

# ARE YOU PLAYING OR JUST CHEERING?

## Acts 29

Tonight I would like to direct your attention to the 29<sup>th</sup> chapter of Acts.

As you notice from your Bibles, it isn't there, YET. It is still being written, it is being written tonight here and across the world. It is being written in blood, sweat, tears, and prayers. And it is exactly what God left us here on earth to accomplish for Him.

### WHAT IS GOD'S REPORT ON YOUR LIFE?

What will be written by the Lord in Acts 29 about you and me? That is what this entire conference, and in fact all of Tulsa Bible Church is really all about!

This year our Missions Conference Team has prayerfully prepared a wonderful event. They have chosen the theme "Faith Under Fire". This is a focus upon all of the persecution so many of our brothers and sisters in Christ are enduring all over the world.

Three words FAITH-UNDER-FIRE. Our keynote speaker will be addressing all three words; may I just focus on two? Faith and Fire. And may I ask you if your FAITH is on FIRE for the Lord?

### WHICH PLACE ARE YOU?

This is the great fall seasons with all the football games and the crisp cool weather. It is a time of memories for me. I have been telling my boys about my early days when I was on the Haslett (Michigan) football team. Over the years various coaches would address us on the teams and try to get us "fired up" for the game. That was always an exciting time because we were quite committed already. We had already shown our dedication by joining the team, working out most of the summer in the heat, running endless gut wrenching cross country miles, practicing plays until we were able to do them instinctively and so on. But now at the moment of the actual game "fired up" meant that we were to get even more fully engaged in the game, commit to again play our best, sacrifice our strength and even comfort by playing even harder, commit there in the locker room to not lose focus, to remember the plays we had been taught, to unselfishly work together as a team and so on. That is team athletics or team sports – whether football, basketball, wrestling or whatever.

Later in college days I moved to a new kind of sports involvement. I was a spectator and a fan. Again we in the stands were encouraged to get "fired up" for the game. This involved wearing team colors, getting season passes, scheduling Friday nights or Saturdays so as to not miss any games, actually coming to all the games, sitting together with our side, paying attention to the game, knowing the team members, cheering at the right times and in a loud and supportive way. Some of the more "on fire" folks would not only do all that but they went further by really dressing up, painting their faces with team colors and symbols, bringing big banners, getting there early, and generally be everywhere cheering and carrying on. That is quite a familiar setting for most of us. In fact the majority of sports and athletic events are pursued by the minority (the athletes) as they are cheered on by the majority (the fans).

This evening as we enter a great conference on missions I ask you these two questions -- Where are you in the game tonight?

Are you **on the team** and actually working out, practicing, playing and “on fire” for the game?

Or are you **in the stands** and “on fire” for the team?

And secondly – which of those two places did the Coach, the God of the Universe through His Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ask us to be?

Most of us I would guess are in the stands and spectators. We are quite committed and zealous. We pay for our ticket to the game (offerings); we come to home games (church) and annually go to an away game (missions conference). Some of us even go see the team at training camp (missions trips), and encourage the players (we pay for and collect their sports cards with their pictures and stats); we wear the colors, support the team, yell and cheer for them, and so on.

### **WHAT DOES OUR TEAM OWNER WANT?**

Now for the hard part, in this team and fan comparison, I ask again which of those two places did the Coach, the God of the Universe through His Son our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ ask us to be?

Which group is the one Jesus outlines, demonstrates and sets up in His Ministry?

Which location is explained in the New Testament?

Where did everyone who actually met Jesus on earth end up?

What did Jesus intend for us to do and to be?

Did He set up a Team and fans or just a Team and we have split it into team and fans?

I think many of you know where I am going with this.

The History of the Game and the Rule Book (God's Word) has a clear answer.

Jesus Christ our Lord only set up a Team that actually practiced, worked out together, played in all the games and so on. There was **ONLY A TEAM**, there were no non-participating, non-players who could just cheer, come and watch, and enjoy the games. In other words there were no 1<sup>st</sup> Century spectators, everyone was on the Team and they all cheered each other on from the field, not from in the stands!

Look with me at Christ's last words and the impact they had on that 1<sup>st</sup> generation of our family. Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8, 8:4. Wow they heard and they obeyed!

Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with the world is the theme of the book of Acts. Chapters 1–7 tell of its spread “in Jerusalem,” chapters 8–11 of the witness “in all Judea and Samaria,” and chapters 12–28 “to the ends of the earth.” So incendiary was the flame of the gospel that soon Christians could be found in all parts of the Empire.

“The comprehensiveness of the early church’s outreach—from their homeland and on out to the ends of the world—forbids the evangelistic schizophrenia to which we so easily fall prey—lavishing our attention on foreign missions while neglecting our neighbors, or attending to the immediate needs around us while millions overseas have never heard about Jesus. We need balance. We must reach our neighbors *and* the world with our gospel witness, our social witness, our money, our time, ourselves, our offspring. We must put all we have and are in the hands of Christ and allow him to use it all in his way, in his time, for others’ salvation, for his glory.

In the final verses of Acts 28, we see the Apostle Paul and the leaders of the Jewish synagogues in Rome having an ongoing morning-to-evening debate. As a result, some were persuaded, while others refused to believe. As the unbelieving were departing, the apostle gave them a parting exhortation, a quotation given originally to the newly commissioned prophet Isaiah by God as an explanation of why his people would ignore him (Isaiah 6:9–10).

*They disagreed among themselves and began to leave after Paul had made this final statement: “The Holy Spirit spoke the truth to your fore-fathers when he said through Isaiah the prophet: ‘Go to this people and say, “You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.” For this people’s heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.’ ” (vv. 25–27)*

Paul says that the unbelieving departed because while seeing they were blind and while hearing they were deaf. Their hearts had become dull, or as the Greek literally says, “fat.” To the Jew who daily dressed his own meat, the image was perfectly clear—a heart surrounded so closely with fatty tissue that it was constricted and thus prevented from functioning properly. The application to us is all too obvious, for the things that can constrict our hearts are too numerous to mention.

