

Walking With Christ In Turbulent Times 2 Peter 1:1-21

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The sixties were very turbulent times. I'm not talking about the 1960s. I'm talking about 61 to 70AD. This period in history set the stage for what Peter wrote and to whom he wrote.

In 64AD, there was a fire in Rome that burned a section of the city. Nero, who probably ordered the fire himself in order to build his palace and a statue to himself in that part of the city, blamed the Christians.

The persecution that followed was intense, but the persecutions that were taking place when 2 Peter was written surpassed even what the Christians faced when he penned his first letter.

Peter wrote his first book, 1 Peter, about 63AD and this book, 2 Peter, about 66AD. It's here in 2 Peter that he tells us he's about to die. When it comes down to it, we're reading Peter's swan song.

In fact, historians from this period tell us that Peter was executed just a few months after he wrote this letter.

Peter addressed his first letter to the scattered and persecuted Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bi-thy-ni-a. These provinces are located in modern day Turkey.

Here in 2 Peter, he's again writing to those same scattered and persecuted Christians; most likely from a Roman prison.

In approximately this same time period Paul was imprisoned in Rome, along with Ar-is-tar-chus, a key partner of Paul and E-pa-phras.

During this time period, the believers imprisoned in Rome read like a who's of Apostles and key Christian leaders.

Later there would be John-Mark, Tychicus, Timothy, and Titus with Luke and Onesimus ministering to them.

John, the beloved disciple, didn't follow the trend. He was imprisoned on Patmos and wrote much later than Peter and Paul.

Now, some commentators have questioned if Peter even wrote 2 Peter because the subject and style is unlike 1 Peter, but the purpose of 2 Peter was different than his first letter.

1 Peter was written to encourage Christians under the threat of violent persecution; 2 Peter was written to warn those same believers of the danger of false teachers and harmful influences.

Convinced that the best antidote for heresy is a mature knowledge of the truth, here Peter exhorts his readers to have a proper appreciation for prophecy.

He was encouraging them to live holy and godly lives while awaiting Christ's coming. He was telling them they must grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord.

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2 Peter 1:1-2, "Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord."

We know that Peter was a key figure in the early church since he was one of Jesus' Apostles.

He was on the mountain with Jesus at the transfiguration and even walked on water. He preached the Pentecost sermon when the Holy Spirit fell on the Jews that day.

Peter was there when the Holy Spirit came upon the Samaritans. He was there when the Holy Spirit came on the gentiles.

Peter and John told the lame man to get up and walk and after that miracle many thousands came to Christ in Jerusalem.

But Peter's not writing as someone who feels exalted or above the everyday Christian because of his fantastic experiences.

He's writing to those scattered believers whose standing, like his, was based on the righteousness of God after being saved by Jesus Christ. They were brothers and sisters with equal standing in Christ.

Yes, Peter's a hero of the faith, but so was every scattered Christian in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bi-thy-ni-a. They were all just like Peter... struggling and persecuted.

Peter was reminding them of their standing; that they were children of the King.

It would've been easy for them to look at their hardships or their isolated situation and have a skewed view of reality.

This is why they needed this reminder of who they were in Christ. In fact, we all need to be reminded of this from time to time.

How often do we need to be reminded that who we are in Christ is our identity and not our accomplishments. Have you walked on water, so to speak?

Did you have a mountain top spiritual experience that could rival what Peter experienced at the transfiguration? Well, if you have great, but that's not why you are who you are in Christ.

We all have the same standing before God as Peter because of the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

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2 Peter 1:3-4, "His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

Peter's reminding the scattered believers that they have everything they need to escape their situation. Now, he wasn't talking about persecution, even Peter isn't expecting to escape that.

There was something more important. They had everything they needed to escape the power of sinful corruption. If you want to live your life pleasing to God, you have everything you need.

All Christians undergoing persecution have received the same invitation to receive God's great promises.

Peter spells this out by explaining to these scattered Christians how to build on their Christian faith.

What does Peter tell them? He tells them to focus on their character, to build on their calling in Christ.

