

SONGS: Faith is the Victory;
CLOSE:

Introducing an Old Fisherman **Profiling Christians – Part 1**

TEXT: 1 Peter 1:1a

INTRODUCTION:

A. On the night between 18 and 19 July in the year 64 AD...

Arsonists have set fire to the imperial city of Rome. By the time the fire is brought under control three of the fourteen districts into which the capitol city is divided has been burned to the ground.¹

It isn't a coincidence that the property most affected is the same area where the Emperor Nero wants to build a new imperial palace—and historians have long believed he was, in fact, the arsonist.

But to avoid suspicion, his propaganda machine begins spreading the news that unpopular Christians ignited the flame...

- Those strange people who never fit in
- That strange gathering who worshipped a dead carpenter
- Those unpatriotic people who would never swear allegiance to the Emperor, or go along with the moral degeneracy of the Empire
- Those people who wouldn't make room for the pantheon of Roman gods and goddesses.

Persecution against Christianity up to this point has been local, random and unorganized. But now it begins to coalesce. Christianity was facing a new crisis. Their world is changing—and they are no longer welcome.

About this same time an old fisherman, in his late 60's, reaches for his quill and under the direction of the Holy Spirit, he begins to write. Actually, he talks slow enough for his friend Silvanus in 5:12 to write down his words to believers who have become targets of religious persecution. He knew Christians would be asking questions – the questions that many are asking today:

- How do you respond when people think you're strange for worshipping differently, or even dogmatically?
- How do you react when government officials penalize you for your beliefs?
- How do you work with employers who demand that you make concessions or else?
- How do you move on after a spouse rejects you because you will not reject Christ?
- What do you do when you realize that although your life isn't being threatened—your career is?

The Letters of the Apostle Peter could have been written to us today.

THE TRUTH IS ... THEY ARE! And are they ever so needed!

B. The Apostle Peter is writing to believers who are experiencing serious persecution.

¹ John Phillips, *Exploring the Epistles of Peter* (Kregel, 2005), p. 7

The apostle knew that a severe “fiery trial” (4:12) was just around the corner, and he wanted to prepare believers for it. **After all, what life does to us depends on what life finds in us.**

Peter’s audience is not unique, in fact, throughout the history of Christianity persecution seems to be more normal than not.

Maybe you have been aware of it for a while, or perhaps only recently some have begun to follow the news and watch the decisions of legislators, or politicians with a growing sense—a growing recognition that suffering for the sake of Christ isn’t new ... in fact, it has become normal.

Being mocked and maligned and misunderstood and marginalized is certainly new to the Christian in the West ... but our world is and has changed. We have now entered an era in our history where to be comfortable, culturally acceptable and at the same time, a committed Christian—is more and more unlikely.

C. Peter’s letter seeks to encourage and reassure Christian churches in Asia Minor as stormy seasons of persecution begin.

Those storms rage on today – in the form of Islamic oppression across the Middle East and Indonesia; in India where a Hindu mob destroys a Christian church built at great sacrifice in the poorest slum of Bombay; in many Communist lands where to confess Christ brings the loss of educational privilege and job opportunities, and often results in imprisonment.

In much of the English-speaking world such threats may seem distant; perhaps we fail to read the signs of the times. BUT no Christian avoids suffering, however, and no true Christian escapes a measure of suffering for Christ’s sake.²

D. For the most part, Christians in the Western world have enjoyed comfortable lives.

Our brothers and sisters behind iron and bamboo curtains have suffered for their faith. Now there is every indication that the time is approaching when it will cost us to take a stand for Christ. The only “comfortable” Christian will be a “compromising” Christian, and the believer’s comfort will be costly.³

Which means this – in the words of one author – the day of the casual Christian is over. It will no longer be possible to drift along, hoping that no tough choices about daily life will have to be made. It will now cost something to be a follower of Jesus Christ.⁴

E. In the face of growing hostility the basic question asked by the believer living in the 1st century and the 21st century remains the same...

