

It's All About Him

1 Peter 5:10-14

When we started this study of 1 Peter, I didn't expect to be here when it ended. I was the elephant in the room, for when your pastor began what was a six-month sabbatical, I showed up in the pulpit. And we began studying this letter of 1 Peter. Today is my 35th sermon on this book, and while there are other good and useful methods of preaching, I have found none more helpful than consecutive, verse by verse, chapter by chapter, expositional preaching from a whole book of the Bible.

There are a lot of benefits to that sort of expositional preaching, and from my perspective it not only saves me a lot of time each week trying to figure out what to preach on, but it keeps me from running on my hobby horses.

I often listen to talk radio when I'm driving, and I'll frequently turn it off for awhile and then turn it back on. Or I'll stop for lunch, or stop for a visit. The start listening again. And so very often it seems like I haven't missed a thing. Whoever is on the radio, whether it is Rush Limbaugh or anyone else, I can go away for an hour and come back only to hear the same thing being said again. Sometimes a day will pass, or more. And you turn on the radio and they are just saying the same thing over again.

I don't ever want people who hear me preach say that about me. And the best protection is to preach through a whole book, then preach through another book. Ultimately, it means to preach the whole counsel of God, as Paul describes it in Acts 20.

There is another benefit to this kind of expositional preaching, and that is that you ought to be more able to understand the whole context. Not just a verse here and there. Not just a proof-

text to prove whatever point you are trying to make, but the whole context of the whole book. In other words, you miss the forest for the trees.

We can get bogged down with all the trees, can't we? All the details. All the particulars. We can analyze all the verbs, define all the nouns. We can read all the commentators and give explanations and interpretations for all the difficult passages. You can identify the main points of a sermon and the sub-points, and all of that is very good. But not if you lose the big picture.

So what is the big picture of 1 Peter. This is still my introduction to the sermon, but this will be a good question for Mike to ask during the sermon review this afternoon. What is the big picture of 1 Peter? What is the message of the book? The overall message. And I would want you to identify two things. The first, encouragement in suffering. That's the theme. That's what the whole book is all about. Encouragement in suffering. Peter writes to warn the church about suffering that is to come, and it surely did come. He writes just prior to the persecution imposed upon Christians by Emperor Nero after the fire of Rome in AD 64. He made Christians the scapegoat, and rather than accept responsibility for his own negligence, he lay the blame on Christians and instituted a time of terrible persecution. That's the first thing I want you to always remember about 1 Peter. The expectation of suffering, as the normal experience of life for a Christian.

Perhaps the most important verse in that context is, 1 Peter 4:12 "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; 13 but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation."

And of course,

1 Peter 1:6 “In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

That’s the first thing that I want you to remember about the overall message of 1 Peter. And the second thing has to do with the method of his teaching. How the message is presented. And the point is this, that Peter goes back and forth between the teaching of doctrine and the application of that doctrine to your life. In other words, he goes back and forth between the declaration of the gospel and the applications of the law. Here is what you are to believe, and here is how you are to live. Here is what God says, and here is how it affects your life. Back and forth, over and over, so completely intertwined and interconnected that there is not conflict, no tension at all between the law and the gospel. They are presented together, in perfect balance and with perfect consistency. Back and forth, over and over, first the gospel then the law. After the law, then the gospel.

And we certainly see that today as we conclude our study of this book. The gospel is clearly presented in the text, and I hope it will be just as clearly presented by my sermon. The gospel corresponds to the first point in my outline,

I. GOD’S CALLING.

Our catechism uses the phrase effectual calling, because “calling” when God does it is not just an invitation, but one that brings about its desired effect. It is effectual. Those whom God calls, he saves. Our salvation itself is identified as our calling.

Eph. 4:1 “I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to

walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.”

Also, Paul describes the power of God in the gospel this way, 2 Tim. 1:9 [God] has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, 10 but has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ.”

So God’s calling is the work of the gospel, and Peter makes it clear, this calling of God is,

A. The call of grace,

In other words, you don’t earn it. The call of grace means that God gives us a gift, unearned, undeserved, unmerited. Look at how Peter puts it in,

v.10a “But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus...”

That’s where everything has to start. That’s certainly where the gospel has to start. “The God of all grace.”

Peter refers to that grace again in,

v.12

Everything starts here. Everything that you must know about God and about your salvation starts here, that God is the God of all grace. That’s the gospel.

Eph. 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, 9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Rom. 3:23 “...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

That's the gospel. That's the call of grace, from the God of all grace. It is,

B. The call to eternal glory.

Look again at verse 10, then, for the object or goal of this calling. We are not just saved by grace in some abstract sense of a philosophical belief, but we are actually called to something very specific. Namely, eternal life. Look again at Peter's words, v.10a "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus..."

Do you remember how Peter began this book with that same emphasis, the call of the gospel of God's grace unto eternal life, what he calls a living hope, or an eternal inheritance?

1 Peter 1:3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you."

So that's the gospel. God is his grace, forgives us our sins and promises to us the blessing of an eternal heaven. Despite whatever sufferings you might endure in this world. That's the message of the whole book. But one more very important phrase in verse 10. Two words, "in Christ." And let me draw that out and emphasize it just to make the point as crystal clear as it could possibly be. This calling is,

C. The call of Jesus.

v.10a "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus..."

That could be translated, "in Christ Jesus." By means of Christ Jesus. As brought about and established by Christ Jesus.

This gospel only makes sense through faith in Jesus Christ. All these promises and encouragements of the gospel are yours, but only in Christ. Only by faith in Christ. Only by the willingness of your heart to trust in Jesus, and to follow Jesus.