How are our hearts? Sluggish? Constricted? Thick with fat? On that fateful day some very Learned, religious men walked out the door and, spiritually speaking, precluded the writing of any new spiritual chapters in their lives. Others remained and listened and heeded because their hearts were lean and vital. Their lives were not monuments but a movement. They were the twenty-ninth chapter of Acts. *Soli Deo gloria!*<sup>1</sup>

The book of Acts deals with the history of the Christian church and its expansion in ever-widening circles touching Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome -the most influential cities in the western world. Acts also shows the mighty miracles and testimonies of the heroes and martyrs of the early church - Peter, Stephen, James, Paul. All the ministry was prompted and held together by the Holy Spirit working in the lives of ordinary people - merchants, travelers, slaves, jailers, church leaders, males, females, Gentiles, Jews, rich, poor. Many unsung heroes of the faith continued the work, through the Holy Spirit, in succeeding generations, changing the world with a changeless message that Jesus Christ is Savior and Lord for all who call on him. Today we can be the unsung heroes in the continuing story of the spread of the gospel. It is that same message that we Christians are to take to our world so that many more may hear and believe.

Prison is where Paul wrote Eph, Phil, Col and Philemon, while writing he was witnessing to the palace guard (Phil. 1.13) and to the Jews (Acts 28.29-31) about the power of the gospel that is able to revolutionize lives, liberate captives, throw open prison doors, tear down social barriers, cause people to love others deeply and stir them to love and worship God

Thirty-one different words are used to explain the over 160 scenes in the Book of Acts where Christians verbally communicate the Gospel. Of these, the words evangelize or preach the Gospel proclaim, announce, testify, speak boldly, speak freely, and prophesy suggest what might be thought of as formal delivery. Yet they represent less than a third of all the usages of speaking words.

The other terms are teach, reason, exhort, answer, speak, charge, minister, prove, confound, relate, expound, confirm, explain, persuade, confute utterly, greet, address, speak in defense, admonish, draw out, set forth, cry out, talk and say.

---

<sup>1</sup>Hughes, R. Kent, *Preaching the Word: Acts—The Church Afire*, (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books) 1998, c1996.

Many words are used in references to both church leaders and unordained average, normal believers.

There are at least a dozen examples of PERSONAL WITNESS IN ACTS:

1. We first see the Apostles after Pentecost, represented by Peter and John out soul winning in Acts (3:1-16);
2. Then Peter is also witnessing in his exchange with Simon (8:9-24);
3. We find the personal soul winning account about Phillip in Acts (8:5, 26-40);
4. Paul is an effective soul winner in his exchange with To Lydia in Acts (16:13-15);
5. Paul even takes the spiritual challenge of witnessing to the Demonized Girl in Acts (16:16-18);
6. Under great personal pain and peril we find Paul the soul winner leading the Jailer and his family to the Lord in Acts (16:19-40);
7. After a violent confrontation Paul is undaunted and shares a witness with Sergius in Acts (18:6-12);
8. Paul wins a fellow Jew to the Lord named Crispus in Acts (18:7-8);
9. Paul patiently instructs, reasons, and then wins two seekers named Aquila and Priscilla in Acts (18:24-28);
10. He goes on to win a mighty servant for the Lord named Apollos in acts (18:24-28);
11. Then he leads to salvation some who were ready but only had gotten as far as being disciples of John the Baptist in Acts (19:1-7);
12. Finally, in spite of shipwreck, near execution, near drowning, snake bites, and criticism Paul has a witness to fellow passengers and Roman Sailors in Acts (27:9-44).

#### BOLD CONGREGATIONS

1. (2:1-11) into streets
2. (4:31) out of prayer of multitude
3. 8:1-4 all
4. 11:19-20 to Antioch –
5. 1 Th. 1:8 around
6. Acts 13:49 spread through region.

#### HOUSE TO HOUSE

1. 5:42,
2. 20:20 as in jailer
3. 16:25-37, Cornelius
4. 10:7, 22-48, Lydia
5. 16:14-15, Timothy, 2 Timothy 1:5

### BIBLICAL BASIS FOR **LOCAL CHURCH VISITATION** FROM BOOK OF ACTS

ACTS 1:8 **But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."**

ACTS 2:46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, <sup>47</sup> praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And **the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.**

ACTS 4:31 After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and **spoke the word of God boldly.**

**ACTS 5:42** Day after day, in the temple courts and from **house to house**, they **never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ**.

**ACTS 8:25** When they had **testified and proclaimed the word of the Lord**, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching the gospel in many Samaritan villages.

**ACTS 20:20-21** You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but **have taught you publicly and from house to house**.<sup>21</sup> I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.

**APPLICATION: BEING FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT, WE ARE TO BOLDLY PROCLAIM CHRIST BOTH PUBLICLY AND HOUSE TO HOUSE AND THE LORD WILL ADD THOSE WHO WILL BE SAVED.**

Why would anyone on the Team ever stay up in the stands and cheer for the TEAM instead of standing, playing, and winning with them? Probably one of three reasons.

1. Being unsure of being on the TEAM. What is the Solution? MAKE SURE. Here is a prayer you can pray, a prayer that declares your desire to transfer your trust to Jesus Christ alone for your eternal salvation. This prayer can be the link that will connect you to God. And if you pray it in faith, God will receive you. **HAVE YOU COME TO CHRIST FOR SALVATION?** If you are empty, call out to Christ. Do not let yourself go through another day without coming to him. Be born again, receive life, be filled, be delivered, and join the victory parade! If you are spiritually dead—without resurrection life—under sin—under guilt—empty, Christ invites you to come to him: Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. (Isaiah 55:1, 2) The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. (Revelation 22:17)

Dear God,

I know that I am a sinner and there is nothing that I can do to save myself.