- How then shall we live?
- How do we respond to the aggression and persecution?
- What should be our disposition and reputation and demeanour?

A mission agency that monitors the church in the People’s Republic of China asked thousands of believers what drew them to faith in Christ—especially when it could mean demotion, persecution, marginalization—and even imprisonment. Many answers were given, **but the one answer that was given most often**—was the joy in the lives of believers with whom they came in contact—such joy that made them envious ... and then curious ... and eventually receptive.⁵

², Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter*. The New Testament Series Editor, John R. W. Stott (Inter-Varsity Press) p. 15

³ Excerpt From: Warren W. Wiersbe. “*The Wiersbe Bible Study Series: 1 Peter*.” iBooks.
<https://itun.es/us/XR12E.1>

⁴ Adapted from Erwin Lutzer, *Where Do We Go From Here* (Moody Publishers, 2013), p. 39

⁵ Ibid. Lutzer, p. 36

So as we study the letters of Peter and read the newspaper and watch the news reports at the same time—if we end up panicking, or get angry, or become resentful ... we're not heading in the right direction.

Peter writes in this first letter ... in the face of testing ... we are to keep on rejoicing >> **SEE 4:13**; if you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed—that is, you are filled with a sense of satisfied joy >> **SEE 4:14**.

As we open Peter's first letter, there is never any question as to why Peter wrote it; if you'll turn to **chapter 5**, he spells it out in **verse 12**. *"I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand."*

In other words, those of you who have been redeemed by grace; you belong to a gracious God; and therefore Peter writes so that you who are in the midst of a changing world ... you won't lose sight of God's grace or stop living out the gospel of grace.

I. THE WRITER PETER – PLEASE TURN BACK TO 1:1

A. It reads simply, yet profoundly, *"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ..."*

1. The original construction could be rendered, "Jesus Christ's apostle".
 - a. In other words, *Peter was sent out* – which is what apostle means, in general terms – he was being sent as an agent on a mission having been personally commissioned by Jesus Christ."
 - b. In more specific terms, an Apostle was among that group of men who had been disciplined by the Lord and had seen Him after His resurrection.
2. It's worth noting that Peter and the early church adopted both the human name of Jesus and combined it with the Messianic title—*the Christ*.
 - a. For us today, **Jesus Christ** goes together like a first and last name—they are inseparable—and rightly so!
 - b. But *"Christ"* wasn't a name; it was a title—a title that meant Messiah – the anointed One – a reference for the One who would die for the sins of the whole world.
3. When the Jerusalem church was gathered on Sunday, on the Day of Pentecost, this earliest of creeds—their first confession of faith was this in **Acts 2:36** *"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."* Jesus is the Christ!
 - a. They knew Him first as Jesus—**the man**; but they came to understand that He was God incarnate—their living Messiah—the Christ.
 - b. By the time Peter writes this letter, Jesus and Christ have become inseparable names of our Lord Jesus Christ.

B. It's interesting that the Apostle Paul is the only writer to ever reverse this order

1. Out of 180 references to Jesus in Paul's epistles, Paul will refer to Him as *"Christ Jesus"* 55 times.
2. You see, for the other Apostles, Jesus came first and then their understanding that He was the Christ – the Divine Messiah came second.
3. But to the Apostle Paul, his experience was reversed.
 - a. He came rather suddenly into an awareness of God the Son as he travelled the road to Damascus to hunt down some Christians.
 - b. **Acts chap. 9** records how the sky suddenly blazed with light and he fell to the ground and heard the voice of God saying, "Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?"

