

1 Peter 1:22-25 'By This Shall All Men Know!'

Some weeks ago now in our series in 1 Peter we looked at just one verse: Verse 21 of chapter one under the title 'At The Name Of Jesus'. V21 "through him" (through Jesus), "you believe in God." And I asked the question: Why is it that the world (indeed even many who claimed to believe in God), have so much trouble with the person of Jesus Christ? And I suggested that it is because we often assume God to be anyone, or any way that we may imagine Him to be. Because we can't see Him. We can't touch Him.

But we cannot do that with Jesus! He was a real figure of history. He lived, He breathed, He spoke. Like Isaiah in Isaiah 6 and Saul in Acts Chapter 9, when confronted with the Name and Person of Jesus Christ, people were rarely indifferent! They were either thrown to the ground and ran toward Him in repentance because of His love, or they raised their hand against Him and His truth. Just as the religious elite did during Jesus day, and the world continues to do so in our own time! Yes claim any idol or god you like and the world will embrace you. But raise the banner of Jesus from the scriptures, and you will have enemies on all sides!

We saw from 1 Peter 2:6-8 Jesus is the foundation upon which our eternal lives are built. And that He is the authority to which "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." Yes, enmity abounds against Jesus and His people because He is that stone that Rock which mankind cannot reimagine into their own ideas of God! And the truth of His gospel condemns them. And they continue to disobey His message of life, if they would only but come to him for forgiveness! So they stumble at His truth. Indeed they stumble and fall at those very things which would set them free for eternity!

And finally, "our faith and hope are in God", because He sent Jesus to us. And for us. And also gave us to Him!

That is where we pick up the text this morning: 1 Peter 1:22-25 'By This Shall All Men Know!' In V22 we read: "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart." Now firstly, brothers and sisters, we need to understand that Peter is not implying that we can "purify ourselves" from sin and its consequences. If he were, he would be discounting and contradicting all that he, the other apostles, and indeed Jesus Himself said of sin and the reality of its consequences. Because God is the God of Love, an important aspect of that Love, is His justice! And sadly, this is often cast aside by many Preachers today. If God did not deal with the wickedness and evil of mankind with His righteous justice and accountability, then He would not be the God of the Bible.

And we may as well do as Satan whispers in our ears, (and as the world of unsaved mankind loves to hear,) "let's eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die." But God is the God of justice so sin and rebellion must be dealt with! V3 of this chapter we read "In his great mercy," He sent His Son to die that we might live. As we saw earlier in this series, it is only through the "Precious Blood of Jesus! So no, he is not implying that we can or have, purified ourselves from sin. But having responded to God's Mercy through Jesus' blood in obedience to His own teaching, of the truth, (even as we have been seeing love for God is evidenced in obedience to Jesus' teaching, Peter now explains to us another evidence of Christ in us: that we have indeed saved. And it is love for His family. His church!

Now the question is: Have we seen anything like this before? Or is this Peter's own idea and instruction for us? Well John 13:34-35: "A new commandment I give you. Love one another, as I have loved you." So you must love one another. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples. If you have love one for another."

Beloved, I want you to notice that Jesus uses the word "must" here. So according to Jesus, if we truly are His people who have been saved by His sacrifice, loving one another is not optional. So we don't get to love only some, while rejecting others, no. (Of course those ones we like and admire and who agree with us on all things.) Again, Jesus doesn't give us a choice here, He uses word "must."

Friends I must confess, that this commandment of our Lord here, as Peter expounds upon it in his letter before us, I have not always been the best at keeping. What I mean is, there have been those that the Lord has placed before me to minister to, that have driven me crazy. And I have no doubt, that there are aspects of my character and manner that have also driven some of you nuts at times. But do you see? That's what family does! If you even think of your own families, you will also have to admit, that at times, that just how it is. But the thing is, family, real family that truly loves, does so warts and all!

It is so sad that there is a tendency among Christians today, that when minor difficulties occur, they simply leave. Instead of being as Christ to one another, by loving one another, they part company, and they are out the door. But that's not what real family does. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another." Here is where the rubber really hits the road, Jesus is saying. If you are to be the genuine article, to be the real deal, then the evidence of your Christianity, the evidence of your genuine love for Me, will be seen in your selfless love for your brothers and sisters who carry my name!

Friends, it is easy to have no regard for one another's feelings. It is easy to see only our selves. But the way of Christ is not the easy way! Think of what it took to mend the relationship between ourselves and God. It didn't come easy. It came by the way of the cross. Satan wants us to have no care for another. To have no concern for how each other feels, or how we are doing, or how we affect one at one another. He longs to see division among us. He longs for us to have no regard for one another. But Jesus said, "love one another as I have loved you." Self-sacrificial love.