I confess my complete helplessness to forgive my own sin or to work my way to heaven.

At this moment I trust Christ alone as the One who bore my sin when He died on the cross.

I believe that He did all that ever will be necessary for me to stand in your holy presence.

I thank you that Christ was raised from the dead as a guarantee of my own resurrection.

As best as I can, I now transfer: my trust to Him.

I am grateful that He has promised to receive me despite my many sins and failures.

Father, I take you at your word.

I thank you that I can face death now that you are my Savior.

Thank you for the assurance that you will walk with me through all of life and finally through the deep dark valley.

Thank You for hearing this prayer.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

2. Being unprepared, unpracticed, unskilled in the ministry of witnessing and soul winning. That can end tonight. Just take a moment and be sure you have your tool kit ready. Mark in your Bible one of many wonderful ways to point someone to Christ. We call this the Romans Road.

It starts by a note on the first spot inside your Bible that is easily visible. Write Romans 3:10. Now turn there with me and write:

# 1 WE ARE ALL SINNERS (note the emphasis in v.11 “none”, v. 12 “all”; note sins of word v. 13, deed in v. 15, habits v. 16, neglect v. 17, irreverence v. 18) then the conclusion v. 23 WE ARE ALL SINNERS. Then put (5:8). By Romans 5:8 write

# 2 Christ DIED FOR SINNERS and put (6:23) then note v. 10 “through the death” (substitution) and v. 11 “received the reconciliation” (imputation). Now go to Romans 6:23 and write

# 3 SALVATION IS A GIFT and put (10:9) by that line. Emphasize Jesus wants to never let you face God’s Wrath against sin, He offers a free gift that He purchased at great cost. Then turn to Romans 10:10 and write

#4 ASK THE LORD JESUS TO SAVE YOU. Read v. 9-10 and 13. Then ask them if they realize they have sinned, that only Jesus the Son of God can save them (because He became the One God punished for their sin and He lived the perfect life they never could). If they say yes then lead them in a prayer crying out to the Lord for their salvation! What would ever keep us from this wonderful eternal ministry? One last reason – either we are unsure of our own salvation, unprepared with the Gospel, or because of --

3. Being unfilled, uncontrolled, unempowered, and unguided by the Holy Spirit. **ARE YOU KEEPING FILLED WITH CHRIST’S SPIRIT?**

Make your prayer be: I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death. (Philippians 3:10)

Our lives can be victorious. Jesus has been there before us; He has met the worst Satan can give and has been victorious. The most important factor in victorious Christian living is to be filled with the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9). Christ is the victor over temptation and sin. His very words to us are, “[T]ake heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

When Martin Luther was asked how he overcame the Devil, he replied,

“Well, when he comes knocking upon the door of my heart, and asks ‘Who lives here?’ the dear Lord Jesus goes to the door and says, ‘Martin Luther used to live here, but he has moved out. Now I live here.’”

When Christ fills our lives, Satan has no entrance. In response to each of the three temptations, Christ answered with Scripture (Deuteronomy 8:3, 6:16, and 6:13). He knew the truth of, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). Why is this so? God’s Word reveals God’s mind, and God’s mind cannot be subject to sin. Therefore, if we fill our hearts with His Word, His Spirit fills us and sin and temptation cannot dominate.

Tonight are you in the stands or on the field?

Where does God want you?

How about deciding in the privacy of your will to get into the game starting tonight!

Back in January<sup>2</sup> of 1956, five young missionaries were speared to death in the jungles of Ecuador. The offenders have now become Christians and have told Steve Saint, the son of one of the martyrs, that they heard and saw what they now believe to be angels while the killings were taking place. A woman hiding at a distance also saw these beings above the trees and didn't know what kind of music it was until she heard a Christian choir on records.

### **3498 First Missionary To Moslems**

Raymond Lull, or Lullius, to whom the Arabic professorship at Oxford owes its origin, was the first Christian missionary to the Moslems.

When shipwrecked near Pisa, after many years of missionary labour, though upwards of seventy, his ardour was unabated.

“Once,” he wrote, “I was fairly rich; once I had a wife and children; once I tasted freely of the pleasures of this life. But all these things I gladly resigned, that I might spread abroad a knowledge of the truth. I studied Arabic, and several times went forth to preach the Gospel to the Saracens. I have been in prisons; I have been scourged; for years I have striven to persuade the princes of Christendom to befriend the common cause of converting the Mohammedans. Now, though old and poor, I do not despair; I am ready, if it be God’s will, to persevere unto death.”

And he died so, being stoned to death at Bugia, in Africa, in 1314 after gathering a little flock of converts. 3

The important thing for us to know about these “scattered strangers” is that they were going through a time of suffering and persecution. At least fifteen times in this letter, Peter referred to suffering; and he used eight different Greek words to do so. Some of these Christians were suffering because they were living godly lives and doing what was good and right (1 Peter 2:19–23; 3:14–18; 4:1–4, 15–19). Others were suffering reproach for the name of Christ (1 Peter 4:14) and being railed at by unsaved people (1 Peter 3:9–10). Peter wrote to encourage them to be good witnesses to their persecutors, and to remember that their suffering would lead to glory (1 Peter 1:6–7; 4:13–14; 5:10).

But Peter had another purpose in mind. He knew that a “fiery trial” was about to begin—official persecution from the Roman Empire (1 Peter 4:12). When the church began in Jerusalem, it was looked on as a “sect” of the traditional Jewish faith. The first Christians were Jews, and they met in the temple precincts. The Roman government took no official action against the Christians since the Jewish religion was accepted and approved. But when it became clear that Christianity was not a “sect” of Judaism, Rome had to take official steps.