- c. And the voice from heaven, that must have nearly stopped his heart from beating, responded, “I am Jesus who you are persecuting.”
 - 1) So for **ALL** the other commissioned apostles who had followed Jesus, they came to know their teacher over time as *“Jesus the Christ”*
 - 2) Paul, on-the-other-hand, who hadn’t met the Lord prior to His crucifixion, came to know Him first as the Divinely Anointed Christ and then as Jesus.
 - 3) We find immediately after receiving his sight and baptism he is preaching in the synagogues and confounding the Jews *“proving that this [Jesus] is the very Christ”* (9:20, 22).
4. Now what Peter is saying in this opening phrase of **Pet 1:1** is critically important, especially when his readers are going to encounter persecution for claiming that Jesus was none other than the divinely anointed Christ—the true and living Son of God.
5. So in this opening statement, Peter actually reinforces their faith by effectively saying, “Jesus is still the Lord of the cosmos – of all creation – the only Messiah able to save mankind. He is indeed—Jesus the Christ.
6. And beloved, what is it that is becoming more and more offensive to our changing world? It is precisely **this early creed!**
 - a. This basic confession that we hold to today—it is becoming more and more offensive that you and I would actually believe that Jesus alone is our Living Lord.
 - b. That Jesus is more than just another prophet or teacher; we believe like Peter that *“Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved”* (Acts 4:12).
7. And so Peter opens with the most condensed doctrinal statement – the shortest creedal confession you can ever utter – *“Jesus Christ.”*

The Man Jesus, is our God and Saviour – our Messiah – our Christ.

II. NOW THERE’S SOMETHING ELSE IN THIS OPENING PHRASE, WHICH IS ALL WE’RE GOING TO GET TO TODAY, IN CASE YOU WERE WONDERING.

A. It is a startling display of God’s grace that would allow you to read the name of Peter, next to the title—APOSTLE.

1. I mean, if you decided to read through the four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and then stopped reading after you finished the Gospel of John—and then later on decided to read some more and picked up your NT and turned to **1 Peter**, you would be amazed to discover that Peter was an apostle.
2. You could just as easily expect a letter from him to open with the words,
 - “Peter, the man who denied Jesus Christ... “
 - “Peter, the man who failed to keep his solemn promise to Jesus Christ... “
 - “Peter, the man who used to be one of Jesus Christ’s closest followers.”
3. Instead, you read, ***“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ”***.
 - a. So let’s find out how Peter got from where he was, to where we find him here.
 - b. In fact, I’m going to propose to you that *who* Peter was – and the growth he experienced – will have an incredible impact on what he writes in this letter.

- c. Peter's past life – his past failures and disappointments – make all the more vibrant and significant and precious his letters to Christians in every country and in every generation.

B. So let's back up for a moment and ask the question: Just who was Peter, the Apostle?

1. Picture in your mind a primary student say in 4th class – a student who is constantly raising his hand in class, even though he has nothing to say. And many times, what he says shouldn't have been said.
 - a. If you read the Gospel accounts, you can easily understand why Peter has been described as the Apostle with a foot-shaped mouth.
 - b. Someone characterized that Peter opened his mouth only to change feet. Peter was the disciple who rushed in where angels feared to tread.
 2. Peter was inquisitive and impulsive and daring.
 - a. While we often fault him for sinking beneath the waves, we too easily forget that when Peter saw Jesus walking on the water, Peter was the only disciple to climb out of the boat and walk toward Jesus, while all the other disciples were hanging on to their seat cushions that served as flotation devices.
 - b. While we fault him for denying the Lord in that courtyard during Jesus' trial, Peter was still the disciple who followed the Lord into that courtyard.
- No disciple speaks, as often as Peter does—AND no one is spoken to by the Lord, as often as Peter.
 - No disciple is corrected more often than Peter—AND Peter is the only disciple to have tried to correct the Lord—which was not a good idea.
 - No one verbally denied Christ more publicly than Peter and yet no disciple confessed Christ more boldly, than Peter⁶

C. Decades ago someone wrote in describing Peter...

...That probably no other person characterized in Scripture appears so impetuous, unstable, and distrustful, and yet at the same time so bold, fearless, and devoted.⁷

1. And by the way, all of the above are among the reasons why we love Peter the Apostle.
 - a. The Apostle Paul intimidates us ... Paul, the brilliant attorney, has most of it buttoned down.
 - b. Peter, the fisherman, is unpredictable ... he seems to be able to balance every surprising success with an equally stunning failure.
2. And we love him for that ... we warm up to him so easily, because we are just like him. Peter is so clearly flawed ... he has so much to be forgiven – as everyone else – by the way ... BUT it's just so obvious with Peter.

