

SERMON 10th MAY 2020
1 Peter 1:1-12

Friends:

I was shocked to read about a Top Manhattan coronavirus Doctor “taking her own life”!

- Dr Lorna Breen, 49, Medical Director of New York Presbyterian Allen Hospital’s Emergency Department was a “true hero” her father said, she was “overwhelmed” by the number of Covid-19 cases she handled, becoming ill herself with coronavirus; she went back to work after a week and a half! She had no history of depression!
- She was a very outgoing person, but something “snapped”, she just “ran out” of emotional steam!
- The “emotional and mental devastation” caused by this “disease” on our first responders is “unimaginable”!
- “Despair” is the most unoriginal sin and potentially the most “destructive”.
- “Despair” is the complete “loss of hope”!
- Despair “blights” our outwardly cheery modern society in which a few succumb to “self harm”, while many “dull” their ‘ache’, if not with “drugs”, then with excessive ‘self-indulgence’ or all consuming ‘work’!
- But according to 1 Peter because of Jesus’ “resurrection” from the dead, Christians are “forbidden NOT to hope”!
- To “despair” means we have turned our backs on hope! We have “chosen” to “disbelieve” God and His many promises to “deliver” and “provide”!
- 1 Peter tells us about a “deathless hope”, a “living hope”! Christ has been raised; we “too” have the hope of “resurrection”!
- As believers we “don’t despair” because our hope rests on “eternity”, and not the few days we live on this earth!

James 4:14

- **(V1)** “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God’s elect, exiles, scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia”.
- It has been said that in calling men to be His disciples; “Christ “ruined” many “careers”!”
- “Peter” was ‘no exception’. Jesus changed his work from that of “fishing for fish” in the local lake; to “fishing for people” in the ocean of the world’s need! When Peter “met” Jesus, Peter “lost” his job but found his “destiny”!
- The letter from Peter was probably “sent” around AD65 from Rome as indicated by the “code name” “Babylon” in 5:13!

- This “letter” is a powerful message of “encouragement” to groups of scattered Christians whom Peter may never have “visited” but knew him by “reputation”!
- The ‘recipients’ of Peter’s letter lived in what has been called “the backwoods of the empire” – in those areas of northwest Asia Minor bordering on the Black Sea. What we call modern Turkey!
- Peter “highlights: the “centrality” of “Jesus” and his achievement in his letter!
- 3:15 “says”: “In your hearts “set apart” Christ as Lord!”
- Peter was “written” to Christians under “pressure” to “conform” to society!
- Peter’s “readers” seem predominantly Gentile with perhaps some “mixed” Gentile-Jewish congregations
- These ‘Christians’, in modern day Turkey, are “undergoing trials”, which though “painful”, seem to “fall short” of full-scale official Roman persecution.
- The “hostility” against these 1st believers is “verbal” rather than “physical”!
(cf 3:9, 3:16, 4:14)
- “This letter” raises the classic and highly relevant “issue” of the Christian’s relation to the “surrounding culture”.
- “How can” we be “in the world” BUT “not of it”!?
- “How can” we be the “salt of the earth” without losing our “flavour”!?!
- “How can” “we” in the midst of this pandemic shine for “Jesus Christ” without ‘becoming’ merely odd or eccentric?
- Peter’s letter is “written” to churches “like ours”, abut a time such “as ours”!
- Peter’s “counsel” is “shrewd”!
- We need to “read, treasure and believe” this letter of Peter’s “because” the “post-Christian” society we live in “now” is “very much like” the “pre-Christian society” in which Peter’s “first century readers lived”!
- As believers today we “don’t” face government or state-sponsored persecution but we “are encountering” the “reality” of increasing hostility toward anything “Christian”!
- While we live under the rule of government that offers some legal protections for Christian’s, Christianity is “no longer” generally accepted “nor deemed” acceptable!

- In “our context”, we may not be facing “imprisonment, torture or execution”; “however” we are facing a “progressively intolerant culture” in which we are being discriminated against simply “because” we “identify” with Christ!
- **(V2)** “Who have been “chosen” according to the “foreknowledge” of God the “Father”, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with blood: “Grace & Peace be yours in abundance”!

