

Prayers

To God

Pray by waiting on the Lord for Him to place prayers of praise into your heart. When you feel that the Lord is truly making a prayer well up within you, and it is not just your own continuous feelings and opinions, then say your prayer to the Lord

For myself

Weekly theme: doing the work of the Gospel

You will have your own feelings about how you respond to the call of Christ to 'make disciples of all the world', both good feelings and also perhaps difficult feelings. Submit these to God.

For others

Lord God, Your ways are wonderful, for You love what You have made and in this love You seek to overcome the evils that have come into the world. Make us channels of Your love by which salvation comes to people throughout the world, and give us a vision of nothing less. Use us, Lord God, people of every nation who pray to you, and who, like us, long for the liberation of those who walk in darkness. Work in every way possible to bring love, peace, joy and faith to a world of suffering, and make us Your effective agents, we pray. AMEN

Meditation

Praise is the heart's outpouring of love;
We reserve our highest for Jesus!

Honour is the respect we give a greater power;
We give our tribute to Jesus!

Glory is the dawning of spiritual splendour;
We see it supremely in Jesus!

Power is the unstoppable energy of God;
We are blown away by His Spirit!

Awe is breathtaking, heart stopping wonder;
We are lost in wonder love and praise!

Worship is the highest privilege of the human race;

We have this freedom because of Jesus!

Bible Passage

1 Peter 1:17-21

¹⁷ Since you address as 'Father', the One who impartially judges according to the life and deeds of each person, then conduct yourselves with reverence while you live here as amongst strangers. ¹⁸ For you know well that you were not redeemed from the futile life you inherited with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without fault or flaw, ²⁰ who was chosen before the creation of the world, and revealed amongst you in these last times. ²¹ Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave Him glory so that your faith and hope are in God.

Review

Yesterday, we began to read Peter's advice for those starting out on the Christian journey, and today, he continues by setting out some truths essential to Christian faith. He does not invent a set of beliefs, but explains and clarifies the apostolic faith for those who will hear. Now, after Jesus' death and resurrection, it took some time for the Gospel truths to be prayed about, discussed and written down, as guided by the Holy Spirit. Peter wrote this letter towards the end of the first century and it therefore reflects some of the most mature and concise spiritual advice within the New Testament. Peter may have read some of Paul's letters and perhaps some of the Gospels, but at heart he was the same man Jesus called at the very beginning of His ministry. So everything he says here is surely of great importance.

To begin with Peter says that those who '*addresses as "Father" the one who ... judges*' should aspire to higher spiritual standards, and '*conduct yourself with reverence*' while in this world (1:17). He goes on to speak of the '*perishable things such as gold and silver*', that is, the materialism from which we must be saved (1:18), echoing words of Jesus and the prophets (e.g. Matt 10:9, Isaiah 2:20). Then, he describes Christ's sacrificial work which is at the heart of the Gospel, '*the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without fault or flaw*' (1:19); and this is no sign or symbol but a clear explanation of Christ's sacrifice for sin; and remember, Peter was speaking about Jesus as a person he knew! Then remarkably, Peter declares his vision of Jesus as chosen before the dawn of creation (1:20) for the salvation of humanity, a conclusion he arrived at whilst Jesus was alive (Matt 16:16f.). Then, as Peter describes how Jesus has broken the barriers between earth and heaven (1:21), he speaks from his own experience of the resurrection his Lord (see John 21:15-19)!

This is powerful theology can be backed up throughout the New Testament. I find it hard, then, when people think of the church today as 'broad' in its theology and understanding of God and Jesus, covering many opinions about the Bible, God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church, salvation, creation and all aspects of Christian life. While I reckon it right for God's people to be open and accepting of all people, I do not understand why some feel that this passage is merely 'one' of several ways of understanding the work of Jesus. Peter's letter witnesses to a truth consistent within scripture about the saving work of God through His Son, Jesus Christ. Our task is to transcend the natural divisions of humanity and take hold of what Christ has done for us, and live to testify to this unique and precious faith.

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V17 **'according to the life and deeds of each person'**

Other translations:

'each man's work' (NIV)

'according to their deeds' (NRSV)

The Greek uses a rare word for 'work' here, which is quite rare in the New Testament. But what is the 'work' of each person? My opinion is that the word refers to everything we do by which we are defined, hence my translation '*the life and deeds of each person*'.

V17 **'live here as amongst strangers'**

Other translations:

'dwelling in a strange land' (CEB)

'during the time of your exile' (NRSV)

The second half of the verse uses a word ('paroikias') which is sometime used for 'exiles' or 'sojourners', but is in fact a fairly loose word meaning 'living amongst strangers'. Because Peter used a different and stronger Greek word in verse 1 ('parepidermois') to address those to whom he wrote as 'exile', I have retained the looser wording here.

