

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 4/18/93  
I Peter 1:17-21 "How God Sets a Hostage Free"

**Intro:** All of us have been deeply impacted this week by the atrocity this week at the prison in Lucasville. We've been obviously concerned for the men from our church who work there, and for their families. And we've thought of the hostages. We've wondered, "What would it be like to be a hostage?"

God's timing is amazing. We've been working our way through a book study of I Peter on Sunday mornings. It's not coincidental that the text we "happen" to be studying this week has to do with hostages. The text is I Peter 1:17-21. I've entitled the message, "How God Sets a Hostage Free."

Q: Did you realize that the Bible teaches that every person is born into this world as a hostage? You were born a hostage. So was I. We are all born hostages. Hostages to what? To sin and death. Every one of us. But in eternity past, God devised a plan to free us.

Q: How does God set people free?

Peter wrote the letter of I Peter to people that had already experienced the life-saving work of God. God had already set them free. They were no longer hostages to sin and death. They'd been released.

Q: But how did God set them free? How does He do it today for us?

Key Word: "Redeem" (18)--"to release by paying a ransom"

**Proposition: I Peter 1:17-21 explains for us how God sets a person free. He wants people who have been set free to know 2 things.**

I. The Responsibility (17)

II. The Reason (18-21)

A. How we were NOT set free (18)

B. How we WERE set free (19-21)

1. The Payment (19)

2. The Plan (20)

3. The Participants (21)

People who have been set free by God need to know 2 things...

**I. The Responsibility (17)**

God has given us a responsibility.

V 17 "And if you call on the Father..."

Notice the verse begins with a connective word, "and." That reminds us to check out the context. Remember Peter wrote this letter to Christians living in Asia minor. They were suffering severe antagonism from a society that was hostile to Christianity. What did Peter tell them?

First, he reminded them of their identity (1-2). Christians are sojourners in this world (1). We're temporary residents. We're aliens. But what's more, we are special

to God (2). We are elect sojourners. We have been chosen by the design of God the Father, by the display of God the Spirit, and experienced the deliverance of God the Son. What's the right way to respond to our privileged identity? Bless God!

Vv 3-12 are a Benediction, a Blessing. Peter calls on us to bless God for His Salvation. Bless Him for what He's done in the past (3a). Bless Him for the inheritance He will give to us in the future (4-5). And bless Him for what He is doing in the present (6-9). True, we may have to suffer in this life. But so did Christ. In vv 10-12, Peter reminds us of the pattern Christ established. The suffering comes now, the glory will follow. So bless God.

But don't just bless God with your lips. Bless Him with your life. That's what vv 13-16 are all about. Saved people are to be holy people. We are to BE holy.

Q: Why? Why should we live holy lives?

A: Vv 17-21 tell us why. Because of the Price that was paid to set us free!

Q: What's our responsibility as holy people? V 17...

V 17 "If you call on the Father..."

Notice the "if, then" structure of the sentence. "If" you call on a Father (the implication is, "and you do!"). "Since" you call on the Father.

To whom is God a Father? To those who what? Jn 1:12 "To those who receive Christ and believe on His Name." A person who calls on the Father is a Christian.

Observation: Peter gives us some excellent marks of true Christian.

1. One who calls on the Father (17)
2. One who lives as a sojourner (17)
3. One who does not cling to vain tradition (18)
4. One who has been redeemed (19)
5. One who exercises genuine faith in the Person and work of God (21)

If you call on the Father, if you're a Christian, then what's your responsibility?

V 17 "Pass the time of your sojourning..."

I'm not sure the word "pass" is the best word to use for the greek verb in v 17. "Passing time" to us has the idea of wasting time, of idly watching it go by. That's not what Peter has in mind.

"pass"--an imperative; "to act, behave, conduct oneself; to live"

For example:

II Pt 2:18 "who live in error"

I Tim 3:15 "that you may know how you should behave yourself"

Q: What's Peter saying? This.

If you call on the Father, and if your a Christian, then our Heavenly Father will judge us one day without partiality and favoritism. And if that's the case, then we have a responsibility. We are responsible to live our lives right now as sojourners, as those who fear God.

Here's the point. If you're a Christian, then live it. If you are a Christian, then make a conscious decision to invest your life as a sojourner for Christ.