D. Now, when Peter was born, his given name was Simon – or Simeon, in Hebrew.

1. His father's name was John and we know that he had a brother named Andrew.
2. He grew up in a fishing village on the Sea of Galilee and developed a fairly successful fishing enterprise with his brother Andrew. They, along with two other brothers, James and John worked the business. All four men would leave their business and follow after Jesus.

⁶ Adapted from John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (W Publishing Group, 2002), p. 41

⁷J. Allen Blair, *Living Peacefully When the World Won't Leave You Alone* (Kregel, 1959), p. 9

3. We know Peter was married because his wife often travelled with him in his ministry trips, according to **1 Cor. 9:5**; it's possible they didn't have any children, which would have allowed her to be involved more directly in his travels.
4. We also can conclude that his fishing business was lucrative enough for them to own their own home in Capernaum (Mark 1:21) and the home was large enough to accommodate his wife and his mother-in-law—whom Jesus healed when she had become ill with a high fever (Mark 1:29-34).
5. Now when the Lord meets Simon, he immediately nicknames him Peter—or Petros, in the Greek language; Cephas in Aramaic.
6. Petros, or Peter, means “stone” or “rock”. It was as prophetic a name change as any—for Jesus Christ will take this impetuous, unstable, unpredictable, emotionally driven man, and make him rocklike – stable and steady.”

III. WHAT I WANT TO DO WITH THE TIME REMAINING IS FOR US TO WATCH SOME OF PETER'S LIFE HAPPEN IN FAST MOTION.

I wanna drop into several scenes – and we'll take a quick photograph – sort of like a quick Instagram, and from there we'll move on.

A. *I'll give you a caption to write underneath each photograph. You're going to have to turn quickly to the Scripture, because we have a lot to uncover.*

1. The first snapshot is found in **Luke 9** - and the caption is the word, **Nonsense**.
 - a. Here's the setting; the three inner core disciples, Peter James and John have hiked up the slopes of a nearby hill, about to become known forever as the Mount of Transfiguration.
 - b. When they get to the top, the Lord begins to pray and Peter and other two disciples fall asleep – which is their normal pattern.
 - c. Suddenly, Peter wakes up to discover that Jesus is talking to Moses and Elijah – and their garments are shining like the noonday sun – and Peter, of course, shows a magnificent disregard for the situation; ignores the fact that nobody is talking to *him* and he blurts out – in **vs. 33**: *“Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias:”* then the verse ends saying Peter said this to *“Jesus, not knowing what he said.”*
 - d. Wanting to make tents for all three, reduces Jesus to the level of Moses and Elijah – Which religions of the world have been trying to do for centuries – wishing to make Jesus just another prophet
 - e. When Peter tries to make some sort of permanent dwelling place for them ... God the Father basically interrupts Peter by saying, – and I'm guessing, but I think God the Father is raising His voice just a tad; *“This is my beloved Son: hear Him.”* i.e. listen to Him!
 - f. Which is a nice way of saying, “Peter, stop running your mouth and listen!” What you are saying is utter **NONSENSE**!
2. Another snapshot is in **Matthew 16** where you can write the caption, **Insightful**, underneath this scene.
 - a. The Lord is asking His disciples who people think He is. Some say in **vs. 14** you are, *John the Baptist, some say you are Elijah, but still others think you are Jeremiah, or one of the prophets.*
 - b. And now comes the major question on this examination of faith – and Jesus said to them, *“But whom say ye that I am?”* Simon Peter answered in **vs. 16** –

and you might be thinking, ‘Oh no – not Peter,’ but rightly answers “... *Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*”