Several events occurred that helped to precipitate this “fiery trial.” To begin with, Paul had defended the Christian faith before the official court in Rome (Phil. 1:12–24). He had been released but then was arrested again. This second defense failed, and he was martyred (2 Tim. 4:16–18). Second, the deranged Emperor, Nero, blamed the fire of Rome (July A.D. 64) on the Christians, using them as a scapegoat. Peter was probably in Rome about that time and was slain by Nero, who had also killed Paul. Nero’s persecution of Christians was local at first, but it probably spread. At any rate, Peter wanted to prepare the churches.

We must not get the idea that all Christians in every part of the Empire were going through the same trials to the same degree at the same time. It varied from place to place, though suffering and opposition were pretty general (1 Peter 5:9). Nero introduced official persecution of the church and other emperors followed his example in later years. Peter’s letter must have been a tremendous help to Christians who suffered during the reigns of Trajan (98–117), Hadrian (117–138), and Diocletian (284–305). Christians in the world today may yet learn the value of Peter’s letter when their own “fiery

<sup>2</sup> Steve Saint, “Did They Have to Die” *Christianity Today*, 16 September 1996, 26.

<sup>3</sup>Tan, Paul Lee, *Encyclopedia of 7,700 Illustrations*, (Garland, Texas: Bible Communications, Inc.) 1996.

trials” of persecution begin. While I personally believe that the church will not go through *the* Tribulation, I do believe that these latter days will bring much suffering and persecution to the people of God.

It is possible that Silas was the bearer of this letter to the believers in the provinces, and also the secretary who wrote the epistle.

### **The Message (1 Peter 5:12)**

First Peter is a letter of encouragement (1 Peter 5:12). We have noted that the theme of *suffering* runs throughout the letter, but so also does the theme of *glory* (see 1 Peter 1:7–8, 11, 21; 2:12; 4:11–16; 5:1, 4, 10–11). One of the encouragements that Peter gives suffering saints is the assurance that their suffering will one day be transformed into glory (1 Peter 1:6–7; 4:13–14; 5:10). This is possible only because the Saviour suffered for us and then entered into His glory (1 Peter 1:11; 5:1). The sufferings of Christ are mentioned often in this letter (1 Peter 1:11; 3:18; 4:1, 13; 5:1).

Peter is preeminently the apostle of *hope*, as Paul is the apostle of *faith* and John of *love*. As believers, we have a “living hope” because we trust a living Christ (1 Peter 1:3). This hope enables us to keep our minds under control and “hope to the end” (1 Peter 1:13) when Jesus shall return. We must not be ashamed of our hope but be ready to explain and defend it (1 Peter 3:15). Like Sarah, Christian wives can hope in God (1 Peter 3:5, where “trusted” should be translated “hoped”). Since suffering brings glory, and because Jesus is coming again, we can indeed be hopeful!

But suffering does not *automatically* bring glory to God and blessing to God’s people. Some believers have fainted and fallen in times of trial and have brought shame to the name of Christ. It is only when we depend on the grace of God that we can glorify God in times of suffering. Peter also emphasized God’s grace in this letter. “I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it” (1 Peter 5:12, NIV).

The word “grace” is used in every chapter of 1 Peter: 1:2, 10, 13; 2:19 (“thankworthy”), 20 (“acceptable”); 3:7; 4:10; 5:5, 10, 12. Grace is God’s generous favor to undeserving sinners and needy saints. When we depend on God’s grace, we can endure suffering and turn trials into triumphs. It is grace alone that saves us (Eph. 2:8–10). God’s grace can give us strength in times of trial (2 Cor. 12:1–10). Grace enables us to serve God in spite of difficulties (1 Cor. 15:9–10). Whatever begins with God’s grace will always lead to glory (Ps. 84:11; 1 Peter 5:10).

As we study 1 Peter, we will see how the three themes of suffering, grace, and glory unite to form an encouraging message for believers experiencing times of trial and persecution. These themes are summarized in 1 Peter 5:10, a verse we would do well to memorize.

The cynical editor and writer H.L. Mencken once defined hope as “a pathological belief in the occurrence of the impossible.” But that definition does not agree with the New Testament meaning of the word. True Christian hope is more than “hope so.” It is confident assurance of future glory and blessing.

An Old Testament believer called God “the Hope of Israel” (Jer. 14:8). A New Testament believer affirms that Jesus Christ is his hope (1 Tim. 1:1; see Col. 1:27). The unsaved sinner is “without hope” (Eph. 2:12); and if he dies without Christ, he will be hopeless forever. The Italian poet, Dante, in his *Divine Comedy*, put this inscription over the world of the dead: “Abandon all hope, you who enter here!”

This confident hope gives us the encouragement and enablement we need for daily living. It does not put us in a rocking chair where we complacently await the return of Jesus Christ. Instead, it puts us in the marketplace, on the battlefield, where we keep on going when the burdens are heavy and the battles are hard. Hope is not a sedative; it is a shot of adrenaline, a blood transfusion. Like an anchor, our hope in Christ stabilizes us in the storms of life (Heb. 6:18–19); but unlike an anchor, our hope moves us forward, it does not hold us back.

It is not difficult to follow Peter’s train of thought. Everything begins with salvation, our personal relationship to God through Jesus Christ. If we know Christ as Saviour, then we have hope! If we have hope, then we can walk in holiness and in harmony. There should be no problem submitting to



those around us in society, the home, and the church family. Salvation and submission are preparation for suffering; but if we focus on Christ, we can overcome and God will transform suffering into glory. 4

Peter gave two descriptions to help us better understand this wonderful truth about glory.

