

A Simple Application

1 Peter 1:22-25

A brief reminder where we are in 1 Peter. The first twelve verses describe and define the gospel, the promise and the hope of the gospel. Peter calls it a living hope, the confidence and assurance of our eternal inheritance. Our eternal salvation.

Then, beginning in verse 13, is first section of application. And remember, Peter goes back and forth between his presentation of doctrine and his application of the gospel to our lives. Back and forth throughout the book. So we read,

v.13 “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”

And last time, two weeks, that beautiful exposition of the motivation for your holiness,

v.18 “...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”

So as the applications come to your life, we are reminded and encouraged by,

v.21 “...so that your faith and hope are in God.”

Be holy, since you have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. That’s really a comprehensive summary of the last two sermons, combined and condensed into a single sentence. Be holy in all your conduct, because you have been born again to a

living hope. That is actually the entire message of this whole book, albeit somewhat oversimplified. So we have the promise of the gospel and the exhortations of the law totally and completely intertwined, and Peter is probably the New Testament writer who is able to do that the most clearly and succinctly.

With Peter, there is never a sense of mere moralism, just the call to do good and be good, without a foundation in the redemption provided for us in Christ. Never do you get that impression from Peter. And with Peter’s exposition and declaration of our redemption, there is never room to assume or presume that how you live your life is unimportant. So you never come away from Peter wondering about the application in terms of how you are supposed to respond. But again, never is that response of obedience confused with the faith by which you receive the promise of the gospel.

So my sermon this morning will again merge together the law and the gospel. I will join together the promise of the gospel with a very simply application to your lives. As I emphasized last time, those are the two things which the Bible teaches, the only two things. What you must believe concerning God and what duty God requires of you! The promise of the gospel. A simply application. Let’s begin the promise.

v.23 “...having been born again.”

Or, “Since you have been born again...”

That’s the definition of a Christian.

I. A CHRISTIAN IS TWICE BORN.

As Peter puts it in,

v.23

Literally, a “re-genesis.” A re-generation. Born again is a

good translation. If I could be a little technical, though, it is actually a reference to the role of the male in the whole process of birth. A woman gives birth, to state the obvious. A woman conceives. And only a woman conceives. Only a woman gets pregnant, and I do chuckle whenever I hear a husband say that, “We’re pregnant.” That’s ridiculous. No man has even been pregnant, and none ever will be. A man begets. That’s his role in the whole process of having children. The reference here in verse 23 is just that, begotten again. And as we usually say it, being born again.

That’s the definition of a Christian! Remember Nicodemus’ confusion when he spoke with Jesus.

John 3:3 “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

John 3:4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?”

John 3:5 “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. 6 “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 “Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ 8 “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

So the only kind of Christian is a born-again Christian. A Christian is a person in whom the Holy Spirit has brought life, just as a mother brings life to a baby she bears and conceives in her own womb. She gives birth in the flesh. To be a Christian, you must be born of the Spirit. You must be made alive by the Spirit, as Paul writes in,

Eph. 2:1 “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins...4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), 6 and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

That’s a Christian. A person who has been made alive, born again, by the power of the Spirit. And that has reference to our spiritual life. You were dead in trespasses and sins. You were made alive, your relationship with God restored as a gift of his grace. And if I might jump to the end of our text at this point,

v.25 “Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you.”

This word is the gospel, the word of the Lord. And that is the gospel I preach to you. You must be born again. You cannot earn your salvation. You cannot work for your salvation, as if you would then have earned it. It is a gift, offered to you freely. And you receive it by faith. By believing the promise of the gospel, that the precious blood of Jesus was poured out as the atoning sacrifice for your sin. If you have never expressed that faith, then I urge you to do so this morning. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. Believe that he died for your sins. Believe that God raised him from the dead. And that God will also give you new life as well, eternal life. The gospel is that simple.

Let’s study these two births for a few minutes, the first birth and the second birth. Let’s try to understand what Peter is teaching us. It isn’t too hard a concept to grasp. Notice first, the first birth.

A. The first birth defines our fallen human nature.

In other words, natural birth. Physical birth. And what is the

result of your first birth? What is the outcome? Well, a cute little baby. And who doesn't mind making a fuss over a little baby? They always get our attention.

But that's not what Peter emphasizes. He emphasizes the mortality of our human existence, what he labels the "flesh" in verse 24. When Paul uses the word "flesh", he is usually referring to the sinful inclinations of our human nature, "the flesh which wages war with your soul." There is a spiritual definition to "flesh" for Paul. Peter uses the word a bit more literally, referring to your body. Your physical existence. And if one thing is certain about the flesh, it is that it is corruptible. It is mortal. In other words, you will die.