Friends:

As Christians we do ‘not’ belong “here” and we are “not” to: we are just “passing” through!

- Our “identification with Christ” is what makes us “strangers in this world!”
- We are foreigners in a “hostile land”, a people presently living in exile, away from our homeland and dispersed throughout the world!

Friends:

We have been “embraced” by the “eternal Triangle” of “love and life”!

- “God the Trinity” has “chosen” us and “saved” us!
- God did “not” choose us according to any intrinsic “value” or qualities we may or may not possess!
- Thankfully God ‘does’ ‘not choose’ as “we would “choose”!”
- God sets “His love” on those whom the world is likely to “reject”!
- The “basis” of our election is God’s “foreknowledge”.
- It “doesn’t just mean” that God “foresaw” who would respond to his offer of salvation in faith; “foreknowledge” indicates that God freely choose to set His covenant love on certain individuals “before” the “creation of the world”!

Ephesians 1:4

- Talking “about” God’s sovereign “choice” in salvation can be “intimidating or difficult”!
- Peter ‘encourages’ his readers with the “doctrine” of “Divine election” because it reminded the Christians in Asia Minor that their suffering did not mean God had “forgotten them”!
- We “too” have the tendency to “believe” that God is with us and “blessing” us when all is “well”; while ‘wondering’ if God has “somehow abandoned us” when our world is “falling apart”!
- Regardless of how bad our circumstances may appear, and they don’t get much “worse” than the “disaster” we are “currently” living in!, God is sovereign and He is the One who has known us from “before” the world was made!

- And “because” God has chosen us; we belong to God, and no amount of suffering can “separate us” from the inheritance he has prepared for us!

Friends:

“Ponder on this”:-

“If “before” the creation of the world God “chose” you, He is hardly going to let you go now!”

- So having been “chosen” by God the Father for a relationship with Him; “consecrated” to this relationship by means of the Holy Spirit’s sanctifying work; and “cleansed” by the blood of Jesus for an obedient life; “how” do we “respond” to this news of such “amazing grace”?
- Single word answer! “PRAISE”!
- **(V3)** Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! “Praise be” or “blessed be” literally means “to speak a good word about”!
(Eulogy)
- When we speak a “good word” about God, we are praising Him or blessing Him!
- There is “no person” who “deserves” our eulogizing more than the God of grace and peace!

Friends:

You can’t choose your “parents”! At birth we share the genetic make up of our biological parents with all its inherent “strengths” and “weaknesses”!

- I’m Australian and have an Australian ‘identity’!
- We’re also born with a socio-economic “identify” on the basis of our parents socio-economic standing! “Yes” our birth identifies us!
- Here in Verse 3 Peter speaks of a “new birth” that brings with it a “new” ‘identity’ and ‘citizenship’!
(2:9)
- In this new birth God is our Father **(V17)** and we are his children **(V14)**!
- And this “new birth” is initiated by the Father and brought about by the seed of “God’s Word”! **(V23)**
- What “good news” this is for those who feel “alienated” in this world!
- “Regardless” of our “original birth”, those “born again” by the “Word of God” are born again into a “new” life with a new identity as God’s “sons and daughters”!

Friends:

Your “deepest identity” in “this life” is your “identity” in God in Jesus Christ!

