



Sermon Notes, 17 January 2021

Term Spring 2021

Series 1 Peter (Trust, Surrender, Confidence)

Gatherings: the 11, the 6

Title 1 Peter 4:1-11

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Readings – Genesis 6:1-7 / 1 Peter 3:18 – 4:11

Scholars regard the final verses of 1 Peter 3 and the opening verses of 1 Peter 4 as some of the most complicated in the New Testament. Questions which arise include:

- Who on earth is Peter talking about in 3:19-20?
- Are we saved by baptism?
- What is meant by 1 Peter 4:1 ... is suffering a means of defeating sin?

Let us remember

- our three 'watchwords' for this teaching series: surrender, trust and confidence
- that Jesus calls us to be a royal / holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices of lives lived for him

In 3:19-20, Peter suggests that Jesus was far from inactive while his physical body lay in the tomb between sometime late on Good Friday afternoon and dawn on Easter Day. Scholars debate the identity of the 'imprisoned spirits' But most believe the reference is either to the fallen angels of Genesis 6:1-4 or the human generation wiped out in the flood of Genesis 6:5-7.

Many (perhaps all of us) would like to believe that this hints at a second chance to come to faith after death. But the word used is not that used for preaching the good news [*euaggelizó*] but that for proclamation or herald. It is most likely, therefore, that Peter means Jesus went to the realm of the dead to proclaim his victory over the forces of evil represented by fallen angels ...

However, we do well to remember that the Cross is the only mechanism for salvation: it works forwards (you and I are saved by its power 2000 years later) but also backwards. When we read of King David crying out for mercy and finding forgiveness, even though the name of Christ was unknown to him, he was forgiven on the basis of the Cross and the blood of Jesus, just as you and I are.

So, Jesus may well also have visited the realm of the dead to proclaim the good news that all of humanity who, like David, cried out to God for mercy and forgiveness during the millennia before the Cross, now have their forgiveness achieved by his saving death. This also makes sense of 4:6, where *euaggelizó* is used.

What we don't have here is the basis for a complacent gospel along the lines of: it doesn't matter whether you come to faith in Jesus in this life; you'll have another chance to do so after you die. If we are to be faithful to scripture, we must bear in mind to its consistent message, put succinctly in Hebrews 9:27, *people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment* ...

Nor are we given reason to believe that the water used in baptism has power to save. The Reformers of the 16th-Century described a sacrament as an external and visible sign of an internal and invisible reality. Peter is clear here that the power of baptism is dependent on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This helps us to address the third question raised by these passages. Paul understands baptism as a physical acting out of Christian conversion and identifying with Jesus in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:1-18, see below). The waters of baptism into which the believer is lowered represent the grave ... our acknowledgment that we are ready to die to self. We are then raised back out of the waters, symbolically beginning to walk out our new life in the resurrection life which Jesus invites us to share.

When Peter writes in 4:1 that whoever suffers in the body is done with sin, he is joining one of the great themes of the

New Testament: that the primary spiritual sacrifice which we, as priests, offer on a daily basis, is the death of self. The discipleship decision and commitment to allow our selfish natures to be crucified. In v. 2 Peter offers a binary choice: either to live the rest of our earthly lives for self or *for the will of God*.

He gives some idea of what that might look like in 4:7-11

- living as though Jesus might return today
- keeping alert and of sober mind
- prayer
- loving (agapetos = sacrificial love) deeply
- not exposing others' sins
- offering hospitality (I'm sure we are all eager to be able to do just that!)
- using our gifts to serve others

For reflection this week, I suggest meditating on Paul's teaching in Romans 6. As well as your usual translation, you may find it helpful to read it in my own, which is reprinted here.

Romans 6:1-18 (taken from Who?)

¹ So what does this mean? Am I saying that we should sin as much as possible, in order to see more and more grace? ² Of course not! Sin belongs to our old life; and you do realise we've died to all that, don't you? ³ The water of baptism represents the grave. ⁴ We go down into it, united with Jesus in his death, and rise back out of the water into our new life in him, by God's glorious power.

⁵⁻⁶ Once united with Jesus in his death, our old self nailed to the cross once and for all, we're guaranteed to join in the wonder of his resurrection life, ⁷ set free from sin's clutches.

⁸ I repeat: if we share King Jesus's death, we will also share his new life. ⁹ Jesus has beaten death at its own game and it has no more hold on him. ¹⁰ Having defeated sin once and for all, Jesus lives for ever.

¹¹ Do you see just how radical this is? Your old way of life is dead and buried. In Jesus, God invites you to live the life he designed you to live. ¹² Don't let sin back into the driving seat. Your body isn't neutral; you can use it either for bad or for good. It's your choice. ¹³ Choose to offer yourself to God, so that he might use you for good. ¹⁴ Sin can no longer dominate. Rather than standing beneath the accusing finger of the Law, you now stand under the cleansing waterfall of God's grace.

¹⁵ Don't read this as another excuse for sin. ¹⁶ You haven't been set free to do as you please: you have a new owner to obey. ¹⁷ Your wholehearted acceptance of the good news has shattered the chains of sin's deadly hold, ¹⁸ allowing you freely to offer your obedience to God himself.