Our faith in Christ is just the beginning of our journey. Once we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we can be faithful and fruitful no matter what our situation.

Since Peter's in prison in Rome, he's not able to speak and lead the Jerusalem council like he did in earlier times, but from his prison cell he can abide in Christ. He can pray. He can trust God.

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2 Peter 1:5-9, *“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins.”*

Peter’s telling the believers that if you do these eight things, you’ll be effective and fruitful. It’s clearly stated here that if we don’t apply these characteristics to our life, we won’t be effective and fruitful.

Therefore, the first thing we must add to our faith is good character or goodness. Our character matters.

Did you know that a major portion of the New Testament was written by spiritual leaders who were in prison, living their lives by faith and Godly character.

We then need to add to our character, knowledge or spiritual understanding that comes from prayer and study of the Bible.

We glorify Christ when we’re generous and compassionate people who serve others. Our calling means we persevere through hard times.

If you don’t have these qualities: faith, *goodness* (virtue), *knowledge*, *self-control*, *perseverance* (steadfastness), *godliness*, *mutual affection* (brotherly affection), and *love*, then you’re spiritually near sighted.

If we lose sight of these qualities, we become spiritually blind. As he was awaiting execution he was burdened that all believers have these characteristics and walk with Christ in turbulent times.

When we know and apply this, then we too will walk with Christ in our own turbulent times. Peter's giving them, and us, a playbook to follow so that in the midst of persecution, come what may, they'll never fall.

Peter then shifts the focus from the hardship and circumstances they're facing to the spiritual.

2 Peter 1:10-11, "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ."

These are the eternal kingdom principles that will take them through anything and everything. This is what Peter's going to have to do as he is aware that his execution is coming soon.

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2 Peter 1:12-15, "So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body, because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things."

Even though Peter's death isn't recorded in scripture, there are some reliable historical accounts of how and when he died.

The "when" is shortly after he wrote this letter. The "how" of his death is by crucifixion.

The historians say that when Peter was to be crucified, he requested to be crucified upside down on an inverted cross.

This was to symbolize that he wasn't worthy to die in the same way as Jesus. To this day the symbol for Peter is the upside down cross.

Here, Peter is really living up to his name, The Rock, that Jesus gave him, but he wasn't always that way. Peter had his highs and lows.

It's been a long time since Peter was with Jesus, trying to understand what Jesus was telling him before His own death. Now, Peter's strengthening believers before his own death.

Peter's last letter wasn't written to give some new teaching, it was to remind the Christians of the truth that was already established.

Peter understood that he would soon depart and be with Christ, but if he could leave fruitful and effective Christians behind his purpose would be fulfilled.

He was looking toward heaven, remembering the glimpse of the future glory he received at the transfiguration.

It all about establishing these scattered Christians before he departs. Peter's reminding them of how to walk with Christ and how Jesus will be there for them after he is dead and gone.

In these next few verses Peter solemnly declares that the testimony of the Apostles, the testimony they endured torture and gave their lives for, was not based on clever fables or even half truths, but on eyewitness testimony of Jesus' majesty.

2 Peter 1: 16-18, "For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

He received honor and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the Majestic Glory, saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain."

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Conclusion

Peter was emphasizing that what he's telling them is the prophetic Word, and that it came from God, not man. He's affirming that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the shining light that pierces the darkness.

2 Peter 1: 19-21, "We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation of things. For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit."

This Bible we have from God takes us to creation to the fall of man. It tells of the inability of the law to save us, to the coming messiah to the birth of Jesus, to his death and resurrection.

Then it tells of the ascension, to the coming of the Holy Spirit, to the good news going to the ends of the earth, and the return of Christ. The Gospel is the Word of God.

We have the sure Word from the Holy Spirit. This is the Word of God from heaven. We'll do well to keep focused on it.

When you put your faith in Christ, you're part of God's royal family. Remember, we still live in turbulent times, therefore we must apply all of these basic teaching to our life as we walk with Christ.

This is the reminder Peter gave to the scattered Christians and it is also his reminder to us today.