

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 3/14/93

I Peter 1:1-2 "How to Live as a Christian in a Non-Christian World"

**Intro:** There was a day when America was a "Christian" nation. I don't mean that America was perfect, or that all of its people were Christians. But there was a time when our country acknowledged God and the authority of His Word as the backbone of our existence. There WAS a time.

Quote: Talking to Dr. Grier about the book Two Worlds, by Tom Oden (IVP). In it he says that the American culture isn't declining. It HAS collapsed!"

I wonder if he's not right. I wonder if we are not living in a "post-Christian" nation. Know this. The tide is rapidly changing in our land. Our Christian freedoms are under organized attack. Biblical values are the targets of secular aggressors.

Illust: Rutherford Institute, John Whitehead

You're probably thinking, "You don't need to tell me that tension is mounting against Christianity. I can see that for myself. What I want to know is this. What are we supposed to do about it?"

Q: How can we live as Christians in a non-Christian world?

That's the issue, isn't it? How to live for Christ in an environment that doesn't recognize the authority of Christ.

Q: Where can we turn for help and guidance?

A: God gave us a book in the Bible which addresses that very issue--I Peter. Today we are beginning a new series in the NT book of I Peter. I've entitled our study, "How to Live as a Christian in a Non-Christian World."

You may wonder, "Wait a minute. Didn't Peter live in a different world? Weren't things were different in 'Bible times'? How could a letter like I Peter be relevant to people like us, 1900 years removed?"

### The Background of I Peter:

#### The Setting:

The year was about 65 AD. Jesus Christ lived, died, conquered death, and ascended back to heaven more than 30 years earlier. When He left the earth, there were approximately 120 followers of Christ. Then the church exploded upon the world. Christianity spread from its Jewish headquarters in Jerusalem throughout Judea and then throughout the Roman Empire. Within a generation, the followers of Christ took the gospel of Christ to nearly every corner of the known world. There were thousands of Christians by the year AD 65.

But don't get the idea that everyone in the world was clapping. They weren't. Namely a man named Nero, who happened to be the Emperor of the Roman Empire. Though we discussed the incident last year when studying II Timothy, let me rehearse for you a tragic event that happened on July 19, AD 64. A great fire broke out in Rome. It devastated the city for 3 days and 3 nights. Guess how the fire started? Historians suggest the great likelihood that Nero started it deliberately. He was a madman. He wanted to burn the city down so he could rebuild it his own way.

You can imagine how the citizens of Rome felt. They were filled with bitter resentment towards Nero. To divert suspicion from himself, Nero realized he needed a scapegoat. He found one. Nero made the Christians his scapegoat.

Q: Why? Why did Nero pick on the Christians? How could he blame the fire on them, and persuade the world to hate them? Here's how.

1. Antisemitism is nothing new. Hatred of the Jews has been around for along time. And where did Christianity begin? With a Jewish Messiah and His band of Jewish followers. The Roman world commonly thought of Christianity as a Jewish sect.

2. The world did not understand Christianity. In fact, some strange rumors circulated about what Christians did. Take for instance the Lord's Supper. Can you imagine how this talk about "eating and drinking the body and blood of Christ" could be misinterpreted by the crowds? It was. A rumor spread that Christians were cannibals. The rumor grew until it became a story that when the Church had communion, they killed and ate a Gentile, or even a newly born child. To top it off, the Christians called their meeting the "Love Feast." Stories soon spread that the Christian meetings were orgies of vice.

3. The world did not understand the message of Christianity. Christians talked about a coming day when the world would dissolve by fire. Preachers told people to get ready for the coming of Christ, and His fiery judgment. It wasn't too hard for Nero to put the blame for his fire in Rome on to people who spoke like that.

Illust: After the killing of an abortionist doctor this week, have you noticed media tends to brand all pro-lifers as crazy nuts who need to be locked up

Nero did a whale of a smear campaign against Christians. And it worked. Severe persecution rocked the Church in the mid-60's.

Illust: Nero rolled some Christians in pitch, set them on fire, and used them as living torches to light his gardens. Others he sewed up in the skins of wild animals and turned loose his hunting dogs on them, to tear them apart limb from limb.

Listen. Later it got so bad that laws were enacted which made Christianity illegal. It was against the law to be a Christian.

Q: How do you live as a Christian in a non-Christian world?

That was no question for idle speculation for Peter. It was an issue he experienced firsthand. And one he wrote about.

It was to Christians living in a non-Christian world that Peter wrote I Peter. I Peter is a message we need today! As we begin our study today, let me give you some of the highlights of I Peter:

1. Peter shows us how to live as Christians in a world becoming increasing "secular." Peter reminds us that we are Sojourners (1:1, 17; 2:11).

2. Peter helps us to grasp the role and purpose of suffering in the Christian life (1:3-12). At least 15 times in this letter, Peter referred to suffering. We need to learn

to view suffering from God's perspective. Suffering is inevitable, unavoidable, and even beneficial for us.

