

Route 66

1 Peter: Bless Your Cursors

Part 60 – June 19, 2011



Peter writes this letter from Rome “with the help of Silas”, (5:12) Paul’s missionary partner, most likely while Paul is under arrest there.

She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. – 1 Peter 5:13 NIV



“She” is a church. And “Babylon” is a Jewish nickname for Rome; because the Romans, like the Babylonians, had invaded and exploited Israel. “Mark” served as Peter’s assistant in Rome, and helped him write the action-packed Gospel of Mark, which technically is the Gospel of *Peter*. And now, as he opens this letter, he calls his readers to ...



Jerusalem evacuation, June 1948

... prepare your minds for action ... – 1 Peter 1:13 NIV

In James, we saw that the persecuted Jewish *believers* had fled Jerusalem en masse, and had become a *scattered flock* among the nations. Remember after the resurrection, how Jesus upset Peter by repeatedly asking him to feed His flock?

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.” Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.” – John 21:17b NIV



Peter spent the later part of his life travelling far and wide, through Turkey, Greece, and Rome, to feed God’s sheep, both Jew and Gentile.

To God’s elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout **Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia** ... **[Roman provinces in Turkey]** – 1 Peter 1:1b NIV



Living as “strangers in the world” is a theme in this letter. Our home is Heaven! Therefore, hope and joy are only strengthened by what we suffer during our short stay in this dying world. When a loved one is alive, we have a hope and joy of reuniting in Heaven. But when they die, and *all we have* is that hope and joy, it deepens and intensifies into something else entirely.

[God] has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you ... In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. – 1 Peter 1:3b-4,6 NIV

The Jewish believers, who escaped Jewish persecution in Jerusalem, are now facing non-Jewish persecution with the *gentile* believers. We can't escape the trials, we can only exchange them.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. – 1 Peter 4:12 NIV

It's a broken world filled with broken people. What'd you expect?

Do you know why the early Christians were so persecuted? Because they were "atheists" and "unpatriotic" "evildoers"! At least, that's how the culture of their day saw it. The gentiles worshipped a gallery of gods in socially collective albeit corrupt ways. And they took offense when a newly saved neighbor suddenly denied the gods and deserted their customs.



For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do – living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. – 1 Peter 4:3-4 NIV

Ever had a friend or colleague take offense or give you a hard time for bowing out of something that violated your conscience? Anyone ever misunderstand or mischaracterize your views as being judgmental, unloving, or even detrimental to society?

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world ... Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God ... – 1 Peter 2:11a, 12a NIV

Two horrific rumors quickly spread about these outsiders who met in secret to practice their illegal *Christianity*. They practice cannibalism (Whenever they gather, they eat the "body" and drink the "blood" as part of their ritual). They practice incest (they're all "brothers" and "sisters"). This is in part why Peter writes:

For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. – 1 Peter 2:15 NIV

Each community had a protective deity (and pagan gods are *easily* angered). So famine, fire, or flood, poor crop, earthquake, or plague, guess who got blamed for provoking the wrath of the gods! The atheists! The evildoers! Recorded outbreaks of harsh persecution often coincide with recorded natural disasters.



Nero, 54 - 68 AD

And it didn't help that Christians were viewed as traitors. Emperor worship was the official religion, and believers refused to perform this patriotic duty. The community at large couldn't comprehend how a Christian could be capable of submitting to Caesar while refusing to honor him with worship. It's the early 60's, Nero is lethal and loony ... and emperor. And in a few short years he'll have both Peter and Paul put to death. Yet, look how Peter directs their attitude toward Nero:

Submit yourselves **for the Lord's sake** to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors ... - 1 Peter 2:13-14a NIV

As believers we tend to get Peter's advice exactly backward. Unlike a stranger or an alien, believers will say things like, "Look what they're doing to *my* country!" And then turn around and say, "He's not *my* president!" or "She's not *my* governor!"



"Behold the Man" by Ciser, c. 1880

For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. ... To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. - 1 Peter 2:19,21 NIV

We don't choose what we suffer, just how we respond.

You'll never reflect Jesus more powerfully or convincingly than when you suffer unjustly and *bless* those responsible.

Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called ... - 1 Peter 3:9a NIV

Peter isn't saying *not* to stand up for truth; he's telling us *how* to stand up for truth as aliens in a lost and dying world.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. - 1 Peter 3:15b-16 NIV

What exactly is this "hope that you have"?

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed [restored]. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. - 1 Peter 2:24-25 NIV

Oh! I have to show you a picture of our Shepherd, but first ... What's "the reason" for this hope? How can we trust that our sin no longer separates us from the Overseer of our soul? Jesus' death and resurrection! He died to remove it and rose to prove it.



And all who've "returned to the Shepherd" have become what the Priests and Pharisees refused: His representatives to this world.

But you are a **chosen people**¹, a **royal priesthood**², a **holy nation**³, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. - 1 Peter 2:9 NIV

1. He chose you *before* you chose Him!
2. You are the King's priest, representing God to the people (by your conduct) and the people to God (by your prayers).
3. Instruments of worship were declared holy when they were completely devoted to God's service in the temple.



I have to show you that picture of the Shepherd who's not in darkness but in the light, but first and finally ... Peter closes with two cautionary commands. The first is this:

Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. - 1 Peter 5:8 NIV

Lionesses do most of the hunting. After they overcome their prey, the male lion steps in, roars his authority, and eats first. A rogue lion has been defeated by a challenger and cast out of his pride. The rogue prowls around roaring with no authority, looking for a weak, young, isolated, or preoccupied victim. To be "self-controlled" and "alert" simply means to stay off the dark path where the old rogue likes to prowl; and stay in the light with the Overseer of your soul.



I should show you that photo of our Shepherd; He's not what you'd expect. The Shepherd we return to is the Lion of Judah! But, there's something can preoccupy, weaken, and isolate us on the dark path of the rogue if we're not intentional about surrendering it. Worry. It's a form of pride in that it offers a false sense of control over the uncontrollable trials and people in our lives.

And this is Peter's other cautionary command:

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. - 1 Peter 5:6-7 NIV

We humble ourselves by turning over all our fake control to God. And in the midst of our trials, we convert our worry list into a prayer list, and put our trust in His power, "God's mighty hand"; His timing, "in due time"; and, His love, "he cares for you".