- c. Jesus goes on to declare that only God the Father could have provoked such revelation *into* the heart and *out of* the mouth of Peter—the rock—and upon the bedrock of Peter’s confession of who Jesus is, He will build His church.
 - 1) What insight from Peter—what a mountaintop for this growing disciple of Jesus Christ.
 - 2) The problem is, only two verses later, Peter, who was filled with insight, becomes Peter, filled with arrogance.

Matthew 16:21-22 – “*From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. 22] Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.*”

- 3) Can you imagine? *Peter takes the Lord aside*, saying something like, “would you step over here for a moment ... listen, this talk of dying, this will never happen to You, trust me, I’m the disciple with great insight.”
- d. **From insight to arrogance!** And Jesus calls him *Satan, a stumbling block* to the Divine plan of redemption – **WHY?**
 - 1) **Mt. 16:23** – “...*For thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.*”
 - 2) Peter, your mind is captivated by your own interests and not God’s.
 - 3) In other words, Peter rebuked Jesus because Jesus evidently wasn’t going to fulfill Peter’s expectations.
 - a) This wasn’t Peter’s plan! Peter expected Judaism to be reformed and revived.
 - b) Jesus could see the end of Judaism and the beginning of the church age.
 - c) Peter expected nice little fish dinners by the seashore; Jesus envisioned the marriage supper of the Lamb.
 - d) Peter saw synagogues packed with disciple and Jesus teaching; Jesus saw the nation screaming for his crucifixion.
 - e. There were not crosses in Peter’s expectations; no nails, no corpse and no sealed tomb either.
 - f. Peter was looking forward to one miracle after another – Jesus was looking forward to defeating death and the grave.
3. It is little surprise that you can then turn to **John 13** and write underneath that snapshot the words **Self-confidence**.
 - a. **John 13** is where Peter tells Jesus, “Look, everybody else will leave you, but I will never deny You ... I’ll follow You even to the death.”
 - b. Five chapters later, at **John chapter 18** you can write in the word that you have come to know Peter by – the caption can simply read—**FAILURE**.
 - c. As predicted by Jesus in **John 13** Peter gave **three denials** ... and the rooster signals Peter’s crushing defeat.
 - d. It doesn’t take long for any of us to take our eyes off the Lord and focus on **OUR** expectations ... **OUR** plans ... **OUR** own self-confidence ... and it isn’t long after when **OUR** promises lie crumbled and broken at our feet ... in the dust of regret.

William Carey...

William Carey, the man we call the Father of Modern Missions – used wonderfully by the Lord in India for decades – wrote these words in his journal during days of inconsistency and failure: this entry is marked, 1794 and it reads,

“My soul is a jungle, when it ought to be a garden; I can scarcely tell if I have the grace of God or not; I am, perhaps, the most inconsistent, cold creature that ever possessed the grace of Christ. If God uses me, none need despair.”⁸

That’s Peter ... if anybody was finished with him, it would be the Lord.

Peter had stunningly, so quickly denied Him ... and soon after that, Jesus died.

That’s it ... I mean, look, even if the Lord rose from the dead, He’ll find somebody else ... some other more worthy Apostle to write inspired letters to churches. He’ll leave Peter out.

But that isn’t the end of the snapshots, is it?