I attended a lengthy ceremony yesterday at the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, DC. The ceremony honored military servicemen who had died after the Vietnam War, often years or decades after, though as direct consequence of harm or injury inflicted during the war. 312 new men were added to the list of honorees, and my father-in-law was one of them. He died last fall of cancer, attributable to his exposure to agent orange while in Vietnam. Like all military ceremonies, it was very moving. It ended with the playing of Taps, and special plaques were placed along the more permanent wall of the Vietnam Memorial. The names of some 58,000 men and women are engraved on that marble memorial.

There is an unmistakable sense of mortality there, isn't there? Peter describes that humanity as grass,
v.24

You see, we are all born of "corruptible seed," verse 23. In other words, every baby that is born is mortal. For every mother who conceives a child is mortal. Every father who begets a child

is mortal. And mortal creatures cannot produce anything other than mortal children.

Now, remember, it wasn't designed that way in the Garden of Eden before the fall. Death was the punishment, the curse, imposed by God upon Adam and Eve for their sin. In the day that they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they died. They became mortal, corruptible. That's the definition of our fallen human nature.

Gen. 2:16 "And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

So we live for awhile, and grass flowers up for awhile. But then it withers and dies. Peter quotes Isaiah,

v.24 "All flesh is as grass, And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away."

Yet, the purpose of all of that is not to depress you or to exasperate you with hopelessness of the certain fate of death. Quite the opposite. The point of this emphasis upon the mortality associated with the first birth is to make the contrast with the second birth. It is an evangelistic invitation. It is the proclamation of the gospel. And the quotation is from Isaiah 40, itself a proclamation of that same gospel.

Is. 40:1 "Comfort, yes, comfort My people!" Says your God. 2 "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, That her warfare is ended, That her iniquity is pardoned; For she has received from the Lord's hand Double for all her sins." 3 The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God. 4 Every valley shall be exalted And every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places

shall be made straight And the rough places smooth; 5 The glory of the Lord shall be revealed, And all flesh shall see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

And so while all human flesh is as grass and will wither and fade, the word of God, the word of the gospel will stand forever.

Is. 40:8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.” 9 O Zion, You who bring good tidings, Get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, You who bring good tidings, Lift up your voice with strength, Lift it up, be not afraid; Say to the cities of Judah, “Behold your God!” 10 Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, And His arm shall rule for Him; Behold, His reward is with Him, And His work before Him. 11 He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, And carry them in His bosom, And gently lead those who are with young.”

And so I proclaim to you that word of God this morning, the word of the gospel. I proclaim to you the promise of a second birth to all who would believe on Jesus. And,

B. The second birth defines our eternal life.

So, if you are a Christian, you were not only born the first time in the flesh, but you were also born a second time by the power of God.

v.23

And again, with contrast of grass in your mind, notice the emphasis,

v.25

Your body will fade away and die. But this word of the gospel will endure forever! And ultimately, this is the promise,

1 Cor. 15:50 “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood

cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. 53 For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54 So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”

Then comes the application. A simple application.

II. A CHRISTIAN GIVES EVIDENCE OF A SECOND BIRTH.

How do you know if you have been born again? Well, look at the evidence.

How do you know if the wind has blown? How do you know if there has been a tornado? Well, look at the evidence.

John 3: 8 “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

So what is the evidence? That’s really the appropriate question. And I have two answers, one with reference to what is inward and the other to what is outward. In other words, the evidence of being born again is the evidence of your heart. But that evidence isn’t seen until it comes out of your heart and into the practice of your life.

But this emphasis upon the inward and the outward is good, because I want to stress that the evidence is not merely outward. The evidence is not merely the performance of some outward or external duty. As I said at the outset, with Peter there is never a

sense of mere moralism, just the call to do good and be good.
No. The evidence of new birth, the evidence of being born again is in,

A. The evidence of a pure heart.

Note that Peter describes that as having already taken place.
v.22

That's a Christian. If you are have been born again, you have purified your soul. That's what it says, doesn't it? Peter doesn't apply that to only a few people in his audience, but to everyone. To all the elect, all the pilgrims, all those who have been born again to a living hope. You have purified your souls.

But you might think to yourself, "I'm not so sure my soul is very pure." You might feel the impurity of your own heart rather personally and painfully. But this is what Peter means, you have been set apart. You have been purified, sanctified, in the same way that the people of God were set aside as the people of God, his own special people.

