

Three Brothers – I Peter 5:12-14

I. Introduction:

- A. I have been trying really hard to develop this lesson into a sermon, so that I could have something to preach.
 - 1. But with the material before us, this will be little more than a Bible lesson with some teachable material.
 - 2. And yet, I did manage to find three points to share, which is always a good start toward a sermon.
 - 3. If only I could have found a poem with which to conclude things, then I would have been all set.
 - 4. Our three points are related to three brethren: Silvanus, Marcus and the saints in Babylon.
 - 5. To put it another way: the faithful brother, the restored & useful brother and a group of chosen brethren.
- B. I will warn you before proceeding: much of this lesson is open to debate.
 - 1. There is some degree of speculation on each of these men.
 - 2. And there is open debate on the last point.
 - 3. I'll just share with you my opinion, leaving it to the Holy Spirit to guide you into your own conclusions.
 - 4. And even if we split it all into groups of three to the third power, none of this is essential doctrine.

II. We begin with **SILVANUS**.

- A. As do many names, "**Silvanus**" originally had meaning, but later like many other names it became unimportant.
 - 1. For example, "**David**" means "**beloved**" in Hebrew, but no one ever calls me "**beloved**," except for my wife.
 - 2. "**Silvanus**" literally means "**woody**."
 - 3. Perhaps you have read a sentence such as: "**The little cabin was built in a beautiful silvan setting.**"
 - 4. In this case "**silvan**" refers to the woods or a forest. Why do I even mention it?
 - 5. Because there is another Biblical name which also means "**woody**."
 - 6. I am referring to "**Silas**."
 - 7. Could it be that "**Silvanus**" and "**Silas**" are the same person?
 - 8. My Bible encyclopedia confirms it: "**The Silas of Acts is generally identified with the Silvanus of the epistles**"
 - 9. These two names appear to be interchangeable.
- B. You can't find the name "**Silvanus**" in **Acts**, but "**Silas**" is found there thirteen times.
 - 1. And "**Silas**" is never is never mentioned in any of the **Apostle's letters**, but "**Silvanus**" is.
 - 2. It appears that **Luke**, the penman of **Acts**, had a nickname for this man: he liked, "**Silas**."
 - 3. But judging from **I Peter 5:12**, Silas actually preferred to be called "**Silvanus**."
 - 4. Remember that Luke and Silas spent months and months ministering together, often sleeping the same room, eating the same meals and ministering in the same services.
- C. With this interchangeability we can begin to paint a picture of this man whom Peter calls "**a faithful brother**."
 - 1. First, in **Acts 15**, he was respected enough to be sent by the church in Jerusalem to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, carrying the Apostles' recommendations about the evangelism of the Gentiles.
 - 2. Then he remained in Antioch, serving the Lord, until it was time for Paul to begin his second missionary trip
 - 3. At that point Silas replaced Barnabas on Paul's missionary team.
 - 4. He went through Galatia with Paul and on into Macedonia, where he was beaten and imprisoned in Philippi.
 - 5. After that, sometimes he was with Paul, and sometimes he was left behind or sent on ahead in various aspects of the missionary ministry.
 - 6. It would be wonderful to have a full biography of Silvanus' life.
 - 7. It might be as interesting as that of Paul or Peter, perhaps even more so, because this man ties the two apostles together.
- D. "**Silvanus**" was a Jew, who probably was a Roman citizen, like Paul.
 - 1. He was well-equipped to minister to people of every nationality; he was all things to all people.
 - 2. And ultimately, he was almost as well-known in many circles as Peter and Paul themselves.
 - 3. I hope some day, away off there in eternity, to be able sit and listen to the stories he could share.
 - 4. He is a truly interesting man.

- E. And the Bible tells us that he was a man of the highest Christian character.
1. If that man had a tombstone over his grave it may have been inscribed with the words: *“a faithful brother.”*
 2. That was how Peter described him in this letter to Galatia and Asia – *“faithful.”*
- F. What do you suppose your friends might want to chisel into your gravestone?
1. Last summer Judy and I looked at several hundred old Baptist tombstones, & some were highly interesting.
 2. There were various inscriptions; some with quotes or statements, and others with simple statistics.
 3. Should your gravestone bear the words *“faithful”* or *“loving?”*
 4. Would yours read *“giving”* or *“self-sacrificing?”*
 5. If the Lord wanted to use one word to describe your life, to put into His eternal word, what would it be?

