

Living For Christ In A Hostile World

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 January 2020

Preacher: Prof Donald Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn now for a moment to the first epistle of Peter, 1 Peter, and chapter 1, and the opening words of the epistle.

Be that an apostle of Jesus Christ to those who are elect exiles of this person in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood, may grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[1 : 40] Thank you. Thank you. words that Peter has given to us at the head of this letter. And they serve two purposes.

They tell us first of all who the letter is from and then who the letter is for. Two simple points. And I want to build my thoughts around these two particular poles.

First of all, who is the letter from? Well, Peter is quite plain. It's from Peter. Peter, he says, is an apostle of Jesus Christ.

It has the same message as those of Paul or John or James. The same gospel. Nevertheless, it's from this particular person, the apostle Peter.

And he is, he says, an apostle, that is, a sent one, a messenger commissioned by Christ to witness to him to the very ends of the earth.

[2 : 49] And Peter was given special gifts for that ministry. He was filled with God's Spirit. He was with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration.

He saw his miracles. He saw the risen Christ. And all these were part and parcel of his preparation for this apostolic ministry.

But he was also, of course, a fisherman. And that too is part of his life of service. Because all that we have in terms of background and in terms of education or social environment, all these things are part of what we bring to our service.

And I have no doubt that Peter learned much on the tempestuous sea of Galilee that has still been in good stead in the years in his apostolic ministry. So all we are, all we have, not only our spiritual lives, but also our day-to-day lives and the natural gifts, all these are part and parcel of what we owe, what we mean to the Lord in our service.

And of course, Peter was also a flawed individual. And there is nothing unique about that. We all are, to alarming degrees, flawed men and women.

[4 : 22] Even the Lord saw in presence, the Apostle Peter was sometimes very hard to control and he was given to outbursts of sometimes careless expression.

And of course, then you have the denial at the end of the Lord's own ministry. And that, of course, leading to that supply moment when he goes out and we, bitterly for the Lord, catches his eye.

And so, a man of great physical courage, a man of great practical experience on the seas as a fisherman, a man of tempestuous personality, a man who had seen things that none of us can claim to have seen in the company of the Lord.

And it's all brought to bear upon his ministry. And fundamentally, he was a church planter who played a primary role in establishing the church in Jerusalem and more widely among the Jews. But he was also, as this epistle explains to us, he was a pastor with a deep concern for the wider church of God, not only for the unconverted and the unreached, the unevangelable, but also for those who were converted and had their own pressing spiritual needs.

[5 : 57] That's why we have the epistle to deal with this, with the problems that these people faced that he addresses in the epistle. And so the Lord had said to him, yes, go be my witness, but he also said to him, go feed my lambs and feed my sheep.

And both categories need to be fed. The young, I hope, know they need to be fed, but so do those of us who are so very much older.

We too live precarious spiritual lives. I need to be kept by God's power to the very day of salvation. We need to be fed by the word of God and by those sent to expound that word to us.

So, yes, feed my lambs, feed my sheep, my sheep feed my lambs. That also was part of the Lord's order. It's very important that the sheep themselves being fed should also feed the lambs.

and the lambs should go up with the sheep in order to be fed. So, we have this man, Peter, very, very much a man at this point, not far from his own eventual martyrdom in Rome at the hands of Nero, but still serving the Lord actively as his commissioned apostle.

[7 : 29] apostle. So, it's from him. And, of course, all our service is individualistic. We all serve in our own way.

Peter is not Paul. Paul is not John. John is not James. James is in Luke. Mary is not Martha. and so on. All these variations and the church is such a tapestry of individual experiences and individual talents.

we've all had or all moments of ovulation or moments of real despondency that way down perhaps in the depths and the heights sometimes no variation at all for long periods.

But anyway, here we are each saying to the Lord what John Calvin said in his great motto I offer my heart to you O Lord.

So here is Peter who has seen so much and heard so much and done so much and who has failed so often and went such pretty years and all that's part and parcel of his ministry.

[8 : 44] And so tonight you know when we say to ourselves well who am I that I should do this or venture to say that how dare I pretend to serve but whoever we are we have our own place that nobody else can fill within the body of Christ.

And if we don't serve God where he placed us then nobody will fill that space for us. John Knox said at one moment to a male queen of Scots which challenged them as to why he dared speak to her in such bold democratic language she said who are you and he said well I am a said demanded of God to speak the truth and speak it I must impugn it to list and you are in the place that God has put you some eminent in many ways some not so eminent God has his own scale different from our scale very often but just as you are that is where we are called upon to serve the Lord with our widow's might perhaps or with the amazing talent of someone like St.