3. Peter enables us to understand the unchanging character of the Church in a changing world (2:4-12).

4. Peter reveals to us God's design for relationships in a non-Christian world. Here's a great section. How can the Church best impact a secular society? By picketing capitol hill? By campaigning against the government? No. How then?

By modeling effective, Christ-honoring relationships for the world to see:

- the Christian's responsibility to Authorities (2:13)
- the Christian's responsibility to hostile non-Christians (2:15)
- the Christian's responsibility to his Employer (2:18)
- the Christian's responsibility to his/her spouse (3:1-7)
- the Christian's responsibility to fellow Christians (3:8)

5. I Peter is a book designed to encourage struggling Christians (5:10-12).

I Peter is a tremendous book. I challenge you to read it weekly as we study.

Q: Where do we start if we want to know how to live in this world?

A: Peter started with the Christian's Identity. Do you know who you are?

**Proposition: In I Peter 1:1-2, Peter informs us with two truths about our Identity.**

I. We are Sojourners in the world (1).

II. We are Special to God (2).

- A. By the Design of God the Father
- B. By the Display of God the Holy Spirit
- C. By the Deliverance of God the Son

Q: Are Christians, who are we?

**I. We are Sojourners in the world (1).**

V 1 "Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ to the sojourners..."

Who was Peter? He was an apostle. He had been for more than 3 decades. "Peter" was the greek translation of his Aramaic name "Cephas" (a name which Jesus gave him, Jn 1:42). He was no stranger to suffering. In fact, within a year or two of writing this letter, Peter became a martyr for Christ.

His thoughts were not for himself, however, but for his brothers and sisters in Christ. They were hurting. Peter writes as a loving pastor. Notice how he identifies them:

"sojourners"--What did Peter mean?

- 1. In a literal sense, Peter's readers were sojourners.

The word means "exile, resident alien." Peter is writing to Christians who had been forced to leave their businesses, and leave their homes.

What happened? V 1 says they were "scattered" throughout 5 provinces in Asia minor. The word "scattered" is a technical term. It's the word "diaspora." The Jews who were forced to live outside of Palestine in pagan lands were called the Diaspora.

Here Peter says that Christians are the True Diaspora. Peter wrote to a mixed audience of Jewish and Gentile Christians who had this in common

Listen. The Christians to whom Peter wrote were hurting. They'd been battered and bruised and slandered. They'd been told by society that they were the scum of the earth.

Do you think they ever got weary? No doubt. They were sojourners.

2. In a figurative sense--All Christians are sojourners.

We're temporary residents. This world is not our permanent residence.

Ph 3:20 "For our citizenship is in heaven..."

Heb 11:13 "...strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

Illust: When we finished seminary, we moved to an apartment. We didn't know how long we'd be there. Instead of unpacking, we lived out of boxes. Why? That was not our permanent home. It was temporary.

Listen. If you are a Christian, you are a sojourner. And so am I.

Caution: Keep two truths in balance.

1. This world IS our home.

2. This world is our TEMPORARY home.

Genesis 2 tells us that God put us here to have dominion over the earth. Song: "This world is not my home, I'm just a passin' through." This world IS our home.

Should it matter to Christians when people dump toxic waste into lakes and rivers? Should Christians care when we hear that the environment is being raped? Should Christians take care of their bodies?

Key: Christians ought to lead the way (and have throughout history) in the fields of health care, education, agriculture? Why? Not to glorify man, but to glorify God.

This world is our home. But at the same time, never forget, this world is our temporary home. We're living on enemy soil. The world has been, is now, and will grow increasingly hostile to Christianity. We are sojourners. That's our identity.

Q: What difference should that make?

1:17 "...pass the time of your sojourning here in fear."

2:11 "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as sojourners..."

Q: Do you view yourself as a sojourner?

I get the feeling that lots of baby boomer Christians think they're going to live forever in this world. Do you serve Christ only if it's convenient?

Illust: George Gallup has found that only 25% of evangelicals tithe.

While 40% say faith in God is the most important thing in their lives, those who make between \$50,000 and \$75,000 a year give only an average of 1.5% to charity, religious or otherwise. This same group spent 12% of their income on leisure pursuits. (Colson, The Body, 31)

J. I. Packer calls it "hot tub religion" (Colson, 45). We have an identity crisis.

Q: Do you view yourself as a sojourner?

Illust:

Tran: How can we as Christians live successfully in our secular world? We must have a firm grasp of our Identity. First, we are Sojourners.

## **II. We are Special to God (2).**

If you have a KJV Bible, what's the first word of v 2? "Elect" Actually, in the greek text, the word does not appear in v 2, but in v 1. Literally, v 1 reads...

V 1 "Peter an apostle...to the ELECT sojourners"

Here's point #2 about our identity. We are special to God. If you are a Christian, you are an elect sojourner.