4. In **John 20**, we’re given a life-changing photograph—you can write underneath it the caption, **EYE-WITNESS**.
 - a. News had reached the disciples that the stone has been rolled away and the tomb is empty.
 - b. Peter and John start racing toward the tomb and when they arrive, **vs. 6** tells us that they went in and saw *“the linen clothes lie, 7] And the napkin, that was about his head, not lying with the linen clothes, but wrapped together in a place by itself.”*
 - c. The grave clothes aren’t torn apart by a resuscitating Lord; they aren’t ripped to shreds by grave-robbers stealing the body. They were lying there; separate from the face cloth, literally, *still in their folds*.
 - 1) Imagine, by this time, the spices that had interlaced these strips of cloth that had been wrapped around the body of Jesus, had begun to harden – and they are still lying there in their folds.
 - 2) What that means is that Peter and John are struck by the fact that these linen wrappings are still in the form of a body, no doubt slightly sunken in; like an empty cocoon. And then John’s careful reference to the face-napkin, inches away, folded neatly!⁹

One New Testament author commented that, in the ancient world, when royalty ate a large meal, they would often pause from their courses and rise from their couch and walk in the garden. If they took the napkin, wiped their mouth and wadded it up, it meant they were finished and would not return to eat. But if the napkin was folded neatly at their seat, it meant they were coming back.¹⁰

Peter saw the napkin – and why so carefully placed there? Because Royal Jesus was not only alive, He was coming back.

If there was any doubt, Mark records the words of the angel who delivered the news of Christ’s resurrection as women came to anoint the body of Jesus; Mark’s gospel records the words of the angel. *“And he saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him. 7] But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter...”* (Mark 16:6–7)

It seems this is almost written as if to imply that Peter doesn’t think he belongs with the other disciples—“We know he’s gone back to fishing ... make sure you tell him too!”

⁸ Quotes taken from S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey* (The Watchman Trust, 1923), p. 126

⁹ Cleon Rogers Jr. & Cleon Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Zondervan, 1998), p. 226

¹⁰ Dino Pedrone, *The Influence of Peter* (Xulon Press, 2012), p. xiii

And in **1 Corinthians 15:5**, these precious words from Paul “[Jesus] *was seen of Cephas*” inform us that Jesus made a special resurrection appearance to Peter.

Peter wasn’t discarded ... his failure had not been final ... he was now an eyewitness. And that changed everything.

5. The next snapshot is on the Day of Pentecost, in **Acts chapter 2**, where Jerusalem has swelled into millions of Jews from all around the world. Peter is the main spokesman of the day and you could write underneath his public sermon the word, **COURAGE**.
 - a. Denying nothing, Peter, declares in his message starting in **vs. 23**
 - 1) That the nation has murdered the Messiah
 - 2) The world has ignored the Son of God
 - 3) Repentance and belief in Jesus occurred simultaneously
 - 4) **Vs. 36** declares that Jesus is *“both Lord and Christ.”* He is both God and the anointed Messiah. And He is the Christ that is their only hope.
 - b. As a result, 3,000 people believed—and were added to the Jerusalem church.

There are other snapshots and other captions to write ... But there is one last snapshot I want to show you in this first letter from Peter. It’s been more than 30 years since he’d come face to face with a man who had the audacity and authority to change his name.

And this man—the God-man—had changed so much more than Peter’s name.

Here’s this old fisherman – a fisherman turned shepherd – he reaches for his quill ... and you can write underneath this snapshot the caption, **GRACE**.

Peter will never forget the grace of God.

IV. LET ME ASK AND ANSWER A FEW QUESTIONS AND OUR INTRODUCTION OF THIS LETTER IS FINISHED.

A. The first question is this: did Peter learn the importance of prayer – i.e. transparent, open prayer?

1. I mentioned how the Lord prayed on two different occasions while Peter slept. And the Lord warned Peter of his future failure and denial, and the Lord even said to Peter in **Lk. 22:30-31** – *“Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: 31] But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not...”*
2. I find it interesting that even though Jesus prayed for Peter, Peter still failed.
 - a. But Jesus prayed with the perfect understanding that Peter’s cowardice wasn’t the conclusion!
 - b. In fact, we learn from this that prayer doesn’t always prevent failure – in fact, failure can be used in God’s providential development of someone’s character and life.
3. But Peter did learn the value of prayer ... and he will write in this letter, *“Casting all your care upon him [i.e. God, the Father]; for he careth for you”* (1 Peter 5:7).