As you know, perhaps Peter was the most qualified person of all to pass this teaching of Jesus on to us. Having denied Jesus three times when He was being beaten and interrogated by the Jewish ruling elite. And after that miraculous catch of fish, and that BBQ on the beach in John 21, when the Lord asks Peter "Do you truly love me more than these?" That was his bold boast at the Last Supper. 'Even if everybody else deserts you Lord, I will be with you until the end. Even if I have to die for you.' But of course as we all know when the time came, he ran for the hills like everybody else! Yes I love you the most Lord!

Well Jesus asks him the same question three times. And in response to Peter's answers, "Lord you know that I love you," He replies, "feed my lambs." "Take care of my sheep." "Feed my sheep." Friends, in the Lord's final question to Peter about Peter's love for him, Peter answers "Lord you know all things, you know that I love you." And it does seem that he is saying 'Lord Jesus, though I failed you miserably even unforgivably, you know that in my heart of hearts I truly love you.' Well if you do, the Lord intimates, evidence of this Peter will I see in your love for My people, My family, My church! So after 30 years of doing this very thing, Peter seeks to instil this same devotion in his persecuted, his beaten and battered brethren. As he also does for you and I! That love for Jesus, is evidenced and expressed in love and devotion toward His Family, His Church. Yes "now that you

have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.” Another translation puts it this way: “love one another from a pure heart.” Now the idea of being “pure of heart” is something that the Lord Jesus has spoken of to Peter, the apostles and the thousands of hearers on His sermon on the mount in Matthew 5. Which He takes from King David in part, from Psalm 24:3-4: “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.” After the death of his friend Uzzah, who touched the ark of the covenant of God without authority and was put to death by the Lord, “David was angry at God and afraid of him.” But after months of soul searching and questioning, he declares in v1 of Psalm 24 “the earth is the Lords and everything in it.” Then in v3 of that Psalm, he asks the question. “Who may stand in the holy place of God.” In effect he says: ‘Who has the right to question and judge the decisions and judgments of the Almighty?’

Those “clean hands” that David speaks of refer to the purity of life. And the “pure heart,” that he speaks of is the purity of intention! He speaks of the motive of God, or the intention of God as being without question, pure! And then Jesus Himself takes up these very words in Matthew 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.” But the question must be asked, of themselves, Who is pure of heart? And the answer of course, is only Jesus! But then how do we apply these things to the believer who is not “pure in heart” like Jesus? Well again, clearly it speaks of the motive or intention of the follower of Christ. Why is it that we do what we do? And may I suggest, that this is what Peter is referring to in v22 of his letter before us. “now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.” Yes what motivates our actions? Why are we doing the things we do under the name of Jesus? What is our intent? Are we seeking some kind of gain or promotion for ourselves? Or is it love for the Lord and His people, that is moving us? Blessed are pure in heart, for they shall see God.” And from our letter before us “so that you have sincere love for the brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

Again Beloved, the Lord Jesus comes to us with the purest of intentions. He comes to us in self sacrificial love. It is always all about what is best for us. He humbled Himself and gave Himself for us. He lived that sinless life that we could not live. He paid that price for sin that we could not pay. And He did all this in obedience to God, for our sakes. Yes His intention toward us and for us is always pure!

Friends, this is both a warning and a challenge to us. As we again ask ourselves, what are my motives for doing what I do as a Christian? Why do I bake cakes? Why do I make meals? Why do I teach scripture? Why do I visit people? Why do I prepare Bible studies and preach sermons? Is it because I am seeking to love with sincerity of heart? With purity of intention? Are we seeking to love as Christ loved? Because we long to see that person or those people saved? Yes we long for them to really know Jesus and to be embraced by Him as we are? And for them to have that peace and assurance, that the life, death, resurrection and assurance of the Saviour brings. And for our fellow believers. Do we want to encourage them that they are not alone. To reassure them in the things of Christ’s Kingdom. To strengthen them in the Word of God. And to excite them with their heavenly inheritance that awaits us. Yes “love them from the heart deeply.” “With a pure heart.”!!

