

Synthetic Bible Studies

Containing an outline study of every book of the Bible
with suggestions for Sermons, Addresses and
Bible Expositions

By

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LESSON TWENTY-ONE

I PETER

We need not devote any time to the history of Peter who writes the Epistle following that of James. He is readily identified as, in some sense, the leader among the twelve disciples, the story of whose life is given with such detail in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles. The last we read of him in the Acts he was laboring in Jerusalem and its neighborhood (chaps. 10-12), but subsequently he seems to have migrated further to the east and south where we now find him, at Babylon, writing this Epistle (I Peter 5:13).

He is addressing it to the "strangers" scattered throughout the different provinces of Asia Minor, an introductory form of address suggesting that of James' Epistle, and leading to the opinion that he wrote practically to the same class of persons, only perhaps a little later in time.

The word "strangers" must not put us off the track as if they were simply persons unknown to Peter, and hence strangers in that sense, or even strangers in the general sense in which all the saints are strangers and pilgrims here. The word simply means "*sojourners of the dispersion*," meaning Jewish Christians scattered abroad.

It is quite evident that they were undergoing severe trial and persecution, and that Peter's object was to inspire them with hope.

The Apostle of Hope

Indeed just as Paul might be called the apostle of faith, and John the apostle of love, so Peter might be called the apostle of hope.

He was the active, impetuous, and expectant one among the twelve, ever their inspiration and mouthpiece; and the same qualities that marked his career then are seen here in his later experience and writings, only purified, trained, exalted by what he had passed through, and by what he has been taught of the Spirit.

As illustrating the characteristic of hope, note the number of instances in which that word is used in this Epistle, 1:3, 13, 21; 3:15, etc.

But note as well another circumstance quite as illustrative, viz: that wherever he speaks of earthly suffering, either on the part of CHRIST Himself or His people, he always throws it in the light of the glory that shall follow.

As Dr. Boardman says, "It is not as if there were an allotment of suffering here, and an allotment of glory by and by, with no connection between the two; but the suffering is incidental to the glory." Peter emphasizes this continually by the juxtaposition of the two ideas. See 1:6, 7, 11; 4:12, 13; 5:1, 2, 4, 10, etc.

Object of the Epistle

There was a twofold purpose in the mind of the apostle in writing this Epistle as he tells us in the sequel (5:12). His purpose was to exhort and to testify, and the theme of his testimony was "**the true grace of God.**"

A good text this for a sermon, the outlines of which might easily be discovered in the full text of the Epistle, and indeed in its doctrinal portion only which is confined to the first few verses of chapter 1.

Outline

1. The Epistle opens with the customary salutation, 1:1, 2, in this case even more interesting and instructive than usual, since some of the richest teachings of the true grace of GOD are found in it. See the second verse, for example. There is the grace of election in the first place, and then that election as drawing forth the operation of the three persons of the adorable Godhead. The opening remarks in our lesson on Ephesians might profitably be consulted here, where attention is called to the fact that the doctrine of the trinity is not called by that technical term in the New Testament, yet it is the very warp and woof of that revelation.

2. Following the salutation we have the thanksgiving, which really extends from the third verse of the chapter to the twelfth, and offers a rich mine of precious ore for the seeker after truth.

It begins with a declaration of GOD's mercy towards us, expressed in what great fact of our spiritual condition (v. 3)?

- on what anterior fact in the life and work of our substitute Saviour is our new birth grounded?
- what is the nature of the "**living hope**" to which we have thus been begotten (v. 4)?
- what four features of this inheritance are enumerated in that verse?
- is there danger of the saints losing this inheritance (v. 5)?
- at what time is it to be fully revealed and enjoyed?
- does it at all militate against our heirship that we are now passing through sorrow at times (v. 6)?
- what is the meaning of this sorrow and what will be its outcome (v. 7)?
- what does this verse teach as to the period referred to by the "**last time**" in verse 5?
- when, then, may we look for the consummation of our salvation, at the end of the world or the coming of CHRIST?
- is this revelation concerning the coming glory of CHRIST limited to the New Testament (vv. 10, 12)?
- did the Old Testament prophets know anything of the time of His revealed glory (v. 12)?
- what intelligences beside ourselves are deeply interested in the outworkings of these marvels of grace (same verse)?

3. Following the thanksgiving, which for the most part, exhausts the doctrinal portion of the Epistle, we have what might be called its application, extending indeed to the very close.

It is introduced by the word "Wherefore" in verse 13. You have been chosen, regenerated, endued with a living hope, and an eternal inheritance, "Wherefore" do these things, live this kind of life whose outline follows.

In other words observe the obligations of conduct (1:13-3:12).

