

Unlocking Freedom: “1 Peter: Hope in a Foreign Land”

Sermon preached by Chris Lofquist

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Introduction

Live in Hope, Live in Holiness, and Live in Fear.

These are the three commands that jump off the pages at us in 1 Peter chapter 1. And what Peter is telling us and reminding us is that our Salvation brings about a change within us that causes us to have a changed perspective and outlook on life and eternal life bringing about hope; our faith also motivates us toward holy and right living.

So, as born again believers, not only has our future changed, but our present lives should be lived in hope and faithfulness. This morning we continue down the path of 1 Peter, as he seeks to encourage and inspire us, believers in a hostile world, to love others.

The BIG IDEA is that: **God’s plan of Salvation in the lives of others, expressed in the Gospel message, endures forever and is not contingent upon our perfect obedience.**

What am I saying here? I am saying that not only is our salvation not based upon our works, but the salvation of others is also not based upon our works. God is the One, through the truths found in the Gospel message, and the prompting of the Holy Spirit, who brings about salvation in the lives of others. Their salvation is not dependent upon your perfect obedience. Do you feel relieved by this truth? There are many of us, who carry such guilt around, because our children or our parents, or our siblings, or our spouses, or our closest friends do not believe in Christ. We walk through pockets in life blaming our own actions/inactions, words/words not spoken, or behavior (good/bad) for their lack of belief. And I am here, with God’s Word behind me, to tell you that God’s plan of Salvation in the life of another, is not contingent or dependent upon your perfect obedience. This is great news! For we all to often struggle with obedience, even after salvation.

But enough from me, let’s see where I’m getting this thought...

Please open your Bibles to **1 Peter chapter 1 verse 22**.

Read **1 Peter 1:22-25**. *Open in Prayer.*

Growing up I was raised in a Minnesota Viking household. The Minnesota Vikings, for those who may not know, are a professional NFL football team. And from birth, my Dad, who I would call the biggest fan I know, shared with us his passion and love for this particular football team. We had Viking clothing, watched Viking games on replay, set up Viking visuals to assist us in listening to the game on the radio (if they played MNF). He told us the names of the players, and little information about his favorites. We even took a pilgrimage to the city which the team spent their preseason, Mankato. And even though we were surrounded with such zeal toward the Minnesota Vikings, my brother became a Green Bay Packer fan, the Vikings hated rival. How is this even possible? He had a free will, and he freely choose another team to root for. It didn’t matter how much Viking memorabilia and conversation we had, Paul choose another team – another direction, because the choice (in the end) was ultimately his to make. My Dad couldn’t

make it for him. Now this illustration may be a stretch, but this is coming back to our big idea, that God's plan of salvation, and the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of unbelievers is not dependent upon your perfect obedience. But obedience does produce some fruit.

So let's begin with this thought, found in verse 22.

1. Faith leads us to Loving One Another (v. 22)

"Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart."

"Fervently Love one another from the heart" – that is the command Peter gives us in this verse. To "Love one another" is an age-old command, mentioned over and over again all throughout the New Testament. And in this letter Peter has written we will see it repeated time and time again. It is the same command that Jesus gave His disciples found in **John 13:34** – *"A new commandment I give you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another."* Peter is simply, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reminding us of Jesus' command that was passed on to him years prior to this letter. And the word used here for love is the word, 'agape' – which is a willful love not necessarily attached to feelings and emotion – it is making the choice to love – therefore it is a sincere authentic love.

This is the love that Peter is calling us toward – however, this fervent (which is the Greek word meaning continual and intense) love is not something that anyone can do. Peter is telling us that this love is an inward and outward response to our faith in Christ.

Peter says this, **"Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren..."**. Not everyone has the capacity to love like God commands us to love. The natural man, without faith in Christ, is degenerate and filled with sin – incapacitating his ability to love like God commands us to. This continual, fervent love we are to be characterized by, flows out of a regenerate purified soul. I equate this idea of 'purifying the soul' to being 'born again (v. 23)'. **Titus 3:3-7** tells us that God saved us according to His mercy, by the *washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit*. This is the concept of purifying the soul - it is a divine work within the believer at the moment of salvation (a 'behind the scenes' kind of work) - and isn't anything that he or she has done through works.

And Peter is reminding us that we received the capacity to *sincerely love our brethren* when we placed our faith in Jesus. He says, *"Obedience to the truth in purifying the soul for a sincere love of the brethren"* This means that when the Gospel message was presented to our hearts, we *believed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*, as Scripture called us to – we obeyed the calling to salvation by the Holy Spirit by having faith in Christ – upon doing this, at the moment of salvation, we were a new creation, purifying our souls and giving to each of us who believe the capacity to authentically and sincerely love each other. Simply put: **You have been saved by grace through faith, purifying your soul, for the purpose of loving one another.**

Application:

Obedience begins with faith in Christ, which directly impacts our actions. How are you doing in loving one another? It is easy for us to allow bitterness and sinfulness to enter into our relationships with one another – but I am reminding you this morning, that you have been saved to love one another. And your willful fervent love for one another will be the most powerful testimony of your salvation.

We could stop there, because this is such a wonderful reminder for us to meditate upon, but Peter continues on to tell us more about our Salvation...