That's God's calling, a calling I proclaim to you as the only true gospel, the only true and certain path to obtain eternal life.

1 John 5:11 "And this is the testimony [the gospel]: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

Is that plain? Is that clear? You are allowed to say, "Amen." This is the gospel. God's calling, by which we receive the promise of eternal life.

Now, let me go back to that big picture of the whole book. Remember the method Peter uses. Gospel and law, back and forth. Promise and application, doctrine and exhortation. One after the other. And that is so very clear here in this final text at the end of the book. We just focused upon that gospel of God's grace, but notice then, immediately, in the same sentence, the effect of that gospel on your lives. I'll now read all of,

v.10 "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you."

So we have a declaration of God's calling, the gospel. And then we have a description of,

II. GOD'S CALLING AT WORK IN THE LIFE OF HIS PEOPLE.

So what does God do in the lives of those whom he calls? Those whom he calls, he sanctifies! Those whom he calls to

eternal life, he changes. He transforms. He perfects, to use the word Peter uses in verse 10. He perfects.

A. God is at work to perfect his people.

Literally this word means to mend. To restore. To join everything together perfectly, such as those of you who can sew might do for a torn garment. God is fixing or repairing what has been broken. That's the purpose of suffering. We might call it "sanctification." God is making you complete, arranging and adjusting everything just the it ought to be. And thus the blessing I often pronounce at the end of a worship service,

Heb. 13:20 "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."

So how many of you need mending? How many of you need God to make you complete, or need God to fix or repair what is broken in you? That's what he does!

Such a blessing it is! May God make you complete in every good work. May God perfect you. May God put you back together, through the power of the gospel at work in your life.

And verse 10 continues, with three more words, more or less synonyms. The three words together give a good sense of what life is all about, what the work of God in your life is all about. I'll summarize the three words together this way,

B. God is at work to establish the strength and stability of his people.

Strength and stability. Or, New King James, "establish, strengthen, and settle." In the New American Standard, "confirm, strengthen and establish."

God will make you stand, that's the literal meaning of the first word. God will make you stable and firm, enabling you to stand. So many of us stand like that 11 month old baby. He's standing, but wobbling pretty badly. That's why we call them toddlers. They toddle back and forth. Sometimes we start to toddle when we get older, too, don't we? God takes a toddler and establishes him! He takes a toddler and makes an Olympic athlete. He takes a toddler who can barely stand up and makes him a world class sprinter. That's the idea of these words.

Then strengthen and settle.

And he will settle you. Literally, he will lay a foundation. That's what God is doing even when, in his providence, he determines for you to endure suffering. He is laying a foundation for your faith, a foundation upon which your faith can be built straight and strong. That's his purpose, and so Peter ends with a personal note and personal reference to others who will offer this same encouragement.

v.13-14

The point there is that God accomplishes his work when we live together. When we see ourselves and identify ourselves as being joined together with others of God's people. She who is in Babylon, likely a reference to believers in Rome. More generally, the elect together with you. That's how we relate to one another, isn't it? We are elected, chosen by God, together. Chosen by God to be together. And in that context, God will "perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you."

With this overarching emphasis that the means by which God does all those things is suffering. Again, that's what this whole book is about. God uses suffering in your life in order to "perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." The God of all grace calls you to eternal salvation in order to "perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you."

And that leads to my final point.

III. OUR CALLING IN LIFE.

God is at work in your life, and on that basis, in that context, he calls you to a measure of responsibility. Again, the law and the gospel. Doctrine and practice. Faith and life. And knowing that God is the God of all grace, knowing that the God of all grace is at work in your life, we have,

A. A call to stand firm.

v.12

Actually, that last phrase is an imperative, a command. It is well translated in the NASB,

v.12 "Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!"

So this is actually an application to our lives. This is the appropriate application and response the declaration of the true grace of God. "Stand firm in it."

It is not a matter of self-help or self-reliance, for God is the one at work. But neither are you passive and uninvolved. You are called to stand firm, as you are promised what God will do. Do you see how the law and the gospel fit together so well?

Phil. 2:12 "So then, my beloved, ...work out your salvation

with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

Work out your salvation. Knowing it is God who is work within you. Stand firm in your faith, therefore, knowing that God will "perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you." That's a summary Peter's message in this whole letter.

And then one final point, one final climax. One final description of our calling in life. It is found in verse 11,

B. A call to give all the honor to God.

v.11

Please let those words be very personal for you. Please let them be real. Your chief end, your primary purpose in life, is to glorify God. To enjoy him. But don't let those words from the first question of our shorter catechism just be words. Let them be your life.

Let this motivation drive you as you live your life. Let this desire be the consuming desire of your heart, whether you suffer or enjoy prosperity. "To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever." Let those words be the answer to all those hard questions, and satisfy your soul with that answer.

What lesson is God trying to teach you? What does God want you to learn? Why did this particular form of suffering or this particular experience come to you? You may well not know the specific answer in a specific situation, but this is certainly the right answer in the broadest and most comprehensive sense, that you would learn to say from the very depth and core of your soul, "To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

Paul reaches the same conclusion when he writes to the Romans,

Rom. 11:33 "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! 34 "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" 35 "Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?" 36 For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen."

In other words, it's all about him. It's not about you at all. It's all about him. It's all about this honor and his glory.

That's biblical Christianity. That's the motivating goal of life. It's all about God. No matter what the situation, no matter what the circumstances, "To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever."

So when suffering comes, do not be unsettled, "Do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you." For you have...

1 Peter 1:4 "...an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials."

That's the message of the book of 1 Peter.