

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

Why Christ is Precious

1 Peter 1:20-21 (687)

It is not unusual for visitors to an art museum to linger over a particularly famous and beautiful painting. In the same way, we are compelled to linger over the rich, beautiful, and worthy truth set before us by the Spirit of God in I Peter 1:1-12. The truth is that the one living and true God, who exists eternally in three Persons, who dwells in unapproachable light, out of His own good pleasure, has chosen, cleansed, and is preserving a people for His own possession. At **verse 13** Peter begins to explore how we should actually live in light of this grand vision of the grace of God in the salvation of sinners. **I Peter 1:13-25** tells us that the glories of the gospel demand the grateful and obedient response of holiness (**1:13-16**), of reverence (**1:17-19**), and of brotherly affection (**1:22-25**). Last Lord's Day I preached on the second of these three from verses 17-19. The point of the sermon was this: the price of our redemption demands our profound reverence. In **verse 17** Peter speaks of God as *the One who impartially judges according to each man's work*. In Peter's thought the justice of God is so exacting, so severe that it demands the response of fear; of reverence; of inspiring awe expresses itself in restraint, submission, and honor. God is absolutely just. As sinful men we are obliged to reverence Him purely on the basis of this perfection, recognizing that it is totally within His right and power to condemn us utterly and completely.

But in **verse 18** a second reason for reverence is set forth. Reverence is fitting because we are those who have, by the grace of God alone, escaped His punitive justice. We have been *redeemed*. **Verse 19** reminds us that the price of our redemption was the *precious blood* of Jesus. You will notice that the final word in verse 19 is the name of "Christ." It should not surprise us that Peter, upon writing down *the name that is above every name* (**Phil. 2:9**) should launch into a poetic, almost creedal description of the Savior. And this he does in **1:20-21**.

I Peter 1:20-21, *For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.*

For what purpose did Peter include this brief description of the Redeemer at this point? Remember, to Peter there is nothing more fortifying to struggling saints than the assurance of the glorious riches of our salvation (**1:5, 9, 10**). To recognize the blessed end for which we have been chosen, called, converted, and kept by God strengthens us to endure the hardships met with in the path of obedience. So Peter is recounting these staggering truths about Christ to the end that we might keep our attention directed upon Him and upon our redemption in Him. Ours is not a day that opens up much time to linger over any one particular idea. Sound bites and flashing visual images are the rule of the day. We seldom stop long enough to quietly ponder the beauties of the gospel of grace; to explore the benefits won for us by our Savior; to write down the ways God has favored us. Peter recounts these staggering truths about Christ to the end that Jesus might be more highly cherished in our hearts. Because we so rarely consider the majesty of God, the awfulness of our sin, and the terror of the

wrath of God we fail to appreciate (as we ought) the sacrifice of Christ for sinners. I was reminded this week of that extraordinary scene in the house of Simon the Pharisee - the woman washing the feet of Jesus with her tears, wiping them with her hair, and anointing them with perfume. Simon had failed to honor his guest and he silently objected to the behavior of this woman. Jesus, looking into Simon's heart, responded by saying, "[Simon] I say to you, her sins, which are many, have been forgiven, for she loved much; but he who is forgiven little, loves little" (**Lu. 7:47**). Peter recounts these staggering truths about Christ to the end that our affections might settle on Christ. Human affections waver. Human loyalties shift from person to person, from thing to thing, and from time to time. The only enduring, unwavering affection is that of our Savior for us (**John 13:1**). Our affections, in turn, must settle upon Him. Let's take a closer look at Peter's description of Jesus.

The first thing Peter says about Jesus is that *He was foreknown before the foundation of the world* (**1:20**). In his sermon on the day of Pentecost Peter had preached, "this Man, delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death" (**Acts 2:23**). We may say that Christ, from eternity, was appointed by the Father to be the Savior of sinners. The word "foreknown" will not permit the idea that God was a passive and helpless spectator as He watched the events of the trial, crucifixion, and burial of Jesus unfold. Foreknow means that these things *did* occur because God actively determined that they *would* occur. In the everlasting covenant of redemption the Father gave the elect to His Son (**Ps. 2:8**) and appointed the Son to assume human nature in which He would suffer for their redemption (**Heb. 10:5; Rev. 13:8**). And Christ accordingly undertook to do the will of His Father (**Ps. 40:7-8**) (see Nisbet, p. 46).

Jesus was appointed, ordained, designated as the Savior of sinners *before the foundation of the world*. This is a biblical way of saying from all eternity. In **John 17:24** Jesus prayed, “Father, I desire that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me; for Thou didst love Me *before the foundation of the world*.” From **Matthew 25:34** we learn that there is a kingdom prepared [for the saints] from the foundation of the world. From **Ephesians 1:4** we know that the elect of God were chosen in Christ from before the foundation of the world. From **Hebrews 4:3** we know that the finished work of Christ on the cross was from the foundation of the world. Who is not moved by the King James translation of **Revelation 13:8** ... *And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him ... the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*. The eternal and immutable purpose and plan of God was that Jesus Christ should be the Savior of sinners.