Paul or Augustine or Calvin or Luther whoever we are each one obligated to play our own part and it's a challenge that I would leave with you how many of us succumb to the temptation to not serve because we don't feel worthy of it or equipped for it now it cannot be there is no ungifted person in the church of Christ no ungifted member in the body of Christ and therefore there are to be no passengers in the church or body of the Lord Jesus remember the psalmist tells us that from the mouths of babes and sucklings God has commanded praise and the devil loves to destroy your self-esteem and that has its own merits but it also disables us because we say

I'm not worthy to do this or say that and it leaves us paralyzed and the place we ought to fill and the word we ought to speak goes unfilled and unuttered well so much for the man who wrote the letter but who is it for we know a great deal about them from other sources beyond this epistle we know that for example they are a very very young church these are very early disciples of the Lord they were in great Christian homes they had no great decades of instruction as you have had and yet the apostle he doesn't write down to them but he writes up to them he addresses their minds he honors them with an interest in the gospel and its great doctrines young though they are he expects them to love these truths and to wrestle with them and to rarish them and to long for more teaching all these great themes so that a young young church maybe some 20 years old at the most and many among them much younger than that or even the very elders would be young men young believers and yet this epistle is so challenging theologically inexhaustible and it's meant not for theologians but it's meant for young believers it's for them it's their food their drink it's what feeds the sheep and what feeds the lambs we know too that they were persecuted but not much said of that here but they were going through hard times distracting times and many would perish in a fiery trial but it's not on their youthfulness or on their tribulations that Peter focuses instead he homes in on two great realities first of all their relation to

God and then the relation to the society around them and I want to meditate with you for a moment on just those two dimensions of this passage first of all their relation to God now you see at once that there are the three divine persons there's the father there's the spirit and there is God the son the Lord Jesus Christ and they're related to each one of them because each one was and is involved in our salvation each is performing his own role doing his own work God the father God the son and the spirit each involved in the Lord's own ministry in the Lord's crucifixion in the

[14 : 19] Lord's resurrection and in my conversion and you because it's not as if Christ went home to his father left to the spirit but the Lord Jesus still is active and God the father is still active and the spirit too of course is still active and so behind every conversion and with you every step of the way there is a triune God in all the fullness of his majesty cooperating in love with each other and sharing a love for you it's not only that all three persons are one in substance as you learn your catechism but they're also one in love with a passionate commitment to your salvation and so each one was involved each one is still involved in a daily way in your spiritual progress and each of them

God the Father is here tonight as we gather and God the Son is here and God the Spirit is here too and in you as you live and work and walk each one dwells as the one God in your heart you're such therefore amazing people so here the three are all involved in your salvation but the apostle does itemize and and relates different parts of experience and privilege to different persons let's note that apportionment for just a moment first of all he says that we are elect we are chosen by God and one could say that means fundamentally that we are in God's eyes we are choice people it's hard to believe that we are choice people just as

God's own son Jesus was his elect his special one his choice person so each one of God's children is choice and each of us knows all that we have to this choice that God has made of us and it's traced back by Peter to the foreknowledge of God the Father that is it's traced back into eternity itself and it's not simply a knowledge but as the rabbi used to insist it is a knowledge which carries with a deep deep affection a love it's an eternal love the astonishing thing that God knows us and God loves us simultaneously because the one ought to preclude the other the knowledge ought to say that person is not lovable and yet

God knows and God loves and God has always known us and God has always loved his own children and that is a remarkable fact to ponder we've known each other a long time many of us but God knew us before any of us knew each other God has known us from all eternity and God has loved us God has been aware of us God has had his purpose for us God has known our names God has got his book our name is in the book God has planned for us in the book all that is brought before us here God's foreknowledge of us God's eternal love now I can express that in words can I visualize it no I cannot but it's such a precious thing you know that we parted company so often the last number of months with those we've loved in this world and known in this world and we say well I knew for so many many years but it strikes me so often well

God knew before I knew God knew her before I knew her in fact God's never been without knowing you not in some purely intellectual way like some great planner some abstract planner but he's known you with his great paternal love love and so often as he watched over us in our pilgrimage down through the years he has been filled with compassion and he has pitied us and I might go to say that you know God has pitied you from all eternity because he has foreseen your troubles from all eternity and he said there's compassion for you it just doesn't happen the day that the trouble hits us and then it hits God it's always been before God's mind you've been before God's mind with all your troubles but you've also been before him with all the great destiny that God has planned for you all the blessings all those blessings that fill our hearts with wonder love and praise so God has foreknown us from all eternity and God having no foreknown us has formed this great plan to conform us to conform you to the image of his own son and that plan has been there