**A Christian's birth described (vv. 2–3).** This miracle all began with God: we were chosen by the Father (Eph. 1:3–4). This took place in the deep counsels of eternity, and we knew nothing about it until it was revealed to us in the Word of God. This election was not based on anything we had done, because we were not even on the scene. Nor was it based on anything God saw that we would be or do. God's election was based wholly on His grace and love. We cannot explain it (Rom. 11:33–36), but we can rejoice in it.

“Foreknowledge” does not suggest that God merely knew ahead of time that we would believe, and therefore He chose us. This would raise the question, “Who or what made us decide for Christ?” and would take our salvation completely out of God's hands. In the Bible, *to foreknow* means “to set one's love on a person or persons in a personal way.” It is used this way in Amos 3:2: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” God set His electing love on the nation of Israel. Other verses that use “know” in this special sense are Psalm 1:6; Matthew 7:23; John 10:14, 27; and 1 Corinthians 8:3.

But the plan of salvation includes more than the Father's electing love; it also includes the work of the Spirit in convicting the sinner and bringing him to faith in Christ. The best commentary on this is 2 Thessalonians 2:13–14. Also, the Son of God had to die on the cross for our sins, or there could be no salvation. We have been chosen by the Father, purchased by the Son, and set apart by the Spirit. It takes all three if there is to be a true experience of salvation.

As far as God the Father is concerned, I was saved when He chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world. As far as the Son is concerned, I was saved when He died for me on the cross. But as far as the Spirit is concerned, I was saved one night in May 1945 when I heard the Gospel and received Christ. Then it all came together, but it took all three Persons of the Godhead to bring me to salvation. If we separate these ministries, we will either deny divine sovereignty or human responsibility; and that would lead to heresy.

Peter does not deny man's part in God's plan to save sinners. In 1 Peter 1:23 he emphasizes the fact that the Gospel was preached to these people, and that they heard it and believed (see also 1 Peter 1:12). Peter's own example at Pentecost is proof that we do not “leave it all with God” and never urge lost sinners to come to Christ (Acts 2:37–40). The same God who ordains the end—our salvation—also ordains *the means to the end*—the preaching of the Gospel of the grace of God.

**A Christian's hope described (vv. 3–4).** To begin with, it is a *living hope* because it is grounded on the living Word of God (1 Peter 1:23), and was made possible by the living Son of God who arose from the dead. A “living hope” is one that has life in it and therefore can give life to us. Because it has life, it grows and becomes greater and more beautiful as time goes on. Time destroys most hopes; they fade and then die. But the passing of time only makes a Christian's hope that much more glorious.

Peter called this hope *an inheritance* (1 Peter 1:4). As the children of the King, we share His inheritance in glory (Rom. 8:17–18; Eph. 1:9–12). We are included in Christ's last will and testament, and we share the glory with Him (John 17:22–24).

Note the description of this inheritance, for it is totally unlike any earthly inheritance. For one thing, it is *incorruptible*, which means that nothing can ruin it. Because it is *undefiled*, it cannot be stained or cheapened in any way. It will never grow old because it is eternal; it cannot wear out, nor can it disappoint us in any way.

In 1 Peter 1:5 and 9, this inheritance is called “salvation.” The believer is already saved through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8–9), but the completion of that salvation awaits the return of the Saviour. Then we shall have new bodies and enter into a new environment, the heavenly city. In 1 Peter 1:7, Peter called this hope “the appearing of Jesus Christ.” Paul called this “the blessed hope” (Titus 2:13). What a thrilling thing it is to know that we were born for glory! When we were born again, we exchanged the passing glory of man for the eternal glory of God!

### **Christians Are Being Prepared for Glory (1 Peter 1:6–7)**

We must keep in mind that all God plans and performs here is preparation for what He has in store for us in heaven. He is preparing us for the life and service yet to come. Nobody yet knows all that is in store for us in heaven; but this we do know: life today is a school in which God trains us for our future ministry in eternity. This explains the presence of trials in our lives: they are some of God’s tools and textbooks in the school of Christian experience.

Peter used the word “trials” rather than “tribulations” or “persecutions,” because he was dealing with the *general* problems that Christians face as they are surrounded by unbelievers. He shared several facts about trials.

**Trials meet needs.** The phrase “if need be” indicates that there are special times when God knows that we need to go through trials. Sometimes trials discipline us when we have disobeyed God’s will (Ps. 119:67). At other times, trials prepare us for spiritual growth, or even help to prevent us from sinning (2 Cor. 12:1–9). We do not always know the need being met, but we can trust God to know and to do what is best.

**Trials are varied.** Peter used the word “manifold,” which literally means “variegated, many-colored.” He used the same word to describe God’s grace in 1 Peter 4:10. No matter what “color” our day may be—a “blue” Monday or a “gray” Tuesday—God has grace sufficient to meet the need. We must not think that because we have overcome one kind of trial that we will automatically “win them all.” Trials are varied, and God matches the trial to our strengths and needs.

**Trials are not easy.** Peter did not suggest that we take a careless attitude toward trials, because this would be deceitful. Trials produce what he called “heaviness.” The word means “to experience grief or pain.” It is used to describe our Lord in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:37), and the sorrow of saints at the death of loved ones (1 Thes. 4:13). To deny that our trials are painful is to make them even worse. Christians must accept the fact that there are difficult experiences in life and not put on a brave front just to appear “more spiritual.”

**Trials are controlled by God.** They do not last forever; they are “for a season.” When God permits His children to go through the furnace, He keeps His eye on the clock and His hand on the thermostat. If we rebel, He may have to reset the clock; but if we submit, He will not permit us to suffer one minute too long. The important thing is that we learn the lesson He wants to teach us and that we bring glory to Him alone.