III. And then here is **MARCUS**.

- A. There are several interesting connections and conjectures about this man.
1. Again, my encyclopedia, ISBE, identified *“Marcus”* with *“Mark”* or *“John Mark.”*
 2. *“Marcus”* is a name only found in **the epistles**, and *“Mark”* always found in **Acts**, with the exception of one reference in **II Timothy**.
- B. Assuming these are names for the one individual, his life may be as interesting as that of Silvanus.
1. Peter calls Marcus *“his son.”*
 2. Remember Peter was a married man, and he may have had several children.
 3. But I am going to go out on a limb, joining a lot of people more knowledgeable than I am, and say that Peter was referring to a son of his ministry; Peter lead this man to Christ, or he mentored him.
 4. This was the sort of thing that Paul did with **Timothy** – **I Corinthians 4:17**.
- C. Assuming *“Marcus”* and *“Mark”* are the same man, we know that his mother’s name was *“Mary.”*
1. The family was sufficiently wealthy to have a house large enough for meetings of the Jerusalem church.
 - a. On one of the occasions when Peter was released from prison, *“he came to the house of Mary the mother of John whose surname was Mark; where many of were gathered together praying”* – **A 12:12**.
 - b. And then Paul identified him even further in **Colossian 4:10** – *“Aristarchus my fellow-prisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister’s son to Barnabas...”*
 - c. Remember that Barnabas had come from a wealthy family, further corroborating this connection.
 2. But it was apparently Peter who brought Marcus to the Lord, and who taught him the way of God.
 - a. And this appears to be the same man who wrote the **Gospel of Mark**.
 - b. In that gospel, he probably used a lot of material and memories which he had gotten from Peter.
 - c. It may have been written while the two men were together in Babylon.
- D. But Marcus’ journey to that point was somewhat circuitous.
1. When Paul & Barnabas began their first missionary journey, *“they had also John to their minister.”*
 2. The first stop of that little troop of Christian soldiers was the Greek island of Cyprus.
 3. After preaching in the Jewish synagogue at Salamis, the Roman governor invited the missionaries to present their message to him.
 4. *“Then the deputy (a Gentile)... believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord”* – **Acts 13:12**.
 5. Sadly, in the very next verse we read, *“and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.”*
 6. We know that this John was John Mark, because at the beginning of the second missionary journey, *“Barnabas was determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark, but Paul through not good to take him with them, who depart from them from Pamphilia, and went not with them to the work.”*
- E. Why did John Mark return to Jerusalem?
1. It wasn’t because he was homesick and yearned to see his mother.
 2. It was probably because he was the spiritual child of Peter, a man who at that point, did not understand that the gospel should be preached to the Gentiles.

3. When Paul led the Roman governor, **Sergius Paulus**, to Christ, it appears that John Mark became incensed or at the very least confused.
 4. It took him some time before he came to see that Christ came to save people from every tribe, nation and ethnic background.
 5. When he did come to the truth, he joined Barnabas in forming a second missionary team.
 6. As angry as Paul was at the departure of youthful and zealous John Mark, the two were later reconciled.
 7. Paul speaks very positively of the young man to both **Timothy** and **Philemon**.
- F. John Mark, Marcus, presents to us a brother with another important lesson.
1. We are all prone to make mistakes in our ministries and even in our general Christianity.
 2. When you find a young believer, who from the moment of his salvation has all his theological ducks lined up, let me know, because I haven't found one as yet.
 3. And pray for the young men you might know, whom the Lord has called into His ministry.
 4. Early in every ministry, and I speak from experience, mistakes are made.
 5. Thankfully there have been some men like Peter and Barnabas, who are willing to take young ministers aside to faithfully correct and teach them.
 6. Men like Barnabas will be highly honored for their foresight and usefulness in the lives of people like Mark.
- G. John Mark is a man who was restored to usefulness; even to the Apostle Paul.
1. Only God knows how much good he did throughout the rest of his life.
 2. There may be hundreds or even thousands of saints in Heaven to day because of this man.
 3. In this letter, Peter was willing to put his arm around Marcus & say, *"My son sends his salutations to you."*