2. The Gospel that brings Salvation endures forever. (v. 23-24a)

“For you have been born again, not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God.” (v. 23). The Word of God mentioned at the end of this verse is the ‘Gospel message’ that brings salvation to all who believe. The Word of God does not always mean the Gospel message, but I gather this from the previous verse and the phrase ‘born again’ at the onset of this verse. *“You have been born again...through the word of God”*. Paul says it this way, *“...Faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ.”* **Romans 10:17.**

Illustration: A skeptic once told Gaylord Kambarami, the General Secretary of the Bible Society in Zimbabwe, ‘if you give me that New Testament I will roll the pages and use them to make cigarettes!’ Gaylord replied, ‘okay, but at least promise me that you will read it before you smoke it.’ When the man agreed, Gaylord gave him the New Testament and that was the last he saw of him for 15 years. Then, while Gaylord was attending a Pastors convention in Zimbabwe, the speaker on the platform suddenly spotted him, pointed him out to the audience and said, ‘This man doesn’t remember me, but 15 years ago he tried to sell me a New Testament. When I refused to buy it he gave it to me, even though I told him I would use the pages to roll cigarettes. I smoked Matthew, and I smoked Mark, and I smoked Luke. But when I got to John 3:16, I couldn’t smoke anymore. My life changed from that moment. And now I am a full-time evangelist, preaching the Word I once smoked!’ **God uses His Word to bring new birth.**

So, this Word of God is the Gospel message that brings new birth, how else does Peter describe the Gospel that brings salvation?

You have been born again...

“Not of seed that is perishable but imperishable”. The word ‘perishable’ here means to corrupt, to spoil and decay. The Gospel message is not corrupted like the philosophies and false gospels of the world, it will not spoil or decay. It brings new birth.

“Through the living and enduring word of God.”. This Gospel message that brings new birth, is also **alive**. The truth of Salvation, found in the Gospel message, will always be continuously active in bringing about salvation to the souls of mankind. It is not dead or inactive, the Gospel message is alive and brings life – which is the truth that lead Paul to say, *“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes!”* **Romans 1:16.** The Word of God, the Gospel, is also **enduring**. This comes from the Greek word that means, ‘to remain’. Once the seed of

the Gospel has been planted in the heart of the believer it will remain – you cannot lose your salvation! “Oh, but I have sinned in a big way, since believing in Christ” – it matters to your daily fellowship with God, and to your testimony, but it hasn’t erased your salvation – because the seed of the Gospel that was planted in your heart, is imperishable and enduring. Also, what an encouragement it is to know that the plan of salvation lasts, as history moves forward and people come and go, in the darkest times of history God’s call to salvation still goes out.

Application: What a loving God we serve! He loves us even when we do not always respond in faithful obedience. So repent of your sinfulness, return to Christ, and continue to allow the living and enduring word of God to bring about transformation in your life. *The word of God is enduring...*

Peter then gives a beautiful illustration by quoting from **Isaiah 40:6-8**.

Verse 24 reads, “For, ‘All flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls off. But the word of the Lord endures forever.’” Even the greatest and most beautiful people and all of their greatest accomplishments and achievements perish (like grass that withers and flowers whose petals fall off). Everything in this world perishes – businesses come and go, money is made and lost, pets live and die (like Reed’s precious gold fish), even life is fleeting – but not the Word of the Lord. **It endures forever.** This not only speaks to the eternal truths of Scripture found in both the Old and New Testament – but in this context, Peter is speaking to the Gospel. No matter how dark the surrounding, the light of the Gospel will not cease to shine.

“And this is the word which was preached to you.” (v. 25b)

3. Even when we Fail, God still Saves. (v. 25b)

When I was reading Peter’s reference to Isaiah speaking of our flesh falling and withering, I could easily relate. For not only have I seen the heavy hand of failure and death, but I fail as well. **I am not always obedient. My words don’t always bring glory to God. My actions and behavior are not always Christ like.** And if I begin to think that my obedience to the Word of God, my testimony, is somehow the only vehicle for the Gospel message than the world is in big trouble - And the Word of the Lord has lost Its impact. But what Peter reminds us of, is not only of our Salvation, but that even when we fail, God still saves. For our flesh is like grass and withers, and in all its glory is like the flower that blossoms for a time and then falls off – however the life changing, heart penetrating truths of the Gospel message endures forever. It changed your life. And even when you fail, the power is in the Gospel message, not your perfect obedience to it. Now, I’m not saying that because the Word of God endures forever, you don’t have to strive to live in such a way as to testify to it to the world around you – but I am saying that we have such a loving God, that even when we fall short of the glory of God, when we fail, His Salvation endures. Do your best, but understand that God saves lives, not you.

It is easy to question the unbelief of others and blame yourself – ‘what did I do wrong?’ – but God this morning in His Word, is removing this burden – for salvation is through Christ alone, and whether you represented Him perfectly or not, their salvation is not dependent upon you.

Conclusion

We all know people who we love, that for some reason walk in unbelief. And many of us have been carrying around the guilt of that unbelief – thinking that if we lived better, they would be saved. But I want to end today’s sermon with what I think is a great encouragement to us all. First, God is so gracious and loving. Second, His Gospel message is not dependent on your testimony. Third, allow His love to flow through you, as you continue to strive to love one another. God help us all.

Let’s pray.