I AND II PETER

The theme of Peter's writing is "encouragement to endure." The Christians were undergoing horrible persecution from Rome. We read in Acts that on several occasions that the Romans saved Paul from certain death. But something happened that turned Rome viciously against the followers of Christ. It occurred under the rule of Nero on July 19, A.D. 64. The great fire broke out in Rome and it raged for three full days. Tenement houses, commercial buildings and even some of the shrines of Rome were destroyed. No one seemed to doubt that Nero himself had set the city ablaze in order to clear the city for new grand, palatial structures he envisioned. The feelings against Nero were intense - absolute hatred. But Nero cunningly directed their hatred toward the Christians. After all, had they not preached a day would come when the world would go up in flames? Nero was successful in his efforts and a horrible persecution of the Christians ensued in which believers were crucified, burned alive or thrown to wild animals. This persecution was not only in Rome, but it spread throughout the Roman world. Peter wrote his first letter (epistle) to believers in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. These regions comprise present-day Turkey.

I PETER
Chapter One

There was a great old gospel song with this lyric:

This world is not my home; I'm just a-passin' through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue;
The angels beckon me from heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

That is the basic theme of chapter one – a heavenly inheritance:

1 Peter 1:1-12

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, [2] elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:
Grace to you and peace be multiplied. [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
even 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, [7] that the
genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though
it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus
Christ, [8] whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet
believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, [9] receiving the end of
your faith—the salvation of your souls. [10] Of this salvation the prophets have
inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to
you, [11] searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in
them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the
glories that would follow. [12] To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to
us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through
those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from
heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

The saints were suffering. Peter reminded them that they weren't home yet. He
understood their suffering for he, too, was being hounded from pillar to post. It would
be interesting to see the reaction of Christians today in western countries (such as the U.S.
where there is no real persecution) if they were truly faced with tests of their faith. How
many of us would be in worship if such services were outlawed by Washington?

Peter lauded these believers for following Christ, whom they had never even seen—yet
they believed.

Remaining Steadfast Despite The Pressure

1 Peter 1:13-25 [The Message]

So roll up your sleeves, put your mind in gear, be totally ready to receive the gift
that's coming when Jesus arrives. [14] Don't lazily slip back into those old grooves of
evil, doing just what you feel like doing. You didn't know any better then; you do
now. [15] As obedient children, let yourselves be pulled into a way of life shaped by
God's life, a life energetic and blazing with holiness. [16] God said, "I am holy; you
be holy."

[17] You call out to God for help and he helps—he's a good Father that way. But
don't forget, he's also a responsible Father, and won't let you get by with sloppy
living.

Your life is a journey you must travel with a deep consciousness of God. [18] It
cost God plenty to get you out of that dead-end, empty-headed life you grew up in.
[19] He paid with Christ's sacred blood, you know. He died like an unblemished, sacrificial lamb. [20] And this was no afterthought. Even though it has only lately—at the end of the ages—become public knowledge, God always knew he was going to do this for you. [21] It's because of this sacrificed Messiah, whom God then raised from the dead and glorified, that you trust God, that you know you have a future in God.

Despite their sufferings, Peter reminded the believers that they were still to maintain a standard of holy living. A life in which Christ has invested His very life is one of obedience to the Master - in all times.

Chapter Two

Peter emphasized the preaching and teaching of the Word:

1 Peter 2:1-3  NKJV  Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, [2] as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, [3] if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

I am sometimes asked, “After all these years, Pastor, what still excites you about ministry?” Simple: the preaching and teaching of the Word.

The Chosen Stone

1 Peter 2:4-10

Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, [5] you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. [6] Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious; And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame." [7] Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone," [8] and "A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense."