IV. Our third group of brethren are described as **"THE CHURCH IN BABYLON."**

- A. Do you remember my first rule of Bible interpretation?
1. One way to put it is this: *"If what the Bible says makes sense, seek no other sense."*
 2. Always approach the Bible as if it is speaking literally, unless you have good reason to think otherwise.
 3. For example, when **Matthew** or **Luke** say that Jesus was speaking a parable, then look for a spiritual meaning not a literal one.
 4. And if a word or image is explained in some allegorical way in one scripture, we have an option to think it might be an allegory in the passage currently under consideration.
- B. So what should we do with the word **"Babylon"** here in **I Peter**?
1. As far as I know all 249 times the word is used in the Old Testament it refers to the ancient city of Babylon.
 2. It never means Jerusalem, Damascus, Rome or the lake of fire.
 3. It is the eleven New Testament verses which are debated by various experts.
 4. But, the first five references in the **gospels** and **Acts** all again refer to the historical city.
 5. So the abundant Biblical precedence is that Babylon is the old Mesopotamian city.
- C. That leaves us Peter's reference and the six references in the **Book of Revelation**.
1. **Revelation 14:8** – *"And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."*
 2. **Revelation 16:19** – *"The great city was divided into three parts, & the cities of the nations fell: & great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath."*
 3. **Revelation 17:5** – *"And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."*
 4. **Revelation 18:2** – *"And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird."*

5. **Revelation 18:10** – *“Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come.”*
6. **Revelation 18:21** – *“And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found.”*

- D. Since the days of the Reformation, Protestant scholars have said that all the references to Babylon in the **Book of Revelation** speak of Rome.
1. Those scholars generally had a hatred for Roman Catholicism and therefore for the city of Rome.
 2. Many Baptist scholars have gone along with that interpretation and application.
 3. But I have to ask why?
 - a. Why should the word *“Babylon”* refer to somewhere else, without any explanation for the change?
 - b. If we are going to pull a city out of our hat, why not say that this is New York, or Washington, London or some Chinese city?
 4. There are some scholars who insist that it is Jerusalem, which I suppose has some merit.
 5. Since, as far as I can see, we have no Biblical foundation for saying Babylon is another name for Rome, what is to keep us from calling it anything we choose?
- E. Actually, some people point to **1 Peter 5:13** as their authority to say that Rome is the Babylon of the New Testament.
1. They say that Peter was in Rome when he wrote this epistle.
 2. But I ask, where is the New Testament proof that Peter was in Rome?
 3. Yes, there is tradition, but tradition isn't proof.
 4. They also say that Peter was never in Mesopotamia. But again, I ask, can that be proved from the Bible?
- F. I go back to my first rule of Bible interpretation.
1. I can't see any scripture which demands I say that Peter was in Rome when he wrote this letter.
 2. And it is presumption to say that the people of Galatia and Cappadocia automatically knew that *“Babylon”* really means *“Rome.”*
 3. If Peter was making that geographic and logical leap, I think there should be some sort of evidence.
 4. So I am going to go out on a limb, saying that he was in the city which was known for centuries as Babylon.
 5. Even if someone wants to insist that the *“Babylon”* of **Revelation** is Rome that is no proof that the *“Babylon”* of our scripture is Rome.
- G. In that city there was a church of the Lord Jesus Christ, made up of a group of God's elect souls.
1. Whether that church was started by Peter or not, it doesn't matter, but I doubt that it was.
 2. And in that city there were Christians, who were brothers and sisters to the suffering saints in Asia.
 3. They probably had much in common, far beyond their faith in Christ.
 4. They could sympathize and empathize with saints around the world.
 5. When they knew that Peter was writing to brethren in Asia, they sent their salutations and their prayers.
- H. And this reminds us that you and I are a part of a large extended family which stretches throughout the world.
1. We are far too myopic – near sighted – than we ought to be.
 2. We may not think very often about our brethren in Manitoba, or Macedonia, or Macau, but we should.
 3. We are going to spend eternity with saints from every tongue, every tribe and every nation.
 4. We have the same gracious Saviour, and our hearts should be linked with His in love toward all saints.
 5. We need to remember to pray for our brethren in Europe and the Philippines, in Korea and China.
 6. Peter gives us a Biblical example and instruction about that.