Before the foundation of the world. Before God said, “Let there be light” (**Gen. 1:3**). Before the light was called day and the darkness was called night (**Gen. 1:5**), there was Christ, the Savior of sinners. Before the firmament was called heaven (**Gen. 1:8**). Before the waters were gathered into one place and the dry land appeared (**Gen. 1:9**). Before the earth brought forth vegetation (**Gen. 1:12**), there was Christ, the Savior of sinners. Before God placed the lights in the expanse of heaven (**Gen. 1:14**), there was Christ, the Savior of sinners. Before fish swam in the sea and birds flew through the air (**Gen. 1:20**). Before any living thing crept upon the dry land (**Gen. 1:24**). Before man was made in the image of God (**Gen. 1:26**). Before God rested from all the work that He had done (**Gen. 1:3**), there was Christ, appointed by the Father to be the Savior of sinners.

The second thing Peter says about Jesus Christ is that [He] **has appeared in these last times (1:20)**. The word “appeared” suggests the pre-existence of Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus was not created. He did not come into being at conception. **John 1:1** clearly says, *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God.”* In the incarnation the second person of the Trinity “remained the infinite and unchangeable Son of God.” In mathematical terms there was no subtraction of divinity but the addition of humanity. The eternal Son took on the form and character of humanity “without in any way changing His original nature” (Berkhof, p. 334). That He *appeared* means that He is now more clearly revealed than He ever had been.

We are not to suppose that the Savior of sinners was not perceived or known in the Old Testament. Indeed, “Christ was made known immediately after the Fall” (Nisbet, p. 46). In **Genesis 3:15** God said to the serpent, *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”* “Ever since, Christ has been sufficiently displayed for the salvation of the elect in all ages” (see Nisbet, p. 46). **Acts 10:43**, *“of Him all the prophets bear witness that through His name everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins.”* The Law and the Psalms and the Prophets pointed to Christ (**Lu. 24:25-27, 44**). Those whom God established as “types” of Christ pointed to Him. Every sacrifice ever offered pointed to Christ, the Lamb of God. Every priest and every feast pointed to Jesus. Every piece of furniture, every appointment, and every ordinance of the tabernacle and Temple pointed to Jesus Christ. The prophecies of God’s messengers pointed to Jesus. **Hebrews 1:1-2**, *God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.*

What has been the goal of God's revealing himself to sinful men all through the ages? Is God sending odd-shaped pieces of information from heaven to confound us as to who He really is and what He is like? Is God sending partial pieces of information from heaven to confuse us as to what His will really is? Revelation has as its end the making known to men of the one and only God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent (see Robertson, *The Final Word*, pp.52-53).

The only Christ men may possess is the Christ set forth on the pages of Holy Scripture. Thus it is to this Savior that man must turn. If a person is to know God in a personal relationship of trust and obedience, he must gain a knowledge of God's character and intentions that the wonders of creation are incapable of providing. The sinner needs to know ... that God encounters man in Jesus Christ, and that in Christ God is seeking, forgiving, and healing ... the sinner needs to know God's intentions toward him ... that God, indeed, purposes to save ... the sinner must know what he must do in order to be saved ... But more than anything else, man needs to know what God has done to save sinners. Through creation and conscience, man learns of God's majesty and limitless power, but he is ignorant of the fact that God in grace became Man in the person of His Son. Fallen man needs to know the mystery of God's will with respect to human salvation ... The fact is that only God's word of special revelation in Scripture announces that the sinner needs to receive and rest upon Jesus Christ by faith as the One who made full satisfaction to God for the sins of the world (Demarest, pp.248-250).

The third thing said about Jesus is that He was **raised from the dead** and **given glory** by the Father (**1:21**). Peter emphasis is not so much on the historical events of Christ's resurrection and reception into heaven as upon what these acts of God

mean for saints who are suffering. Christ's resurrection and reception into glory are testimonies to us and to the world. They are declarations that the Father is pleased with the ransom paid for sinners by Jesus Christ; that God's justice is fully satisfied on behalf of all who flee to Him through Jesus Christ; that Christ's atoning sacrifice for the elect is accepted. After His sufferings, death, and burial Christ our Representative was raised and glorified by the Father as a sure pledge that all of us who are in Him shall likewise be raised and glorified. Christ was raised so that our *faith and hope* might not rest in any particular resolution to our problems; not in any particular relief from our difficulties, but *in God* alone (see Nisbet, p. 49).

You see, we are told that God accomplished all these things *for the sake of you who are believers in God (1:20)*. The Nicene Creed says, "We believe ... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God ... who **for us and for our salvation** came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary." God, in the Person of Jesus Christ, came out of heaven to save sinners. My friend, no gift that you have ever received, no privilege that you have ever enjoyed, no honor that you have ever won may be compared to the staggering favor that God came out of heaven *for your sake*.