Illust: Do you remember what happened to Abraham's nephew Lot? When did he get into trouble? When he stopped living as a sojourner, and became a resident in Sodom. Everything he lived for went up in smoke. He lost his home and all his earthly possessions. He lost His wife. He lost his testimony.

Listen. If God has set us free from sin and death, we have a responsibility. We're to live like it!

Q: Can people tell from looking at your life that God has set you free from sin?

Illust: Habits?

Tran: We have a responsibility. We are to live as sojourners. But why?

## **II. The Reason (18-21)**

V 18 "Forasmuch as you know"

There are a lot of things I don't know. There are a lot of things you don't know. Eg--

But listen. The Bible makes on thing perfectly clear. There may be differences of interpretation on a lot of things, but not on this. Peter says WE KNOW beyond a shadow of doubt how we're redeemed!

Q: How did God rescue us from our sin? First, the negative...

### A. How we were NOT set free (18)

V 18 "You know that you were NOT redeemed with corruptible things..."

There were 3 kinds of people in the world of Peter's day: Freemen, slaves, and freed men. 60,000,000 people in the Roman Empire were slaves.

A person could become a slave in various ways: through war, bankruptcy, they could sell themselves, their parents could sell them, or by birth.

A slave could become a freed man by paying the price his owner required. If he could come up with the redemption price, he could be free.

The Romans had a pagan practice that Peter may have in mind here. If a slave was seeking to buy his freedom, he would pay money into the local temple treasury. His aim was to honor his god (small "g"). He believed that his god would ransom or purchase him from his master. When that happened, as far as society was concerned, he would become a freed man. But as far as he was concerned, he was the property of his god. (see: I Pt 2:16 "As free men...servants of God.") (see: Michaels, 64)

Q: How were we set free from our bondage to sin?

Did we pay off God? Did we buy His favor? What does Peter say? NO! "You were not redeemed with corruptible things..."

Listen. You can place all of the religions of the world into 2 categories.

1. One says that Man is responsible to reach and appease God. That's what Islam is all about. Tragically, that's what the average person on the street in America believes too. "If I live a good life, when I die, I'll go to heaven."

2. The other says that man can't reach and please God. He's dead in his sins. He needs God to reach down and save him. That's the gospel.

This is amazing. Christians are people who have been set free from their vain manner of life. We're not perfect. But we have been set free. We've been redeemed.

Illust:

To "redeem" means "to set free, to rescue, to free by paying a ransom." How were we set free? By what price?

### B. How we WERE set free (19-21)

Peter explains 3 facets of our redemption.

#### *1. The Payment (19)*

V 19 "But with the precious blood of Christ..."

Remember, Peter was a Jew, with a lengthy Jewish heritage. In v 19, Peter is calling to mind a rich, Jewish illustration from Israel's history.

If God taught His people anything in the OT, it was this. Sinful men can approach Him only through sacrifice. Day after day, year after year after year, the Israelites brought lambs to be slain as sacrifices. Beginning in Moses' day, for over 400 years they brought their animals to be offered on the altar in the tabernacle. Then after Solomon built the temple, sacrifices were made there in Jerusalem. The sacrifices went on for hundreds of years, until finally, the Romans destroyed the Jewish temple in AD 70.

Just think of it. The blood of thousands upon thousands of animals flowed down the altar. Why? For one reason--to provide a covering for the sins of men. Thousands upon thousands of lambs gave their lives. Until what happened? Until THE Lamb of God came. He was a lamb without blemish or spot--Jesus the Messiah.

Q: Why did Jesus Christ enter the world?

A: To be our Passover Lamb.

When Jesus came, He lived a perfect, sinless life. He lived the perfect life we could not live. And when the time came, in obedience to His Heavenly Father, He laid down His life. The blood of the Lamb was shed. He became a Sacrifice for us.

Mk 10:45 "For the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a RANSOM for many."

Tit 2:14 "Who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us..."

Our redemption involved a great payment.

Q: When did God design our redemption?

This may be hard for us to fathom, but God devised our redemption even before He created the world!

## 2. *The Plan (20)*

Many feel that v 20 is actually an excerpt from a creed or hymn.  
V 20 "Who verily was foreordained before..."

Did you catch that? Our redemption was in the plan of God before Creation occurred. Christ's death was an appointment, not an accident. We share in the benefits of something that was in the mind of God throughout eternity past. Listen. God has you in view before He ever created Adam.

