape
 - Slaves seek to rebel
 - Those under persecution seek relief
 - They put their obedience and their witness at risk
- Peter, who remembers the command of His Lord to shepherd the flock by feeding the sheep, wants to feed them the perspective they need to respond to their trials and their difficulties
 - And the perspective he's going to provide is perspective we need too
- His lesson on perspective begins with a three part description of the character of their salvation
 - The reward, the experience, and the privilege of our salvation

1Pet. 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

1Pet. 1:4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

1Pet. 1:5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

- It's only natural to remind the readers first of the reward that comes with their salvation
 - Peter starts in verse 3 reminding believers that our salvation is first and foremost a hope in resurrection
 - I'm often amazed at how few Christians can state what belief means
 - Belief in what
 - In Christ, yes, but what about Christ
 - That he was the Messiah, but how do we know that
 - Romans 10 gives us the answer

Rom. 10:9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

- We are believing that He was raised from the dead
 - And in that belief, we have reason for hope, knowing that the same power of God that raised Jesus from death can certainly raise us as well
 - And since He has promised to raise us also

2Cor. 4:13 But having the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I BELIEVED, THEREFORE I SPOKE," we also believe, therefore we also speak, **2Cor. 4:14** knowing that He who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and will present us with you.

- And there is a living hope in that belief
 - The world fears death and has no answer for the inevitability of death
 - And the fear of death drives men to a life of desperation

Shortly before his execution by firing squad, the notorious murderer James Rodgers was asked whether he had any final requests. "Why yes," he replied. "I'd like a bulletproof vest."

- But not the Christian
 - We have no fear of the grave, or should not

- The fear of death gives way to a living hope knowing that we will be raised just as Christ
 - How does it feel to consider that moment when you pass from this life to the next
 - Knowing that as you assume your new incorruptible form that it is the one and only time you will experience that transformation
 - That in that moment you will recognize that you are never going to face the prospect of an end again
 - That's true living hope
- That's what we have as a result of our Lord
- But if that weren't enough, Peter reminds the reader that this transformation is followed by an inheritance
 - In verse 4 we are reminded that our salvation brings with it an undefiled, imperishable inheritance reserved in heaven that cannot fade
 - It can't be withdrawn
 - It can't be lost
 - Consider how you come into an inheritance
 - You receive it after one who has died leaves you something in a will or as we often call it, the last will and testament
 - Well, my friends, let me tell you about the will your name was written in
 - It was the last will and testament of Jesus Christ
 - The New Testament
 - Upon Christ's death, the new testament was inaugurated in blood, Hebrews 9 says
 - And by that will, we receive an inheritance as children of Gods
 - Now if the death has already occurred, then the will has already gone into effect for those who are heirs
 - And as heirs, we must already be the recipients of that inheritance even now
 - And so we are
 - We can't get to it or see it now, because God has a better plan
 - He has stored it in a better place
 - He's placed it in an incorruptible place, stored for a day when we can receive it in full, unspoiled, imperishable
 - Yet because we are heirs and because it's already ours according to the will of God and because it is in heaven protected and waiting, it can't be lost
- Can things get any better?
 - Not only have we been saved from judgment
 - Not only are we given a living hope that the power of death has been removed for us

- We also have an eternal inheritance appointed for us by God
- But wait, you might ask Peter
 - What if we shrink back?
 - What if we can't make it to the end of this race without faltering?
 - What hope do we have to actually reach the end of our lives still trusting in Christ for this hope and inheritance?
 - Peter brings that answer in verse 5
 - Peter says we are those who are protected by the power of God
 - God doesn't save us in His power and then turn us loose in some sense and just hope it all works out OK
 - Were He to do something so absurd, who could be saved?
 - Honestly, who among us believes so much in our own abilities and strength of character that we could be sure of persevering on our own merits?
 - Not me
 - But praise God it doesn't work that way
 - And He protects us through the same faith He gave us in the beginning
 - The same way we were saved (by faith) we will be assured to persevere (by faith)
 - And that perseverance is for a salvation to be revealed to us in our last days
 - At our glorification
 - When we leave this body behind, we enter into the fullness of the salvation that is ours even now
- And then Peter moves into the second point, the experience of our salvation

1Pet. 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,
1Pet. 1:7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;
1Pet. 1:8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,
1Pet. 1:9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

- In this salvation, Peter reminds the early church that they rejoice
 - They are excited and thankful and joyful because they know they have this inheritance and they have been saved from the penalty of their sins
 - And Peter says they have this joy even though – for a little while – they have been distressed by various trials
 - We need to get a clear understanding on what Peter means by trials

- The word is *peirasmos*
 - It can mean temptation or trial, but it's essential meaning is an external kind of attack
 - Something that comes upon a believer from outside themselves
- And the purpose of the trial is to challenge our fidelity to God and to Christ, and reveal the character of our faith
- Did you notice Peter's intentional contrast?
 - In verses 3-5, Peter went to great pains to bring to mind the permanency and lasting quality of the inheritance we have received
 - And of our faith itself
 - Being kept by the power of God
 - These are the things that should be on our minds because they are lasting and permanent and meaningful
 - And now in verse 6 Peter says you have trials in the meantime, but they are only for a little time (the Greek word literally means briefly)
 - Now is Peter saying that he somehow knows that his readers are about to experience some kind of relief from persecution and trials?
 - Does Peter have advanced word from God that the trials are about to end and that soon life will become blissful and uneventful?
 - No...his point is not that earthly trials are about to end
 - Peter's point, of course, is that in comparison to the unimaginable limitlessness of eternity
 - Our earthly life is brief, very brief

James 4:13 Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, and spend a year there and engage in business and make a profit."

James 4:14 Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

- In contrast to the eternity of our glorified life with Christ, our life here is so brief that it is virtually immeasurable in the economy of God
 - And so whatever trials might come our way in this life, are by definition brief trials – they come for just a little while
 - Even if a trial should come upon us that would last our entire life
 - A disease or disability
 - Or perhaps a condition of poverty or persecution
 - Those trials and circumstances may fairly be called brief when we consider how long our joy will last in the eternal realm with God
 - And yet they are so very important to the character of our faith
 - We will return to this second point next week and continue on to the third