[20 : 35] God's never been without that plan I might even say that even before man fell before the human race fell that God's plan was to conform us to make us Christ like he has foreknown and foreloved us from all eternity and of course that means that this love will never let go there are things that obscure it clouds that seem to blot it out a darkness that hides God's face love love or love or doubts or or guilt extremities of pain which sometimes some of you have to go and these things hide God's face but they don't hide you from God's face this love never lets go there's a beautiful Hebrew word a very very simple word the word chesed

God's loving kindness God's unfailing love the love that is always there even in the darkness even when we can't see and when we can't feel so this love God has loved us He's known us He's

ordained us to salvation from before the beginning of the world and so God has chosen us and what's He chosen us to?

well the apostle tells us we've been elect he says to be sanctified by God's Spirit to obedience and to the belief of the truth first he says this sanctification by God's Spirit now it's not so much this what we call the process of growing in grace but a moment of consecration when God sets you apart we sometimes set elders apart to the eldership deacons the diaconate ministers to ministry missionaries to their own missionary fields and it is a moment of special dedication and consecration and in many ways also a moment of separation and God has ordained us to be set apart to be taken out of the old stock of Adam and grafted into the new stock of the last Adam the Lord Jesus in other words it's not so much growth or furtherness growth but it's a decisive change and it's affected by God's Spirit when he calls us by his own word and blesses the word to us and by that word sets us apart he dedicates us to his own service calls us out of the world we were dead in sins he makes us alive we are serving the flesh we were what Paul calls the old man we become new we become bearers and exponents of our new resurrection life it's a definitive and irreversible change and that's happened to every single believer in this audience tonight everyone has been selected by God for ordained by God to be consecrated so that we are no longer our own we are no longer dead in sins we are no longer unequipped to serve God we are called we are vessels set apart to a holy use consecrated dedicated to the service of God and he wants to emphasize that fact for us we are elect in or through this sanctification of course you see so often people say well this election doctrine this predestination doctrine it is inimical to sanctification because if we elect we can live as we please and then

God will still save us at the end but you see here this intimate intimate link between election and sanctification elect to sanctification elect to be holy not because we were holy not to make holiness unnecessary but because God has undertaken as I mentioned earlier on to make us Christ-like and it's not a matter of logic as we were to say I mustn't be unholy because I'm elect it's not simply that but God will not let us people live lives which lack this essential element and dimension of holiness we are elect to it God will see to it now that will raise of course many many mysteries for us but where

God begins God will complete and God will finish so we are elect not because holy not to make holiness unnecessary but in order to be holy because we cannot sanctify ourselves so God will set us apart and then God will cause to grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ and then elect unto obedience and in some ways it's the same idea elect by the grace of God not because we have been obedient or because we have become believers or because we have been converted but elect to obedience obedience the consequence not the cause of my being chosen by God elect to obedience elect to be sanctified elect to be obedient and this is where of course what God counsels in eternity comes breaks forth in time we see we see our election we see it in this fact of our obedience of faith for one thing and the obedient lives that follow and this going right back to this great fountain of the invincible grace of God so this choice

[28 : 11] God has made of you as a result of it we are sanctified and set apart and transformed and as result of it we live lives of obedience in the words we acknowledge the lordship of Jesus because that's what obedience means what is holiness what is a saintly person is it somebody whose head is always in the clouds always has mystical experiences knows a good deal of theology is it not the case and I find this so challenging that holiness is obedience whatever God is saying to you through his word and providence there obey because it's not in some overwhelming experience it's not in some magical moments or many such moments but in this fact this voice that says what Thomas said to

Jesus my lord and my god taking god seriously remember we read from exodus chapter 24 and I'll come back to that later on we will obey they said that's the great thing this submission to the lordship of our risen saviour Jesus Christ this lord in every part of our lives every area of our existence Jesus Christ is lord my lord and my god and so elect to obedience to sanctification or consecration and then to obedience and to the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ now at the first the most obvious level this means that the blood that cleanses from all sin is sprinkled on you and it's such a remarkable image because you know one can say at one level well blood's a messy thing not a cleansing medium but messy and the point of course is that the cross it's a very ugly thing and an abhorrent thing you may know in a great hymn there is a fountain filled with blood drawn from