- With this “new life”, we also have a “new hope”, **(V3)** says into a “living hope”!
- “Hope” in the Bible is “not” a vague wish (“I hope we have pizza tonight!): Biblical “hope” is a certain expectation of a “future event”!
- In **(V3)** Peter “grounds” our “living hope” in the “resurrection” of Jesus Christ!
- If Christ is still in the “grave” our faith would be in “vain”, and we would be a “hopeless people”!
- “Because” Jesus did rise from the dead, we also have the hope of our “own” resurrection!
- Death, death, death it’s all in the news whenever you tune in!
- Covid-19 “means” death! (over ¼ million dead worldwide)
- “But” for the Christian Death is “NOT” the last word!
- This “living hope” gives us a “new impetus” for living!
- Suffering is bad,
- Persecution is bad,
- Covid-19 is bad,
- Isolation is bad,
- Nothing in “this life” we face can “extinguish” this living “hope from God”!
- “C.H. Spurgeon”, sums it up well:
“Do not look to “your hope”, but to “Christ”, the “source” of your hope!”
- **(V4)** “An “inheritance” that can “never” perish, spoil or fade!”
- We are given “birth” by God, given “hope” of a resurrection and also receive and “inheritance” from Him! We are so “blessed” by our Lord!
- This “inheritance” is kept for “us” and “we” are kept for it!
- In the Old Testament, Israel had been promised a “land” as “their” “inheritance”!
Josh 11:2
- “Throughout” this letter Peter applies “old covenant” “imagery” to the Christians he is writing!

- Like “Israel”, Peter’s readers are pilgrims and exiles in their world (**V1**), they are ‘scattered’; they “too” are promised a “future inheritance”!
- Our promised inheritance is not susceptible to corruption; it is eternal!
- It will “never” become defiled or unclean; it will “never” fade away or lose its unspoiled character!

Friends:

I’ve seen the “beauty” of Switzerland, I’ve witnessed “poverty” beyond belief in East Africa. I’ve known great joy in my own life and others, and I’ve experienced ‘brokenness’ that so often persistently intrudes!

- “However” our future “inheritance” will “not” only cause our “worst” experiences in this life to become distant “memories”; it will make “even” the most exotic places on earth and the finest moments of our lives here “pale in comparison”!
- Here on earth every earthly “treasure” we value fades and every “human pleasure” we hope in diminishes with time!
- (**V5**) who through “faith” are “shielded” by God’s power until the “coming” of the salvation that is to be revealed!
- This future “inheritance” is all “well and good”, but how can we know that in the “face” of temptation, suffering and persecution, we will “persevere” to the end and reach the everlasting life?

Friends:

It’s not “easy” to “maintain” a Christian witness when you are “bombarded” by insults, ridicule and abuse. I can only imagine how “tempting” it would be to “deny Christ” if my life was in question – thousands of our brothers and sisters don’t have to imagine that “because” it “is” their reality!

- How can we “know” that we will get this future inheritance?
 - God “will” “protect” us and “shield us”; He will “never let us go”! Paul says that God who began the good work within you, will “continue” His work “until” it is finally finished when Christ returns.
- Philip 1:6*
- (**V5**) “Who “through” “faith”...”
 - The greatest “threat” to “perseverance” is “unbelief”!
 - If we lose “faith” then we will “not” receive our “reward”!
 - The writer of Hebrews says in Chapter 3:12:

“See to it, brothers and sisters, that ‘none’ of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the Living God!”

Friends:

We must “continue” in faith in order to receive our “inheritance”!

- God “keeps” his finished salvation for “us”, and “us” for his salvation!
- But God “does” not keep us in a “cage” or against “our will”!
- God who works “for” us also works “in” us!
- Our “faith” is God’s “way” of “keeping” us: it is “His Gift”!
- Why “does” God use “faith” as the instrument of His “keeping power”?
- Because “faith” is “not” “our” achievement!
- “Faith” is trust in “God’s” “achievement”!
- As Verse 21 says:
“Your “faith and hope” are in God!”
- “Martin Luther” said:
“Ask God to work “faith” in “you”, or you will remain forever without faith, no matter what you wish, say or can do!”
- **(V6)** “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a “little while” you may have had to suffer grief in all “kinds of trials”!

Friends:

Suffering will come; it is an “inevitability” for all who live in this “imperfect” world and particularly for all who profess Christ in this “fallen world”!