(1) *Be hopeful* (1:13). Having been begotten again unto a living hope, be hopeful. Hopefulness in the truest and most far reaching sense has been made possible through CHRIST, now exercise it. Hope in verse 3 is a condition, in verse 13 an experience. It is our duty to hope.

- what preliminary is necessary to hope (same verse)?
- when is this hope to be changed into fruition?

(2) *Be holy* (vv. 14-16). What two motives to holiness are given in these verses? Note that "conversation" here does not mean merely talking one with another, but our whole conduct or manner of living.

(3) *Be God-fearing* (vv. 17-21).

- what two motives for Godly fear on the part of the child of GOD are given in these verses?
- by what language is it seen that Peter and Paul agree perfectly as to the only ground of human redemption?

(4) *Be loving* (vv. 22-25). Note a twofold use of the word "love" here parallel to that of the word "hope" in the previous verses. First, we see love as a condition into which we have been begotten by the HOLY SPIRIT through the Gospel, and then we see it as something to be practiced in our dealings one with another.

- what was fundamental as a prerequisite to this love (v. 23)?
- with what is the word of GOD identified in verse 25?

(5) *Be increasing* (2:1-3). Here is another "Wherefore," growing out of the premise in the preceding chapter and affording a third illustration of the peculiar grammatical or rhetorical construction previously alluded to. You have been born again by the Word of GOD. The Word of GOD is a living Word. Wherefore desire the Word that you may live, grow, increase in strength in the Lord. There was a prerequisite to the exercise of hope, of holiness, and there is one to the exercise of growth. What is that prerequisite (v. 1)? How these prerequisites, these "**puttings off**" of things in order to the "**putting on**" of other things suggest the pruning of the husbandman that makes the vine grow, and bud and put forth fruit!

(6) *Be praising* (2:4-10).

- under what figure of speech very common to the Scripture, is the Lord referred to here (v. 4)?
- under what corresponding figure are believers referred to in relation to Him (v. 5)?
- what are these "**living stones**" called, by apposition, in the same verse?
- what "sacrifices" is this priesthood to offer?
- on what ground have such sacrifices become acceptable?

Here is a beautiful thought almost overwhelming in its revelation of divine love and grace towards us in CHRIST. The reason our sacrifices are acceptable to GOD is because of the preciousness of CHRIST to GOD through whom those sacrifices are offered, a preciousness attaching to Him as revealed in the Old Testament Scripture quoted in verse 6. But this preciousness really belongs to us; it has been made over to us in CHRIST, and has become ours in Him. Hence the reason our sacrifices are acceptable to GOD is because of our preciousness in His sight-preciousness imputed into us in CHRIST clearly, since it reads (v. 7), "**Unto you therefore which believe *he is precious.***"

- but now what does verse 9 show to be the peculiar character of the sacrifices we are to offer up?
- And why, what reason have we, for thus offering them up? Read the conclusion of this section.

(7) *Be self-restrained* (2:11, 12). The carnal appetites seem here to be referred to, and yet the expression "**fleshly lusts**" may have the general meaning of worldliness as suggested in the Epistle of James just studied.

- "Conversation" (v. 12) remember, means general conduct, behavior.
- "Honest" means seemly, consistent.

- who are meant by the Gentiles, the church or the world?
- why should they be careful and restrained in their conduct because of them?

(8) *Be submissive* (2:13-3:7). The spirit of submission here inculcated is along these lines, governmental, (vv. 13-17), industrial, (vv. 18-25), conjugal, (3:1-7).

(9) *Be like-minded* (3:8-12). What the Spirit means by likemindedness in this case is explained in what follows:

- having compassion or sympathy,
- being tender-hearted, loving and meek.

He enlarges upon the last named virtue. We should not render railing for railing, but rather blessing. We were called in CHRIST to do this, and by this means we ourselves come into blessing (vv. 10-12).

Testimony to the Hope

We have been dwelling upon the obligations devolving on us as Christians and growing out of the living hope into which we have been begotten through the mercy of GOD.

Another of these obligations, introducing us to a new field of Christian activity altogether, is that of witnessing or testifying to the hope itself.

The subject is easily reached through the reference just made to the need and the value of meekness under provocation or wrong. The Christians were enduring wrong; it was a time of persecution, if not general and continuous as at some later periods, nevertheless fierce while it lasted, and to be met only with faith and patience.

An observance of the advice in the preceding verses (10-12), would enable them to escape much of it (v. 13), and yet when it fell upon them in what spirit should it be received (v. 14)? It is at this point that the obligation to testify is presented, the subject extending from 3:15 to 4:6, at least, and including one or two expressions of so mysterious a character as to have given rise to much controversy.

Observe please, the features by which this testimony should be marked as indicated in verses 15 to 17, viz: readiness, intelligence, meekness, and well-doing. Thus would they not only be delivered, but thus would they triumph over their enemies as CHRIST Himself was delivered and as He triumphed. This is the significance of the mysterious words following about the Spirits in Prison.