Your redemption was planned before Creation. Then Peter reminds us that it was "manifested" in these last times. Listen. From the human perspective, our Lord was cruelly murdered. But from God's perspective, He laid down His life for sinners (Wiersbe).

Q: What does that truth do for you?

A: It should motivate and encourage you! Why? Notice the last 2 words of v 20--"for you." The payment was made FOR YOU. You are special to God.

Illust:

Q: Does benefits from this redemption? Notice the participants...

## 3. *The Participants (21)*

V 21 "Who by Him do believe..."

Q: Who are the participants in the redemption of God?

A: Those people who have genuine faith.

Notice I said "genuine" faith. Listen. It's not enough merely to have "faith" or to "believe." The Bible talks about a deficient faith.

Q: How can a person's faith be deficient?

A: Faith is only as good as its object.

Illust: Suppose you and I took an airplane ride. When we got to 5000 feet, suppose I said, "I'm going to jump." You'd say, "Are you crazy?" And I said, "No, I'll be OK. I've glued some feathers to two pieces of cardboard. They'll save me. I can fly with these. I believe I can fly. I have faith I can fly!"

Could I fly? No. Did I have faith? Yes, but a deficient faith. Faith is only as good as its object.

Q: What's true of genuine faith?

A: V 21 shows us 2 marks of saving faith.

1. Saving faith has as its object the Person of Christ.

V 21 "Who BY HIM do believe"

Please listen. Faith that saves is faith that's placed in the Person of Christ. It's not enough merely to believe things ABOUT Jesus.

2. Saving faith has as its object the Work of Christ.

V 21 "Who raised Him up from the dead, and gave Him glory..."

If a person exercises saving faith, he/she will acknowledge the redemptive work of Christ. That includes His crucifixion (19), His resurrection (21), and His glorious exaltation (21).

Q: Have you ever talked with someone who claimed to be a "Christian," yet didn't live like it? Have you ever noticed how people like that are highly offended if you insinuate the possibility that maybe they are not genuinely saved?

Illust: This week I read an article in "Time" magazine entitled "Clinton's Spiritual Journey." The author, Priscilla Painton, had this to say about our President's relationship with God, "Unlike George Bush, whose Episcopal faith came to him as naturally as his other responsibilities as a legatee of the Eastern establishment, Clinton describes his relationship with God as something that has to be achieved, a spiritual place he is constantly struggling to reach despite an acute sense of his own mortal shortcomings. In one of 3 instances when he discussed the subject during last year's campaign, he told viewers of VISN, an interfaith cable network: 'My faith tells me all of us are sinners, each of us is gone in our own way and fallen short of the glory of God, and that life's struggle is for sinners, not saints, for the weak, not the strong. Religious faith has permitted me to believe in the continuing possibility of becoming a better person every day, to believe in the search for complete integrity in life.'" (Time, April 5, 1993, p. 49)

I don't know our President's spiritual condition. I thank God for him and our country. I don't know if he was quoted accurately in this article. But did you notice though there was mention of "faith," there was no mention as to the object of that faith. "My faith tells me..." "Religious faith has permitted me to believe in the continuing possibility of becoming a better person every day..." There is no mention of Jesus Christ being the object of that faith.

Problem: Let me be frank. I don't know of our president's spiritual condition. God alone knows. But I'm convinced that there are a lot of people who think all is well between them and God. They say they have faith. But they're confused as to what genuine faith is. If you asked them, "Do you believe in Jesus?", they'd say, "Sure." But when you ask them who Jesus is, He's merely an Example to follow.

Listen. He is that, but first and foremost, He is a Savior we must receive.

### **Conclusion:**

Q: Who are the real hostages in life?

A: Those who are enslaved in their sins.

Friend, God paid an incredible ransom to set us free. What have you done with Jesus?

Illust: Francis Ridley Havergal saw a picture of the crucified Christ with this caption under it: "I did this for thee. What hast thou done for me?" Quickly she wrote a poem, but was dissatisfied with it and threw it into the fireplace. The paper came out unharmed. Later at her father's suggestion, she published the poem, and today we sing it, "I gave My life for thee, My precious blood I shed; That thou might ransom me, and quickened from the dead. I gave, I gave, My life for thee, What hast thou given for Me?" (Wiersbe, 399)