V18 **'redeemed'**

Other translations:

'ransomed' (ESV)

'set you free' (NIRV)

The word '*redeemed*' is a technical New Testament word with great theological significance, largely because it is used in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Old Testament used in Jesus' day) for those instances of the law in which someone has to 'buy back' either property or the freedom of a slave, for example, for the sake of natural justice. This Greek verb is 'lutrow' which normally means 'to set free'.

V19 **'without fault or flaw'**

Other translations:

'without blemish or defect' (NIV)

'spotless' (NRSV)

The Greek word here comes from a Hebrew expression meaning '*without spot or blemish*', a phrase used to describe the purity of animals acceptable for sacrifice.

V20 **'he was chosen before ...'**

Other translations:

'he was foreknown' (NAS)

'he was marked out' (NJB)

The word here is 'proginoso' which means '*known beforehand*', indicating the foreknowledge of God. Some would hold that this should be translated 'predestined', but this would be too strong. God had made His mind up that he would work through His Son at the very beginning of Creation.

Further Comments

Conduct yourselves ... (v17)

As I explained a little more fully in yesterday's study, there is some benefit in thinking of this part of Peter's letter as a sermon addressed to candidates for Baptism. Everything we have read so far in the letter is by way of encouragement for those about to commence the journey of faith. Verse 17 fits this perfectly, and is nothing less than an encouragement to Christians to live a godly life which is different from that acceptable to the world. Please note that Christians are not asked to 'go under-cover' in the world, disguising themselves within it so that they can claim to have greater knowledge of the world from which people need to be saved, thus giving better opportunities for service or evangelism. No, we should know enough about that from our own past and the on-going temptations of the enemy which we have to repel.

Peter addresses his readers (or congregation!) as those who 'address as 'Father' the One who impartially judges ...' His starting place is faith in one God who made heaven and earth, and who treats all people equally and fairly; he is 'impartial'. In Peter's day the world was the opposite of impartial, just as it is on ours. We live in a world which is unfair, and in which some people have much and others have little, and most social interaction is based on the partiality and unfairness of wealth, time, place, personality, sex and power. Now, says Peter, if we are to live within this unfair and partial world in which we are inextricably caught up, we must keep fearfully in mind the fact of God's impartiality. This means that as in the teaching of Jesus (see the Sermon on the Mount – Matthew 5-7), we must live without recourse to favours or favouritism; nor social, financial or religious advantage. In other words, those who know they are saved, also know that they are 'saved sinners', and as sinners stand no higher before God than anyone else. As Paul said 'all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God' (Romans 3:23)

Redeemed ... (v18)

In the Old Testament, possessions or animals were 'set free' through the payment of a price, a process which is described as being 'ransomed' (see Leviticus 25:26,33,48f. 27:13, etc), and the same word (see notes above) was used in many places for the deliverance of God's people (Ex 6:6, Isa 44:22f. 51:10f. etc). In our passage, Peter talks about two alternative methods of payment for freedom; one being 'silver and gold' (1:18) and the other being 'the precious blood Of Christ' (1:19). It is no co-incidence that following on from the previous verse, the one is a worldly way, and the other is God's way.

Even in the Old Testament where the laws of Moses set down the payments to be made in order to secure the release of a slave, or the payment for animals for sacrifice, for example, the money supposed to be used for these religious purposes gained a reputation for corruption. By the time of the prophets, the words 'silver and gold' were a byword for false religion (see Isaiah 2:19f. 31:7f. Hosea 8:4f.), and Jesus Himself exposed the financial injustices of the Temple system (Luke 21:1f., Matt 21:12f.) in his own day. God's salvation of humanity could never come through such means.

By Christ (v19)

The redemption of our lives from sin and death has come by the 'precious blood of Christ, a lamb without fault or flaw' (1:19), just as the lamb required for the Passover sacrifice (Ex 12:5f. Heb 9:14f.). Many people find the idea of Jesus as a 'sacrifice for our redemption' a difficult pill to swallow, and some say that they do not accept this theory of Christ's work for us because they do not see why God would accept the death of His Son as a 'payment' for our sins. The trouble with this is that we mix up ancient religious metaphors with modern ones and come out with nothing. The ancients understood that life and death were intertwined, and death was necessary if life was to continue. The sacrificial system fully embraced that way of understanding life. We do not think of things in this way today, but the world is still the same, and for us, the very food (even from the supermarket) we eat is testimony to the fact that something must die so that we might live!