These persecuted believers needed a spiritual lift. Peter quoted three Old Testament passages which spoke of a cornerstone. Those who have visited Israel know that buildings there are made of stone. You understand the principle of a cornerstone there. Peter teaches that Christ is the cornerstone of our very lives — here and in eternity. And each downtrodden and persecuted believer, wrote Peter, was a holy priest, a holy person, serving the chief cornerstone. Christ is the foundation, the cornerstone, of everything
we believe and are. Verses 13-17 interest us today as there is so much dissatisfaction with government at just about every level:

1 Peter 2:13-17

Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake, whether to the king as supreme, [14] or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise of those who do good. [15] For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— [16] as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. [17] Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

One of the ways in which the believer will honor Jesus is his or her reaction to authority. You know, we do not live in a democracy; we live in a republic. A true democracy is mob rule while a republic has laws and directives for the common good. These laws are put into law by legally-elected representatives. We may not like some of those laws but at no time is the Christian given the right to pick and choose which laws we will obey.

Chapter Three

This chapter deals with “submission” in the home:

1 Peter 3:1-7

Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, [2] when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. [3] Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— [4] rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God. [5] For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, [6] as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

[7] Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.
Here is the same passage from “The Message”:

1 Peter 3:1-7

The same goes for you wives: Be good wives to your husbands, responsive to their
needs. There are husbands who, indifferent as they are to any words about God, will be captivated by your life of holy beauty. [3] What matters is not your outer appearance—the styling of your hair, the jewelry you wear, the cut of your clothes— [4] but your inner disposition. Cultivate inner beauty, the gentle, gracious kind that God delights in. [5] The holy women of old were beautiful before God that way, and were good, loyal wives to their husbands. [6] Sarah, for instance, taking care of Abraham, would address him as "my dear husband." You'll be true daughters of Sarah if you do the same, unanxious and unintimidated.  [7] The same goes for you husbands: Be good husbands to your wives. Honor them, delight in them. As women they lack some of your advantages. But in the new life of God's grace, you're equals. Treat your wives, then, as equals so your prayers don't run aground.

In Peter’s day, a woman had virtually no rights at all. She really was not much more than a purchased slave to her husband. What happened if she became a Christian while her husband remained a non-believer? Peter challenges her to continue to be a terrific wife. Submissive does not mean spineless or someone who gets walked over. But a man has the same responsibility! Submission to our wives does not mean we are milquetoasts. Husbands, do yourselves a HUGE FAVOR: love your wife!

Now Peter gets down to business about us married men:

Men are to be UNDERSTANDING. Let's face it: there is a huge difference in the way men think and women think. We men are to be gentle and considerate. Men are to be COURTEOUS. Manners do not cease at the wedding altar. Men are to treat our wives as EQUALS

Christ's Sufferings

1 Peter 3:18-22

That's what Christ did definitively: suffered because of others' sins, the Righteous One for the unrighteous ones. He went through it all—was put to death and then made alive—to bring us to God. [19] He went and proclaimed God's salvation to earlier generations who ended up in the prison of judgment [20] because they wouldn't listen. You know, even though God waited patiently all the days that Noah built his ship, only a few were saved then, eight to be exact—saved from the water by the water. [21] The waters of baptism do that for you, not by washing away dirt from your skin but by presenting you through Jesus' resurrection before God with a clear conscience. [22] Jesus has the last word on everything and everyone, from angels to armies. He's standing right alongside God, and what he says goes.
Jesus suffered ONCE for our sins. His sacrifice never needs to be repeated (remember that prior to Calvary, sacrifices for sin were offered virtually non-stop). This teaching to these early believers was pretty shocking!

Second, Peter taught that between Jesus’ death and resurrection, a space of three days, He went into the world of the dead and preached the Gospel. He emptied Hades and took the O.T. believers unto Himself. *Hades is the place where all the dead in the Old Testament went (Hades was divided into Sheol - Hell - and Paradise)*. Here is the basic thesis: Jesus died on the Cross and there is no corner of the universe into which the grace of God has not reached.

Chapter Four

Conversion means “about-face.” It is a turning from darkness to light, from the old way of living to the new in Christ. Peter reminds us all that the Christian will no longer live as he or she did formerly:

1 Peter 4:1-6

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, [2] that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. [3] For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries. [4] In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you. [5] They will give an account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. [6] For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

Verse 7 is somewhat of a shocker:

1 Peter 4:7

But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.