And now Peter gives us his reasoning as to why we should be responding to Jesus` gospel in this way. And he uses the analogy of two kinds of seed. One that is naturally planted, as by the hands of men or the flesh. While the other is supernaturally sown through the Holy Spirit inspired preaching of the gospel! V23 “for you have been born again not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God.” Friends, yet again what is placed before us is the reality, that

there are only two kinds of people. Those who are of the natural kingdom of the world, and those who are of the supernatural Kingdom of God through Jesus. We can think of it in these terms. There are two kinds of knowledge and understanding through which humanity exists. Through which we live and perceive life to be. Yes there are the seeds of two kinds of knowledge as it were. One comes through the natural process of being born and labouring and growing in understanding as people, through life's experiences. This Peter calls the "natural seed." These things are sown throughout our lives, simply by living through our day by day existence. Yes learning and growing, through the experiences of life. And all people are born into this group. But for some, only up until a certain moment in their lives. But then at some stage, (and it's different for each of us. Different in time and experience,) but yes at some stage, as with Saul on his way to Damascus, and Alan when struck with bowel cancer, Patricia pushing her billycart up the street to our hall one day, and you and I through whatever experience, God meets us on the road through the gospel message of Jesus Christ. And our lives are never the same again! Hallelujah. Praise God.

Friends why are we to respond to one another with that "sincere love," that "deep heartfelt love," that love of the purity of intention? Because "we have been born again," not with the natural seed of our fathers and mothers of flesh, but through the preaching of the "living and enduring word of God." And the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, having been poured into our hearts by the Father Himself! Yes Christians, (not those in name only but in practise and evidenced in life, so in Word and deed,) are born, but then "born again" of God's supernatural seed.

Brothers and sisters, the second birth is what separates us from the rest of the world. You know it is a sad truth, that many today who claim Christ are almost in effect ashamed to speak of being "born again." As I've mentioned before, it's as though there are the Christians, and the "born again" Christians. And yet if we know our Bible and the very author of it and what He Himself teaches on the matter, we will know as He says in John 3:3 "I tell you the truth, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless he is born again."

Beloved, if we know what Jesus teaches, even the very words of that one whom we claim, we must embrace and confess, that it is by His life and death, we have been lifted out of those bodies of flesh with sins consequences and born anew, into the eternal Kingdom of Jesus. And this happens to us, (look at the words,) through the "living and enduring" Word of God.

Friends, as God's Word is "living," we will live. As God's Word is "enduring" we will endure. Through all hardships, through all trials. Because as God's seed has been sown supernaturally into our hearts and souls, by the preaching of His Word and the breath of His Holy Spirit within us, so too will He supernaturally carry us into glory! No He will not abandon us short of the gates of heaven. Look at what Peter says of the fleetingness of the lives of humanity in comparison to the Eternal Omnipotent God. V24 "for all men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field, the grass withers and the flowers fall." In another place we are told that "man is but a mist that appears and is gone." Now I don't know about you, but this idea of the "grass withering," that picture of the green grassy meadows being dried out by the sun and the scorching heat and the hot winds, and over time, the flowers of those grassy fields bending over and eventually falling to the ground, as I get older, more and more do I appreciate the imagery. The hips, the shoulders, the knees, the neck and the back all ache. The machine that is our body, doesn't work the way it used to. We can't do the things the way that we used to do them. Our eyes may need glasses to see. Our ears aids to hear. And our minds, well, they are not as sharp as they once were. Yes truly, "the grass withers, and the flowers fall." And less God takes our breath from us earlier in life, this happens to all mankind, at different times and in different ways. Yes all humanity passes through this great tribulation that this life is, into death. That is the God ordained way of the natural seed, "the perishable seed." But again

dear friends, the believers of Jesus are not of “the perishable seed, but of the imperishable, through the living during word of God.” Though we go the way of all flesh in this life, a glorious body awaits to be given to us in the presence of the King! With the wonderful footnote in v25 that amazing word of assurance for Christ's people. “The word of the Lord stands forever.” Notice the two images as they are placed side-by-side. The fleeting glory and the withering’s and falling of the lives of men reflected in the fading grasses and flowers of the fields. Compared to the Word of God which “stands forever.” Literally for eternity. Yes so secure.

So eternally firm and unshakable are the things which the follower of Jesus Christ are built upon. The life, the death, the resurrection, the ascension and the return of Jesus as King. Yes these things are so firm and secure. Because as with all of God’s Word, they “stand forever.” Yes our hope is built on nothing less than the eternal Word of the living God! And look at the wondrous final line of assurance from Peter. “And this is the word that was preached to you.”

Brothers and sisters, that Word has not changed. It is the very same Word today for you and I. And we know this to be true because God Himself has told us as much in His Word. 1 Samuel 15:29 “He who is the glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind, for he is not a man that he should change his mind.” Malachi 6a: “I the Lord do not change.” Hebrews 13:8: “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever.” Yes “This the word that was preached to you.”

What a blessing to know that the God, even the Creator of the universe has promised that He will keep us for glory. Because we are not the “natural seed” born of the flesh but the “supernatural seed born again” of the promises of God! So we “must love one another deeply, from the heart.” “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God”! Yes “by this shall all men know that you are my disciples. If you have love one for another.”

Let's pray!