Peter illustrated this truth by referring to the goldsmith. No goldsmith would deliberately waste the precious ore. He would put it into the smelting furnace long enough to remove the cheap impurities; then he would pour it out and make from it a beautiful article of value. It has been said that the Eastern goldsmith kept the metal in the furnace until he could see his face reflected in it. So our Lord keeps us in the furnace of suffering until we reflect the glory and beauty of Jesus Christ.

The important point is that this glory is not fully revealed until Jesus returns for His church. Our trying experiences today are preparing us for glory tomorrow. When we see Jesus Christ, we will bring “praise and honor and glory” to Him if we have been faithful in the sufferings of this life (see Rom. 8:17–18). This explains why Peter associated *rejoicing* with *suffering*. While we may not be able to rejoice as we look *around* in our trials, we can rejoice as we look *ahead*. The word “this” in 1 Peter 1:6 (NASB) refers back to the “salvation” (the return of Christ) mentioned in 1 Peter 1:5.

Just as the assayer tests the gold to see if it is pure gold or counterfeit, so the trials of life test our faith to prove its sincerity. A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted! Too many professing

Christians have a “false faith” and this will be revealed in the trials of life. The seed that fell on shallow soil produced rootless plants, and the plants died when the sun came up (see Matt. 13:1–9, 18–23). The sun in the parable represents “tribulation or persecution.” The person who abandons “his faith” when the going gets tough is only proving that he really had no faith at all.

The patriarch Job went through many painful trials, all of them with God’s approval; and yet he understood somewhat of this truth about the refiner’s fire. “But He knoweth the way that I take; when He hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 23:10). And he did!

It is encouraging to know that we are born for glory, kept for glory, and being prepared for glory. But the fourth discovery Peter shared with his readers is perhaps the most exciting of all.6

#### THE CIRCUMSTANCES BEHIND THE LETTER

That this letter was written in a time when persecution threatened, is abundantly clear. They are in the midst of various trials (1:6). They are likely to be falsely accused as evil-doers (3:16). A fiery ordeal is going to try them (4:12). When they suffer, they are to commit themselves to God (4:19). They may well have to suffer for righteousness’ sake (3:14). They are sharing in the afflictions which the Christian brotherhood throughout the world is called upon to endure (5:9). At the back of this letter there are fiery trial, a campaign of slander and suffering for the sake of Christ. Can we identify this situation?

There was a time when the Christians had little to fear from the Roman government. In *Acts* it is repeatedly the Roman magistrates and the Roman soldiers and officials who save Paul from the fury of Jews and pagans alike. As Gibbon had it, the tribunal of the pagan magistrate proved the most assured refuge against the fury of the synagogue. The reason was that in the early days the Roman government was not able to distinguish between Jews and Christians. Within the empire Judaism was that was called a *religio licita*, a permitted religion, and Jews had full liberty to worship in their own way. It was not that the Jews did not try to enlighten the Romans to the true facts of the situation; they did so in Corinth, for example (*Acts* 18:12–17). But for some time the Romans simply regarded the Christians as Jewish sect and, therefore, did not molest them.

The change came in the days of Nero and we can trace almost every detail of the story. On 19th July, A.D. 64, the great fire of Rome broke out. Rome, a city of narrow streets and high wooden tenements, was in real danger of being wiped out. The fire burned for three days and three nights, was checked, and then broke out again with redoubled violence. The Roman populace had no doubt who was responsible and put the blame on the Emperor. Nero had a passion for building; and they believed so that he had deliberately taken steps to obliterate Rome that he might build it again. Nero’s responsibility must remain for ever in doubt; but it is certain that he watched the raging inferno from the tower of Maecenas and expressed himself as charmed with the flower and loveliness of the flames. It was freely said that those who tried to extinguish the fire were deliberately hindered and that men were seen to rekindle it again, when it was likely to subside. The people were overwhelmed. The ancient landmarks and the ancestral shrines had vanished; the Temple of Luna, the Ara Maxima, the great altar, the Temple of Jupiter Stator, the shrine of Vesta, their very household gods were gone. They were homeless and, in Farrar’s phrase, there was “a hopeless brotherhood of wretchedness.”

The resentment of the people was bitter. Nero had to divert suspicion from himself; a scapegoat had to be found. The Christians were made the scapegoat. Tacitus, the Roman historian, tells the story (*Annals* 15.44):

Neither human assistance in the shape of imperial gifts, nor attempts to appease the gods, could remove the sinister report that the fire was due to Nero’s own orders. And, so, in the hope of dissipating the rumour, he falsely diverted the charge on to a set of people to whom the vulgar gave the name of Chrestians, and who were detested for the abominations they perpetrated. The founder of the sect, one Christus by name, had been executed by Pontius Pilate in the reign of

Tiberius; and the dangerous superstition, though put down for the moment, broke out again, not only in Judaea, the original home of the pest, but even in Rome, where everything shameful and horrible collects and is practised.

Clearly Tacitus had no doubt that the Christians were not to blame for the fire that Nero was simply choosing them to be the scapegoats for his own crime.

Why did Nero pick on the Christians and how was it possible even to suggest that they were responsible for the fire of Rome? There are two possible answers.

(i) The Christians were already the victims of certain slanders.

(a) They were in the popular mind connected with the Jews. Antisemitism is no new thing and it was easy for the Roman mob to attach any crime to the Jews and, therefore, to the Christians.

(b) The Lord's Supper was secret, at least in a sense. It was open only to the members of the Church. And certain phrases connected with it were fruitful sources of pagan slanders, phrases about eating someone's body and drinking someone's blood. That was enough to produce a rumour that the Christians were cannibals. In time the rumour grew until it became a story that the Christians killed and ate a Gentile, or a newly born child. At the Lord's Table the Christians gave each other the kiss of peace (1 Peter 5:14). Their meeting was called the *Agape*, the Love Feast. That was enough for stories to spread that the Christian meeting were orgies of vice.