Peter was referring to himself; he only had a short time to live. So many of us are in that same boat today. In view of the “shortness of my life, I should show love to God and people.
In light of that note verse 9:

1 Peter 4:9  Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.

Is there anything more annoying than a grumbler? Illustration: What if your wife said to you tomorrow, "Well, here is your breakfast; I’ve been up all night getting it ready and you had better appreciate it, bub, because it was a lot of hard work. If you only knew what it took to prepare your miserable food...." etc. That would pretty much ruin not only your breakfast but your whole day. In all things, let’s keep our attitude sweet and positive.

Suffering For God’s Glory

1 Peter 4:12-19

Friends, when life gets really difficult, don't jump to the conclusion that God isn't on the job. [13] Instead, be glad that you are in the very thick of what Christ experienced. This is a spiritual refining process, with glory just around the corner. [14] If you're abused because of Christ, count yourself fortunate. It's the Spirit of God and his glory in you that brought you to the notice of others. [15] If they're on you because you broke the law or disturbed the peace, that's a different matter. [16] But if it's because you're a Christian, don't give it a second thought. Be proud of the distinguished status reflected in that name! [17] It's judgment time for Christians. We're first in line. If it starts with us, think what it's going to be like for those who refuse God's Message! [18] "If good people barely make it, what's in store for the bad?" [9] So if you find life difficult because you're doing what God said, take it in stride. Trust him. He knows what he's doing, and he'll keep on doing it.

We Americans know virtually nothing about suffering for the Lord. In Peter's time it was like this, according to the historian Tacitus:

Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burned to serve as nightly illumination when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle and was exhibiting a show in the circus while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car wagon. Hence, even for criminals who deserve extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty that they were being destroyed.

Chapter Five
In the first verses, Peter deals with pastors - shepherds over the flock of Christ. 1 Peter 5:1-4 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: [2] Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; [3] nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; [4] and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

Why would anyone want to be a pastor? Well, to me it is a very high calling and I love being one. Our motives must be examined constantly. We are promised a crown of glory if we are faithful.

1 Peter 5:5-11

Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." [6] Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, [7] casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you. [8] Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. [9] Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. [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. [11] To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

How do we resist Satan? By being steadfast in the Christian faith, which comes by our faith study of God’s Word.

II PETER
Chapter One

The second letter of Peter is a bit more complex than the first one. However, it is very helpful in the development of you and me as believers and followers of Christ. The book was written to prevent deterioration of the Christian ethic which was under attack at that time by a number of critics.

I verse 4 of chapter 1 is an incredible definition of a Christian: 2 Peter 1:4 .... you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.
2 Peter 1:5-11  But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, [6] to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, [7] to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. [8] For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9] For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins. [10] Therefore, brethren, be even more diligent to make your call and election sure, for if you do these things you will never stumble; [11] for so an entrance will be supplied to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Peter teaches us that Christ’s life is manifested to us in very practical ways:

FAITH – This is the certainty in our hearts and minds that everything Jesus said is factual. We have unwavering faith in His directions, and that faith is reflected by the way we live.

VIRTUE - This means excellence of character.

KNOWLEDGE - This is “the wisdom of God.” God-given insight into real living.

Peter was aware of his pending death:

2 Peter 1:12-15  For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. [13] Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, [14] knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. [15] Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease. That “tent” was his physical body. Peter knew he would one day be crucified for Jesus had told him so (last chapter of John). But before he died, he wanted to be sure that the saints under his care were right with God.

2 Peter 1:16-21  (Here Peter recounted his remarkable experience on Mt. Hermon when Jesus was transfigured right before his eyes:

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. [17] For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." [18] And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. [19] And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns
and the morning star rises in your hearts; [20] knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, [21] for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus would soon leave Galilee for His last trip to Jerusalem where He would be crucified. But on the mountain top, God sent Elijah and Moses to Him. Peter was there along with James and John to see it in person. (Does God have favorites? Yes, I believe He does for He said He would draw near to those who wanted Him.)