These "**spirits in prison**" (v. 19), are not, I think, the spirits of men, but evil angels, the evil angels mentioned in connection with the days of Noah (v. 20, compared with Genesis 6), and spoken of again by Peter in the same connection in his second Epistle (2:4, 5), and by Jude (6).

CHRIST suffered for sins, was put to death as to His flesh, but was delivered, quickened as to His spirit. He was not only delivered, however, but was caused to triumph openly over his enemies, for in His spirit He went and proclaimed His victory through the cross before the evil angels reserved in chains and darkness unto judgment, and is now "**gone into Heaven and is on the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him**" (v. 22).

The word "preach" in verse 19 is not the one usually employed in connection with the Gospel,

but another word having the meaning only of a herald or a proclaimer of news, not necessarily the good news of salvation. CHRIST did not go into hell to preach the Gospel to the lost, and give them "another chance," so to speak, but He went into the prison-house of the condemned evil spirits of Noah's day awaiting judgment, and announced to them the results of Calvary which they had sought to frustrate.

Now observe the practical exhortation to these persecuted and suffering Christians based upon the experience of CHRIST (chap. 4), "**Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind,**" suffer as did He, and you will triumph as did He, especially in that day when you shall give account to Him who judges the quick and the dead.

This reference to the dead brings up the thought of some of their number who had died, perhaps as a result of the persecution suffered, and Peter reminds them that the Gospel had been preached to them to this same end. They had indeed been "**judged according to men in the flesh,**" had suffered the judgment of men while in the body, but they were living "**according to God in the Spirit.**"

Their spirits were alive before Him, for men could kill their bodies but not their souls.

This reference to the preaching of the Gospel to the dead, it will thus be seen, means a preaching which they heard and accepted, not after they had died, but while they were still alive here in the flesh. Dead though they were now as to their bodies, their spirits were alive unto GOD, and awaiting the triumphant resurrection of their bodies as in the case of CHRIST.

Concluding Exhortations

The remainder of the Epistle, 4:7 to the end, is taken up with specific exhortations naturally suggested by the foregoing.

For example:

1. To sobriety (v. 7). Observe the reason for this sobriety and its method of exercise.
2. To love (v. 8). Observe the kind of love, and the way in which it would show itself.
3. To hospitality (vv. 9-11).

The hospitality in this instance, while not excluding that on the material side which the apostolic church seems to have been very generous in exhibiting, does nevertheless have special reference, it seems to me, to that interchange of spiritual courtesies of which verses 10 and 11 speak.

As we have seen in the study of Paul's Epistles, there was a disposition on the part of the early Christians to misappropriate the spiritual gifts so freely bestowed upon them by the Head of the church, and to use them in a spirit of unholy emulation rather than for the edifying of the body of CHRIST.

4. To rejoicing in tribulation (vv. 12-19).

It will be recalled how remarkably this exhortation harmonizes with the declaration of the truth in Romans 5:3, etc., and also that it affords an illustration of that peculiarity of Peter who, as we have said, ever throws forward the sufferings of the Christians in the present time into the light of the glory that shall follow. But let not the inspired caution be overlooked concerning the kind of suffering or trial that is meant. We are all great sufferers as we think, but what proportion of our suffering is for righteousness' sake, or for CHRIST's sake? And yet it is the latter only that has promise of the glory. Moreover, as the writer says, some of the other suffering being on account of wrong-doing on our part has judgment awaiting it from GOD rather than reward.

It is true, indeed, that there is no condemnation in the sense of eternal separation from GOD for the believer in CHRIST, and yet that believer often suffers here for his unfaithfulness, and must by and by stand before the judgment seat of CHRIST to give account for the deeds done in the body. There is such a thing as being saved ourselves, though our works may be burned up, and no greater calamity can befall a Christian.

5. To fidelity on the part of elders (5:1-4).

Observe in this case again the relation expressed between present suffering and future glory (v. 1), and also the time when this glory shall be experienced (v. 4).

6. To humility (5:5-7).

Observe the reason for humility, and the reward. Read verse 7, where anxiety is substituted for care. Care is almost always necessary, but anxiety on the part of a child of GOD is dishonoring to Him.

7. To watchfulness (5:8-11).

Observe the testimony in this case to the personality of Satan, the way in which he is to be withstood, and the comfort ministered in the thought that our afflictions through his machinations are neither singular nor unusual.

The Epistle concludes with a superscription in which the name of another is mentioned as an amanuensis.

- where have we seen that name before?
- for what two reasons has the Epistle been written?
- where does Peter seem to have been located at this time?
- who was associated with him?

~ end of Lesson 21 ~