(c) It was always a charge against the Christians that they "tampered with family relationships." There was this much truth in such a charge that Christianity did indeed become a sword to split families, when some members of a family became Christian and some did not. A religion which split homes was bound to be unpopular.

(d) It was the case that the Christians spoke of a coming day when the world would dissolve in flames. Many a Christian preacher must have been heard preaching of the second coming and they fiery dissolution of all things (Acts 2:19, 20). It would not be difficult to put the blame for the fire on to people who spoke like that.

There was abundant material which could be perverted into false charges against the Christians by anyone maliciously disposed to victimise them.

(ii) The Jewish faith had always appealed especially to women because of its moral standards in a world where chastity did not exist. There were, therefore, many well-born women who had embraced the Jewish faith. The Jews did not hesitate to work upon these women to influence their husbands against the Christians. We get a definite example of that in what happened to Paul and his company in Antioch of Pisidia. There it was through such women that the Jews stirred up action against Paul (Acts 13:50). Two of Nero's court favourites were Jewish proselytes. There was Aliturus, his favourite actor; and there was Poppaea, his mistress. It is very likely that the Jews through them influenced Nero to take action against the Christians.

In any event, the blame for the fire was attached to the Christians and a savage outbreak of persecution occurred. Nor was it simply persecution by legal means. What Tacitus called an *ingens multitudo*, a huge multitude, of Christians perished in the most sadistic ways. Nero rolled the Christians in pitch, set light to them and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He sewed them up in the skins of wild animals and set his hunting-dogs upon them, to tear them limb from limb while they still lived.

Tacitus writes:

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 a 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. 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 (Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44).

The same terrible story is told by the later Christian historian, Sulipicius Severus, in his *Chronicle*:

In the meantime, the number of Christians being now very large, it happened that Rome was destroyed by fire, while Nero was stationed at Antium. But the opinion of all cast the odium of causing the fire upon the emperor, and he was believed in this way to have sought for the glory of building a new city. And, in fact, Nero could not, by any means he tried, escape from the charge that the fire had been caused by his orders. He, therefore, turned the accusation against the Christians and the most cruel tortures were accordingly inflicted upon the innocent. Nay, even new kinds of death were invented so that, being covered in the skins of wild beasts, they perished by being devoured by dogs, while many were crucified, or slain by fire, and not a few were set apart for this purpose, that, when the day came to a close, they should be consumed to serve for light during the night. In this way, cruelty first began to be manifested against the Christians.

Afterwards, too, their religion was prohibited by laws which were enacted; and by edicts openly set forth it was proclaimed unlawful to be a Christian.

It is true that this persecution was confined originally to Rome; but the gateway to persecution had been opened and in every place they were ready victims for the mob.

Moffatt writes:

After the Neronian wave had passed over the capital, the wash of it was left on the far shores of the provinces; the dramatic publicity of the punishment must have spread the name of Christian *urbi et orbi*, far and wide, over the entire empire; the provincials would soon hear of it, and when they desired a similar outburst at the expense of the loyal Christians, all that they needed was a proconsul to gratify their wishes and some outstanding disciple to serve as a victim.

For ever after the Christians were to live under threat. The mobs of the Roman cities knew what had happened in Rome and there were always these slanderous stories against the Christians. There were times when the mob loved blood and there were many governors ready to pander to their blood-lust. It was not Roman law but lynch law which threatened the Christians.

From now on the Christian was in peril of his life. For years nothing might happen; then some spark might set off the explosion; and the terror would break out. That is the situation at the back of *First Peter*; and it is in face of it that Peter calls his people to hope and to courage and to that lovely Christian living which alone can give the lie to the slanders with which they are attacked and which are the grounds for taking measures against them. *First Peter* was written to meet no theological heresy; it was written to strengthen men and women in jeopardy of their lives.

7

## THE CHOSEN OF GOD AND THE EXILES OF ETERNITY

### 1 PETER 1:1, 2 (CONTINUED)

WHAT we have just been saying means that the two great titles of which we have been thinking belong to us who are Christians.

(i) We are *the Chosen People of God*. There is *uplift* here. Surely there can be no greater compliment and privilege in all the world than to be chosen by God. The word *eklektos* can describe anything that is specially chosen; it can describe specially chosen fruit, articles specially chosen because they are so outstandingly well made, picked troops specially chosen for some great exploit. We have the honour of being specially chosen by God. But there is also *challenge* and *responsibility* here. God always chooses for service. The honour which he gives a man is that of being used for his purposes. It was precisely there that the Jews failed, and we have to see to it that the tragedy of a like failure does not mark our lives.

(ii) We are *the exiles of eternity*. This is never to say that we must withdraw from the world, but that in the real sense we must be at the same time both in the world and not of it. It has been wisely said that the Christian must be *apart* from the world but never *aloof* from it. Wherever the exiled Jew settled, his eyes were towards Jerusalem. In foreign countries his synagogues were so

built that, when the worshipper entered, he was facing towards Jerusalem. However useful a citizen of his adopted country the Jew was, his greatest loyalty was to Jerusalem.

The Greek word for such a sojourner in a strange land is *paroikos*. A *paroikos* was a man who was in a strange land and whose thoughts ever turned home. Such a sojourning was called a *paroikia*; and *paroikia* is the direct derivation of the English word *parish*. The Christians in any place are a group of people whose eyes are turned to God and whose loyalty is beyond. "Here," said the writer to the Hebrews, "we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

We must repeat that this does not mean withdrawal from the world; but it does mean that the Christian sees all things in the light of eternity and life as a journey towards God. It is this which decides the importance which he attaches to anything; it is this which dictates his conduct. It is the touchstone and the dynamic of his life.