- It’s “not often” that the whole world suffers at the same time; but “NOW” is that time!
- Our comfortable “lives” in our comfortable “surroundings” has abruptly come to an end! We’ve all been shocked at how society has changed “over night”!
- Some people say we have “rights” in a free liberal democracy, we can do what we want!
- Some become angry and fight back, perhaps we will grow hopeless and fall into a pit of despair; or maybe we think that if we simply “ignore” pain and problems, they will just go away!
- “Because” it has “no future hope”, the world has every reason to respond in such ways; “however” those of “us” who believe in Christ and have a “living hope” of eternal life; respond “differently”!
- I admit that “JOY” is not the first response we think of when facing “suffering”!

- It seems “ridiculous” to respond with JOY!
- Yet “joy” in the midst of suffering is a “consistent New Testament “theme”!
cf Matt 5:12, Col 1:11, 1 Thess 1:6
- What possible “reason” could we have to “rejoice” in the “midst” of suffering?
- By the way Peter is “not” encouraging us to rejoice in suffering “itself”!
- That would be “absurb”!
- I suffered for 40 years with debilitating headaches; I didn’t enjoy on moment of that!
- Suffering “reminds” us of the “evil” in this world, and by “itself”, suffering accomplishes nothing but discouragement and despair!
- “However” “enduring” faithfully through “suffering” “strengthens” and “purifies” our “faith”!
- We “rejoice” in the “hope” of eternal life not in what we are suffering!
- It’s “our salvation” we “rejoice” in “not” in our “circumstances”!
- Sadly we’re all too tempted to find our “joy” in so many others things in this world!
- This might “explain” why we “fee;” as if our lives are lived on continuous emotional “roller coaster”!
- When our “joy” is rooted in financial security, it will rise and fall on the amount of money we have at present.
- When our “joy” is rooted in a particular relationship, it will rise and fall on the basis of how the person responds to us!
- When our “joy” is rooted in present circumstances, it will rise and fall on the basis of whether we are having a good or bad day!
- “Why” do we do “this” to “ourselves”?
- Peter “reminds” us this morning that our JOY cannot, must not, be rooted in “this world”, our “JOY” must be rooted in “God himself”!

Friends:

In the “midst” of the ‘vulnerability’ we’re all feeling at the moment “our salvation” is a “constant mooring” in the fluctuations of our life!

- “And” yet Peter puts our sufferings in “perspective”!
- He does not deny that “suffering” causes “real” distress, “real” grief! (V6)

- “Nowhere” does the Bible ‘deny’ Christians grief and sadness!
- What you are “feeling” as a result of being “isolated” and the dreadful death toll around the works is truly “heartbreaking” and “agonizing”!
- The Bible teaches us how to “grieve” and how to express “sadness” with “hope”!
- Many ‘psalms’ teach us to express our “grief honestly” while still “clinging” to hope in God!

Friends:

Don’t let anyone tell you that Christians are never to be “sad” – that we shouldn’t “grieve”! We do grieve, but we “grieve” with “hope”! We can “smile as we cry”!

- Peter also “reminds” us that our “present suffering” is “only” for a “little while”! **(V6)**
- While our present suffering is “real”, in the light of our future inheritance, the suffering we are facing today in “only” “temporary”!
- “Of course” this does “not” diminish our grief, it remind us we have a “living hope”; our “present sufferings”, in the words of Paul, our “light and momentary troubles” are “preparing for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all”!

2 Cor 4:17

- “Not only” do we “rejoice” in suffering but our suffering and present pandemic is “no accident”!
- “Suffering” is “not” random it is designed by God to accomplish His purposes in us!
- In Verse 7 Peter “explains” that Christian suffering is the “purifying fire” through which our faith is tested, tried and “proven” to be “genuine”!

Friends:

Is your “faith” “genuine”?

- **V8** has always been a personal favourite!
- Persevering in our faith through trials “proves” our faith is real! And so does “loving” Jesus “without” having “seen” Him! Peter, of course, had ‘seen Jesus’; and his love could bring pictures to his mind!
- By “faith” **(V9)** we who have ‘never’ seen Jesus may share with Peter in “loving Jesus”!

Friends:

What an encouragement that God “chose” you and me for “salvation”! All by grace, faith is a “gift” from God! The question is:

“Do you love the Lord Jesus “more than anything else?”

Amen