Emmanuel's veins many modern hymn books refuse to contain that hymn because the image is too abhorrent and yet there is no other place where you and I can find cleansing from guilt from the power of sin from its pollution particularly but in the blood that great promise if we confess our sins the blood cleanses us from all sins and of course that is for many of us a point when a discipleship began that great moment of discovery when a guilt ridden conscience realizes that God's own son died in my place and that his sacrifice covers notice all sins we grade them big sins and small sins but no that does not register in God's book cleanses from all sin and you say well for at last does that mean it means one thing my sin because ultimately no other sin matters but my sin to me and I have sprinkled with it as the blood was sprinkled on the

Passover on the doorposts and the lintel or in Exodus 24 on the book of the covenant and on the people and that blood sprinkled upon them was a blood of privilege it burnt them out as God's covenant people but it also of course meant obligation we will obey we have our own part of the covenant to comply with and to fill to fulfill but I want to bring this to a conclusion I just want to take up for a moment this other idea that these people are elect but in relation to society where are we where we're told that we are exiles sojourners or strangers aliens in this world we are stateless people we are one nation

Peter will tell us in the second chapter we are a holy nation we have a great history but we have no geography we don't have our own Christian land or state we don't have our own commune because we are dispersed through all nations and everywhere we are we are exiles and stateless resident aliens with no rights and in Jeremiah we read of the Old Testament church in exile in Babylon and I wanted to read that for one reason because it's very tempting when I say to myself and to others you know that we are aliens this isn't our world this is not my country and therefore I owed nothing but just to attend

[34 : 56] Christian meetings and the world is no concern of mine and I can understand that because the world is so depressing and so utterly hostile to us as it's always been it's no worse than it was in that respect both Peter and Paul will feel it's full force in the moment of marriage the full force of that hatred but that doesn't entitle us to wash your hands of it go go go back again to that letter from Jeremiah to the exiles it's a remarkable piece of Old Testament teaching because those exiles were so attempted to hate the Babylonians and all they stood for and to hate this land they wanted to hang their harps on the trees and never seen again in this fallen and hostile alien world but God sent word to them and said build houses and plant gardens marry children because you belong to this world for the time being and he said to them seek the welfare of the place where you are and pray for its welfare the welfare of the hated

Babylonian state pray for its welfare seek its welfare pray for its welfare because its welfare will be your welfare and so no matter how disengaged we may feel from the culture of a post-Christian society with all its hostility to our Christian faith and our traditions we are in the same place and the same obligation as the exercise that Jeremiah wrote to here we must build houses and plant gardens here we must work for the welfare of our own community and pray for its welfare here we must be salt and light

Paul to the Philippians laid down the directive wherever it says you find truth or virtue or beauty or righteousness in your society in this Roman colony give your minds to it give your support to it there is much in this world that's abhorrent much disturbing condemnation but there are good things too that deserve our support institutions government local national cultural forces charities like the RNRI and so on well the point really is quite simple is it not seek the welfare of the land you don't belong to because we have here no continuing city there were Babylon for 70 years and they knew that one day they'd leave it as a nation and they longed to leave it but while you're in it the prophet says

God says pray for its welfare they were on the wrong side of Jordan but that's where God had cast their lot and we too must while we long to be with Christ which is far better we must still work for the good of the world we belong to and that's why this church and congregation and in this town we are here to be salt and light with a debt imposed upon us by God towards our own community to work for the amelioration of all that is wrong and promote all that is virtuous and good and lovely and true and God has made his choice people and given us choice resources to enable us to engage in that project with its own presence to help us be granted so let's join in prayer

O Lord have mercy upon us in all we endeavor to do we fall so far short of your own standards and fail to honor you as we ought but Lord help us amid all that all the evidence of our own

inadequacies and our own ineptitudes help us to know that we still have a calling a vocation collectively as a congregation individually also as believers of heart to work for the welfare of the world we don't belong to and to pray for your blessing upon it we thank you O Lord for always knowing us and not rejecting us and for forming such a great purpose for us despite our utter unworthiness O Lord don't let us go keep hold of us to the day of salvation and glorify your name through us and bless your word in this place that word of power

[41 : 18] O Lord may it inspire and enoble your people and may it convict the consciences and persuade the minds of those who hate you for Jesus sake amen our closing psalm psalm psalm 126 and we shall sing the whole of this psalm it's on page 419 we shall sing the whole psalm when science bondage God turned back us men that dreamed were we let's stand to sing and

When he that filled with laughter was our love, Our charm with that or he, Among the heavens said the Lord, Great things for them have brought, The Lord hath done great things for us, Where joy to us is brought,

At streams of water in the south, Our bondage are recalled, The snow endures a living time, Of joy and joy they shall, The tenderly precious seed, In glory for thy Lord, In countless bringing back his sheeps,

Rejoicing shall return.