There is a famous unwritten saying of Jesus: "The world is a bridge. The wise man will pass over it, but he will not build his house upon it." This is the thought which is behind the famous passage in *The Epistle to Diognetus*, one of the best-known works of the post-apostolic age: "Christians are not marked out from the rest of mankind by their country or their speech or their customs. ... They dwell in cities both Greek and barbarian, each as his lot is cast, following the customs of the region in clothing and in food and in the outward things of life generally; yet they manifest the wonderful and openly paradoxical character of their own state. They inhabit the lands of their birth, but as temporary residents thereof; they take their share of all responsibilities as citizens, and endure all disabilities as aliens. Every foreign land is their native land, and every native land a foreign land. ... They pass their days upon earth, but their citizenship is in heaven."

It would be wrong to think that this makes the Christian a bad citizen of the land in which he lives. It is because he sees all things in the light of eternity that he is the best of all citizens, for it is only in the light of eternity that the true values of things can be seen.

We, as Christians, are the Chosen People of God; we are the exiles of eternity. Therein lie both our priceless privilege and our inescapable responsibility.

## THE THREE GREAT FACTS OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

### 1 PETER 1:1, 2 (CONTINUED)

In verse 2 we are confronted with the three great facts of the Christian life.

(i) The Christian is *chosen according to the foreknowledge of God*. C. E. B. Cranfield has a fine comment on this phrase: "If all our attention is concentrated on the hostility or indifference of the world or the exiguousness of our own progress in the Christian life, we may well be discouraged. At such times we need to be reminded that our election is *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*. The Church is not just a human organization—though, of course, it is that. Its origin lies, not in the will of the flesh, in the idealism of men, in human aspirations and plans, but in the eternal purpose of God." When we are discouraged we may well remind ourselves that the Christian Church came into being according to the purpose and plan of God and, if it is true to him, it can never ultimately fail.

(ii) The Christian is chosen *to be consecrated by the Spirit*. Luther said: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him." For the Christian the Holy Spirit is essential to every part of the Christian life and every step in it. It is the Holy Spirit who awakens within us the first faint longings for God and goodness. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us of our sin and leads us to the Cross where that sin is forgiven. It is the Holy Spirit who enables us to be freed from the sins which have us in their grip and to gain the virtues which are the fruit of the Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who gives us the assurance that our sins are forgiven and that Jesus Christ is Lord. The beginning, the middle and the end of the Christian life are the work of the Holy Spirit.

(iii) The Christian is chosen *for obedience and for sprinkling by the blood of Jesus Christ*. In the Old Testament there are three occasions when sprinkling with blood is mentioned. It may well be that all three were present in Peter's mind and that all three have something to contribute to the thought behind these words.

(a) When a leper had been healed, he was sprinkled with the blood of a bird (Leviticus 14:1–7). Sprinkling with blood is, therefore, the symbol of *cleansing*. By the sacrifice of Christ, the Christian is cleansed from sin.

(b) Sprinkling with blood was part of the ritual of the setting apart of Aaron and the priests (Exodus 29:20–21; Leviticus 8:30). It was the sign of *setting apart* for the service of God. The Christian is specially set apart for the service of God, not only within the Temple, but also within the world.

(c) The great picture of the sprinkling comes from the covenant relationship between Israel and God. In the covenant, God, of his own gracious will, approached Israel that they might be his people and that he might be their God. But that relationship depended on the Israelites accepting the conditions of the covenant and obeying the law. Obedience was a necessary condition of the covenant, and failure in obedience meant failure of the covenant relationship between God and Israel. So the book of the covenant was read to Israel and the people pledged themselves: “All the words which the Lord has spoken we will do.” As a token of this relationship of obedience between the people and God, Moses took half the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it on the altar, and half the blood of the sacrifice and sprinkled it on the people (Exodus 24:1–8). Sprinkling was for *obedience*.

Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the Christian is called into a new relationship with God, in which the sins of the past are forgiven and he is pledged to obedience in the time to come. It is in the purpose of God that the Christian is called. It is by the work of the Holy Spirit that his life is hallowed towards God. It is by the sprinkling of the blood of Christ that he is cleansed from past sin and dedicated to future obedience to God.<sup>8</sup>

Most of this can be found in "From Jerusalem to Irian Jaya" by Ruth Tucker. God bless! Steve

In the year 1876, Alexander MacKay in his farewell address before setting out for Uganda: “Within six months you will probably hear that one of us is dead. When the news comes, do not be cast down; but send someone else immediately to take the vacant place.” Within 3 months one of the party of 8 was dead; within a year, 5 had died; and at the end of the two years MacKay himself was the sole survivor. In the face of overwhelming odds he struggled on for 12 years until he too was felled by fever.

West Africa came to be known as the “white man’s grave.” Melville Cox arrived in Liberia in 1833 but died within 4 months of his arrival. His last words were: “Let a thousand fall before Africa be given up.” In the Congo in the 1800’s only one out of four missionaries survived the first term of service. In 1915, Mary Slessor, spent nearly 40 years in Africa. Over the years she suffered recurring bouts of malaria, and had often endured painful boils that appeared on her face and head, sometimes resulting in baldness. She died at the age of 66 in her mud hut. In the year 1900 in China, during the Boxer Rebellion, no fewer than 189 missionaries and their children lost their lives. It was the largest massacre of missionaries in the history of modern missions. Others such as Jonathan and Rosalind Goforth, saw 5 of their 11 children die in childhood, escaped after a harrowing 1000-mile flight to safety. What drove these people, what fueled their willingness to pay the ultimate price, to give their lives for others. What makes them different from you and me.

What shall we say of the immeasurable sacrifices of William Carey and Adoniram Judson who each buried two wives as well as little children in India and Burma. Judson: when his wife Nancy and baby Maria died of fever. “God is to me the Great Unknown. I believe in him, but I cannot find him.”

---

<sup>8</sup>Barclay, William, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Letters of James and Peter (Revised Edition)*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2000, c1976.