Now, in chapter 2, Peter warned believers against false doctrines:

2 Peter 2:1-11 But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction. [2] And many will follow their destructive ways, because of whom the way of truth will be blasphemed. [3] By covetousness they will exploit you with deceptive words; for a long time their judgment has not been idle, and their destruction does not slumber. [4] For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment; [5] and did not spare the ancient world, but saved Noah, one of eight people, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood on the world of the ungodly; [6] and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them to destruction, making them an example to those who afterward would live ungodly; [7] and delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked [8] (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds)— [9] then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment, [10] and especially those who walk according to the flesh in the lust of uncleanness and despise authority. They are presumptuous, self-willed. They are not afraid to speak evil of dignitaries, [11] whereas angels, who are greater in power and might, do not bring a reviling accusation against them before the Lord.

We read Jesus’ prophetic discourse from the Mount of Olives in Matthew 24 in which he warned several times of coming false teachers. Paul warned Timothy that the time would come when people would have “itching ears”, wandering from one rumor to another.

Someone told me recently of a local church, purporting to be a Gospel preaching church, in which there is no cross present. The pastor explained, “We do not want to offend anyone.” Do you suppose they offend God?
In the Old Testament (Numbers 22) we read of a prophet (Balaam) who sold out his sacred calling for money. What motivates false prophets today? 2 Peter 2:12-17 But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption, [13] and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it pleasure to carouse in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, carousing in their own deceptions while they feast with you, [14] having eyes full of adultery and that cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls. They have a heart trained in covetous practices, and are accursed children. [15] They have forsaken the right way and gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; [16] but he was rebuked for his iniquity: a dumb donkey speaking with a man's voice restrained the madness of the prophet. [17] These are wells without water, clouds carried by a tempest, for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever.

What motivates today’s false prophets (these wells without water, as Peter called them)? Usually it’s power, prestige, and money.

Now then, what is the attraction to these false prophets? Peter answers that:

2 Peter 2:18-22 For when they speak great swelling words of emptiness, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through lewdness, the ones who have actually escaped from those who live in error. [19] While they promise them liberty, they themselves are slaves of corruption; for by whom a person is overcome, by him also he is brought into bondage. [20] For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. [21] For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. [22] But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

They appeal to the desires of the flesh. Every proclaimer of God’s Word has an sacred responsibility to the truth of the Gospel - not distorting it for any carnal consideration.

In verse 21, Peter warns that it would be better for someone to have NEVER KNOWN God than to know Him and then turn away. These passages are a reminder for us to take inventory: AM I CLOSER TO GOD NOW THAN I WAS LAST YEAR, LAST MONTH, LAST WEEK? If not.....why not?
Chapter Three

Remember that Peter wrote this second letter (epistle) as a warning to Christian against heresy, one of which was that Christ was not going to return to Planet Earth.  2 Peter 3:3-4  ... knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, [4] and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

The argument of these scoffers was that their ancestors had come and gone and nothing had changed.  Not so, claimed Peter...  2 Peter 3:5-9  ....For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, [6] by which the world that then existed perished, being flooded with water. [7] But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are reserved for fire until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. [8] But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [9] The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

I remember preaching about the Lord’s return in a church (not Assembly of God) in Ohio. A man in the congregation openly laughed and mocked the Word. I can only wonder if he’ll still be laughing at the Judgment Bar of God?

The Day Of The Lord

The Day of the Lord is that time that begins with the Rapture of the Church and the creation of the New Earth - a period of over a thousand years. How will it come:  2 Peter 3:10-13  But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. [11] Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, [12] looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? [13] Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Everything we know of regarding this Earth will be destroyed; and God will create a new one.  In view of that.....what kind of persons should we be?
So Be Steadfast

2 Peter 3:14-18 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; [15] and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, [16] as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures. [17] You therefore, beloved, since you know this beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; [18] but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Peter’s last call was for the believer to be steadfast. To be mature. To grow spiritually. To be consistent in living for Jesus.

Next week: I, II, III John