B. Second question: did Peter learn how easy it is to fail and how damaging self-confidence is?

1. Did he ever ... Peter will write in **5:5**, *“...be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”*
2. Peter warns in **5:8**, “listen beloved, watch out ... don’t be overconfident, but reliant on the Lord *“because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour.”*

C. Question #3: did Peter replace hot-headed reactions with calm, clear thinking?

1. You may remember that Peter was the disciple who took out a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane and sliced off an ear of a man in the crowd; he's the man who promised the Lord uninterrupted faithful success.
2. Three times, the Apostle Peter will write in this first letter, for the believer to be "*sober*."
 - a. The word "*sober*" literally refers to avoiding drunkenness.
 - b. **However**, each time it's used in the NT, it is used as a metaphor to being clearheaded ... to having a calm and collected perspective so that you remain focused on what's most important.
3. Our church needs this attribute now, more than ever. Calm, clear thinking on what matters most – and that's the gospel – and the Lord whom we represent.
4. This is no time to pitch a fit ... or panic ... or spend our time complaining or wringing our hands over the loss of rights, righteousness and freedoms in this country. Let's not sing that we're standing on the "Rock of Ages" and then act as if we're clinging to a piece of driftwood.
5. Listen, beloved, one of the best lessons we can learn from 2,000 years of church history is that God's churches do not need to be appreciated in order to advance. Believers don't need freedom in order to be fruitful. We don't need a seat at the table of power in order to sow the seed of the gospel.

CONCLUSION:

Our hopes and petitions should not be directed toward government but toward Christ!

Now that doesn't mean you can't petition the gov't powers that be, or run for a political seat in the gov't or pray that somebody in gov't will put their thinking cap on. Exercise every right you have in this country we love.

But the Christian has absolutely no right to panic – or complain – or resent what is ultimately the Lord's purpose as **He** moves this earth and every nation on it toward that final destination where the glory of the Lord will fill the earth like the waters of the sea.

Listen, sometimes in history, God gives a nation a leader who is better than they deserve.

The nation Israel didn't deserve the godly king Josiah, but the Lord raised him up and delayed His judgment. Josiah was a better king than the nation deserved.

Sometimes God gives a nation a leader who is far worse than they deserve.

It would be hard to prove that Germany deserved Hitler, or Russia deserved Stalin. It's as if God reveals the potential pit of evil in a human heart and prepares a nation for the gospel of redemption.

And sometimes God gives a nation a leader that they actually deserve – one just like them

Such people that are immoral ... decadent ... deceitful ... arrogant ... spiritually blind ... openly rejecting the gospel ... willfully ignorant of the Bible ... brazenly defying God's created order for gender and marriage.

As a church we need to maintain our focus on our mission and align our expectations with God's plan. More than ever we need a passion that demonstrates grace of God to the confused and lost—those who, without Jesus Christ—will be condemned forever.

Listen, the smoke from the burning of Rome is still thick in the air ... Christians in Peter's day are to be preparing for greater persecution than ever ... in fact, Peter will be executed in the wake of it all.

But picture in your mind a 75-year-old man ... a man with calloused hands and gnarled fingers from years of tending nets and cleaning fish and rowing with wooden oars—a man calmly writing to encourage the believer ...

He writes in with ink mixed with forgiveness and grace ... listen, as he writes in this letter, *You can entrust your souls* – literally, you can deposit into safe-keeping your hearts and your lives - and *know that your faithful Creator will always be doing what is right.*

In a world gone wrong ... God is making sure it will all turn out right.

The madness of Rome was under His Divine management; the chaos of the time was under His control ... and **He** is still in control today.

30 Apr. `17, Morn – River Valley BC – Maynooth, Co. Kildare