If we can overcome our natural revulsion at the idea of death and remember that Jesus' death was one which was planned and which led to resurrection, then however awful it was, it was glorious. Certainly Peter knew full well the true horror of Jesus' death, yet came to terms with it by understanding it in these terms. Those who have lived at times of war will quickly tell tales of how the death of some has liberated others, and without this, some evils would not be overcome. So, Christ's death for us may still be a mystery for many reasons, but the Bible explains that it is God's way of restoring His relationship with us, so who are we to gripe at what God has ordained? This is the reason why we can have faith in God as 'saved' sinners.

Lastly, I have often wondered whether Peter describes Jesus' blood as 'precious', as a personal touch and perhaps a memory of the terrible day of Jesus' death when Peter knew his own mortality and vulnerability before God more acutely than at any other time. Jesus died to set him free.

Chosen ... resurrection ... and glory! (v20,21)

This work of Christ for our redemption and salvation is not something that God made up as he went along, responding to the ups and downs of His relationship with the people of Israel. Throughout history, said Peter, God had in mind not just the world order He created for us, together with all its sin and problems, but a rescue plan which He had prepared beforehand. The text of our passage says that God knew before Creation what He would do (see notes above) to rectify the satanic fall from grace which happened as a result of the free choice of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3).

This is not just a theological statement, though it is a profound insight; Peter emphasised this to encourage converts to the Faith that they were not alone and that God was in full control of what was happening. In the days of the early church though the numbers of Christians was rising impressively, they were a tiny number of people within the Roman Empire. It required huge courage and belief to affirm that God had changed the world utterly through Jesus and that those who believed were in fact touching on the eternal truth about the salvation of God 'revealed in these last times' (1:19).

The past verse (1:21) brings everything we have read so far to a climax, focussing on the person of Jesus Christ, and giving Him glory for everything he did for the salvation of the world. To speak in this manner must have been a powerful experience for Peter because he was speaking about someone he knew. I can almost imagine that knowing this, his words would have kept a congregation enraptured; he was speaking from the most extraordinary personal experience. However, as the centuries have passed, Peter's message has proved entirely correct and the same inspiration has caught hold of generations of other Christians, liberating them as God's people into His service by means of the same powerful truths.

Discipleship

Application

The witness of God's Word and Christ's sacrificial death

These verses of scripture stand with others in Ephesians 1 and 2, Romans 3 and 5, and several other famous passages, as succinct explanations of the salvation we have through Jesus Christ. Personally, I find few real differences between them, and though scholars can find various words and details which do not appear to agree, I am of the opinion that this is a human problem rather than a problem with God's Word. The consistency of agreement within Scripture that Christ's sacrificial death is the key to our salvation and liberty before God is strong. However, this does not mean to say that people are necessarily persuaded by this. Today, people come to church for a variety of personal reasons and some hold the Gospel truths quite lightly and as a matter of debate. It is only when the full evangelical message is preached that some will come face to face with the truth that we need to accept for ourselves what Jesus has done for us. Unfortunately some will look away; but this should not stop the faithful preaching God's unique Word.

The preaching of the Gospel

All manner of wonderful things are being done by God's people today across the world, and much of it is of crucial importance. Christian social and evangelistic work which raises people out of the depths of poverty and helps give them live a new life; work with children and young people, the aged, service in the community, mission alongside people in all kinds of circumstances, telling them that God cares for them, and so much more. However, without the preaching of the Gospel of salvation by which people are saved from sin and death in this world by the '*blood of Jesus Christ*', all this has little meaning. This is because without salvation, a Christian has no goal or moral authority to act. Pray for the upholding of God's Gospel of salvation by faith through the blood of Jesus Christ, and pray that God's people will value it as Peter did.

Ideas for what to do

- *Write an email to a friend stating what you believe Jesus has done for you. You might not send this email to anyone, but the exercise of doing this will clarify your mind about some aspects of your faith.*
- *Go for a long walk with your Bible and take time to churn over in your mind the truths of the Gospel by which you have been saved and by which you now live.*

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Do you think I have misrepresented the thrust of this passage in any way? What do you think Peter is saying in this passage?
2. Discuss in your group what you personally take from this passage of scripture. Are there any parts of it which remain a mystery to you?
3. When do you think God will bring true, universal and international renewal to His people? Or will God bring the world to an end before this?

Final Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, may we never get up and walk away from the challenges that you have placed before us. Grant us the courage to face the greatest spiritual and physical challenges according to your will, and so show our love for You who first loved us. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. AMEN