Remember, *for the sake of you* ... as a sinner. Allow me to use the second person here as Peter does. Was your predicament so desperate that God Himself had to leave glory to rescue you? Yes! The beauty of the gospel is obscured to you who rarely consider your condition before God saved you. *For the sake of you*, not one of whom sought after God (**Rom. 3:11b**). *For the sake of you*, not one of whom was good (**Rom. 3:12**). *For the sake of you*, not one of whom had an ounce of the fear of God in your eye (**Rom. 3:18**). *For the sake of you*, every one of whom was helpless,

a sinner, and an enemy of God (**Rom. 5:6, 8, 10**). *For the sake of you*, every one of whom lived in the lusts of the flesh; dead in trespasses and sins (**Eph. 2:1, 3**). *For the sake of you*. Beloved, there we were - every throat an open grave (**Rom. 3:13a**), poison under every lip (**Rom. 3:13c**), every mouth full of cursing and bitterness (**Rom. 3:14**), every foot swift to shed blood (**Rom. 3:15**), our every path strewn with destruction and misery (**Rom. 3:16**).

It was for the sake of folks like you and me that Jesus *appeared*. But someone may object, I was never that bad a guy. I was a moral man, a church-going man, a kind man, a gentle and quiet man, a responsible man. My friend, I have no doubt that you were. So was I. But the beauty of the gospel is obscured to any man who considers himself to have been better than the Bible says he was before his conversion. To file the sharp edge off our corruption and guilt; to spit and shine ourselves is to tarnish the beauty of the gospel. It is only as we accept the testimony of Scripture regarding sinners will we stop to wonder at the magnificence of the gospel of the saving grace of God. *For the sake of you ... a sinner*.

For the sake of those who were in such a condition but who are now *believers in God*. The only thing between those two conditions is Jesus Christ. Peter says, we are believers *through Him*. No one else has been appointed by God as the Savior of sinners. No one else has been revealed to man as the Savior of sinners. No one else has been resurrected and received into heaven as the Savior of sinners. As Peter himself preached in **Acts 4:12**, "*And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved.*" The saving ministry of Jesus Christ is summed up in the statement that He is the Mediator between God and men. **I Timothy 2:5** says, *for*

there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. A mediator is one who stands between two parties at odds with one another and who brings them together. **Romans 8:7** tells us that every member of our fallen and rebellious race is by nature *hostile toward God*. **Romans 1:18** says *the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*. Reconciliation of the alienated parties is needed, but can only occur if God's wrath is quenched and man's heart is changed. In mercy, God sent His Son into the world to bring about the needed reconciliation ... Once for all, Christ achieved reconciliation for His people through His sacrificial death on the cross. On the cross He took our place, bore the curse due to us, and by the shedding of His blood made peace for us. Peace means an end to hostility, the removal of guilt, and the turning back of the wrath of God that was otherwise unavoidable. Only those who have received *this* reconciliation through faith in Christ are justified and have peace with God (*New Geneva Study Bible*, p. 1910). Once again I invite every sinner to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ that you might be saved.

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and _____ response of **holiness (1:13-16)**, of **reverence (1:17-19)**,
and of **brotherly affection (1:22-25)**.

1 Peter 1:20-21, *For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world,
but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21 who through Him
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so that your faith and hope are in God.*

For what purpose did Peter include this brief description of the Redeemer at this point?

Remember, to Peter there is nothing more fortifying to struggling saints than the
assurance of the glorious riches of our _____ (1:5, 9, 10).
To recognize the glorious end for which we have been chosen, called, converted,
and kept by God _____ us to _____ the hardships
met with in the path of obedience.

So Peter is recounting these staggering truths about Christ to the end ...

that we might keep our _____ directed upon Him and upon
our redemption in Him.

that Jesus might be more highly _____ in our hearts.
that our affections might _____ on Christ.

The first thing Peter says about Jesus is that
He was foreknown before the foundation of the world (1:20)
We may say that Christ, from eternity, was _____ by the
Father to be the Savior of sinners.

The second thing Peter says about Jesus Christ is that [He]
has appeared in these last times (1:20)
That He *appeared* means that He is now more clearly _____ than
He ever had been.

The third thing said about Jesus is that He was
raised from the dead and given glory by the Father (1:21)
Christ's resurrection and reception into glory are _____ to us
and to the world.
They are declarations that the heavenly Father is _____ with the
ransom paid for sinners by Jesus Christ; that God's justice is fully
_____ in behalf of all that flee to Him through Jesus Christ; that
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After His sufferings, death, and burial Christ our Representative was raised and
glorified by the Father as a sure _____ that all of us who are in
Him shall likewise be raised and glorified.

You see, we are told these things happened ...
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"We believe ... in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God ... who **for us
and for our salvation** came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of
the Virgin Mary" (The Nicene Creed).

Remember, ***for the sake of you ... as a sinner***
The beauty of the gospel is obscured to you who rarely consider your condition
before God saved you.
(**Note:** The list of characteristics of us in our sinful condition is taken from Romans 3,
Romans 5, and Ephesians 2).

Who through Him are believers in God
The saving ministry of Jesus Christ is summed up in the statement that He is the
_____ between God and men (**I Tim. 2:5**).