It is an OT ceremonial concept. It is the definition of the people of God, those who are clean. Those who are separated from the world, from the unclean. Those who are set apart as a holy nation. God's holy people. That's who you are as a Christian, by definition. God has set you apart. God has purified your soul. God has made you clean.

Just one OT reference,

Lev. 10:8 "Then the LORD spoke to Aaron, saying: 9 "Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die. It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, 10 "that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and

clean, 11 "and that you may teach the children of Israel all the statutes which the LORD has spoken to them by the hand of Moses."

The whole ceremonial system was established in Israel for that purpose, "that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean." If you have been born again as a Christian, you are no longer unclean, but clean. "Since you have purified your souls...", as Peter puts it.

But then look. What does that mean in practice? How is that made evident? Verse 22 continues, "in obeying the truth." That's a Christian. Truth isn't just something you believe. It is something you do. Truth is not just something you think, but the way you act.

And there is one action identified above all others!

B. The evidence of sincere and fervent love.

v.22

Love must come from the heart. It must come from within you. It must come from the center of your life, identified with understandable symbolism as the heart. Not just outward actions. Not just flattery. Love that is not in pretense only, without guile, not demonstrated with only the appearance of facade of genuine interest and concern.

Dear friends, you are to love one another from the heart. And, as verse 22 makes explicit, "in sincere love of the brethren."

There the word "sincere" means without hypocrisy. Without dissimulation. Unfeigned. Undisguised. As we all know and understand the simple English word, sincere. It's the real thing.

Genuine, authentic, legitimate, bona fide love. Pure and certain. Brotherly love. And yes, the Greek word is the word we use for the city of Philadelphia.

It is a repeated theme in Scripture.

Heb. 13:1 Let brotherly love continue.”

Rom. 12:10 “Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love.”

1 Thes. 4:9 “But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.”

1 Peter 3:8 “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous.”

John 13:34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

So let me ask you, let me challenge you, is that your calling as a member of this church? It must be.

It’s too easy to ignore this whole idea of brotherly love. It is too easy to simply give it lip service. So let me challenge you, to think consciously of how and when you can demonstrate that tender affection of brotherly love to one another this morning. Maybe it will mean talking to someone you don’t know very well. After all, it’s easy to justify the reality that we all have certain friends, but what about everyone else. Look around you. Go ahead. Look around you after the benediction, and go get to

know someone whom you don’t very well. Maybe that will mean listening to them, not just talking to them. Listening to what is important to them, asking them what is important to them. It might mean making yourself vulnerable in talking to them. It might mean asking a personal question. It might mean that you stay a little longer and talk, rather than leaving right away. It might mean that go to another section of the sanctuary to talk to people you don’t normally see. It might mean you commit yourself to praying for someone, personally, according to their specific needs. It might mean that you are willing to enter the life of another person, and consider that person more important than yourself.

Dear friends, you can’t have brotherly love for someone you hardly know! And as members of one another, you are called to that brotherly love within the context of this church. That’s why church membership matter so much, because that phrase in verse 22, “sincere love of the brethren,” makes reference to your brothers and sisters in this family which we call a church.

And to add the final emphasis, raising the standard even one step higher, this calling as a Christian is a call to a fervent love. Not just brotherly love. Peter isn’t content with that word. Not just sincere love. Adding that word isn’t enough either. One more word, a fervent love. Love one another deeply, as the NIV puts it.

Literally, the Greek word refers to a stretching out of the hand. So love, not perfunctorily. Not routinely. Not carelessly or simplistically. But deeply. The idea is earnestness. You really mean it! You do it intensely. Zealously, not lightly.

Now, this is one of those points in which it is safe to say, we all need to repent. Because as soon as you put a limit on this zealotry or fervency, it is not longer fervent. If this is an

obligation that you can completely and finally fulfill, so that your duty is completed, you are no longer loving fervently. Suffice it to say, this is one obligation in which every one of us is compelled to confess, I could have loved more fervently. More earnestly.

It is a debt you will never fully repay,

Rom. 13:8 “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

A simply application, isn't it? But it will cost you your life. So lay down your life, in love, for your brothers and sisters in Christ, beginning right here. Right now.

You who have been born again, because you have been born again, “love one another fervently with a pure heart.” Not only is that the evidence of your salvation, it is also how we proclaim the gospel to those around us,

John 13:34 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. 35 By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”