Don't let that word frighten you. The doctrine of election is a biblical doctrine. Here it is in I Pt 1:2. It's also in Eph 1, Romans 8-9, John 6:65, Col 3:12. It's tragic that some Christians are intimidated by election. The truth of the matter is that the doctrine of election is one of the most encouraging doctrines in the Bible. That's why Peter mentions it at the beginning of his letter to hurting Christians.

Q: "How did I become an elect sojourner?" Verse 2 tells us.

V 2 "Elect according..."

How did we become elect sojourners? All three persons of the Trinity were involved in your salvation.

### A. You became a Christian by the Design of God the Father.

V 2 "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God, the Father"

Please notice something very wonderful. Your salvation was designed by God the Father. We were chosen "according to" (in keeping with) the foreknowledge of God the Father. What does that mean?

See:

Acts 2:23 (Peter preaching) "Jesus of Nazareth...delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, you have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified..."

God is sovereign. He is in total control. Of His Son's death. Of your salvn. Rom 8:28-29 "And we know...to them who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image..."

Please notice that God's foreknowledge involved both a people and a purpose. God chose a people for a purpose, to be like His Son.

You are special, by the Design of God the Father. What an encouragement Peter knew that truth would be to suffering Christians. The Church is not just a human organization. The Church exists by the very design of God!

God chose us to be His. Why? In accordance with His "foreknowledge." Foreknowledge does not suggest that God merely knew ahead of time that we would believe, and therefore, He choose us. II Tim 1:9 is clear that God did not choose us because of anything we would do, "Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

To "foreknow" = to set one's love on a person or persons in a personal way  
That's what God did with us.

Illust: I listened to J. Verson McGee several weeks ago. He commented on how people get upset with Rom 9:13, where God says, "Jacob have I loved, but Essau have I hated." People are disturbed because God chose Jacob, but not Essau. "The amazing thing is not that God hated Essau, but that He loved Jacob!"

Key: We would never have chosen God if He had not first chosen us. We were dead in our sins. Dead men are incapable of doing anything.

You can know you are special to God, first by the Design of God the Father. In eternity past, He set His love on us.

Q: How did we actually become a Christian?

### B. You became a Christian by the Display of God the Holy Spirit.

V 2 "through sanctification of the Spirit"

Do you remember the day you became a Christian? Here's what happened according to Peter. God the Father brought you to Himself by means of the "sanctification of the Spirit." To sanctify means "to set apart." The Spirit set you apart from the world, to God.

Quote: Luther, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him."

It's the Holy Spirit who awakens within us that first longing for God. It's the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sin (Jn 16:8). It's the Spirit who leads us to the cross. It's the Spirit who brings us to faith in Christ. It's the Spirit who gives us the assurance that our sins are forgiven.

Q: How does the Spirit do all of that? I Pt 1:22-23 "...by the word"

Illust:

Remember, we are elect sojourners. We are special to God, by the Design of God the Father, and by the Display of the Holy Spirit.

Q: But what purpose did God have in mind when He chose us?

V 2 "unto obedience and sprinkling..."

### C. You became a Christian by the Deliverance of God the Son.

Notice God's purpose...

V 2 "unto obedience and sprinkling..."

God designed a means to restore rebellious sinners to obedience to Him. How? By the Deliverance provided by God the Son.

Notice the words "sprinkling of the blood." That's an OT phrase.

1. Lev 14 says that when a leper had been healed, he was sprinkled with the blood of a bird. Sprinkling with blood is a symbol of cleansing.

2. Also, in Ex 29, sprinkling with blood was a part of the ritual in setting apart priests for God's service. Sprinkling with blood indicates a person is set apart to serve God.

3. The greatest picture of sprinkling is found in Ex 24:7-8. In that account God entered into a special covenant relationship with the Israelites. He gave them His law (ch 20). Here's what happened. Moses took the book of the covenant and read it to the people (24:7). Do you know what the people said?

Ex 24:7 "All that the Lord has said, we will do, and be obedient."  
Do you know what Moses did?  
Ex 24:8 "And Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people..."  
Why? Sprinkling signifies obedience.  
Listen. Heb 12:24 tells us that Jesus' blood is the blood of sprinkling. Jesus' blood provided our atonement. Jesus' blood delivered us from our bondage to sin so we could live in obedience to God!

Q: O friend, do you want to be delivered from your sin?  
Then look to Jesus Christ. And may we never forget that we became a Christian only by the deliverance provided by God's Son.  
Let's make this personal. As far as God the Father is concerned, I was saved when He chose me in Christ before the creation of the world. As far as God the Son is concerned, I was saved when He died for me on the cross. As far as God the Holy Spirit is concerned I was saved one Sunday morning in December, 20 years ago, when my pastor shared the gospel with me, and I received Jesus Christ as my Savior. All three persons of the Godhead were involved in my salvation. I praise Him!  
What about you? Where are you? Perhaps the Spirit of God is at work now.

Our Identity: We are sojourners. And we are special to God.