**‘HIS’ STORY 14 - 1 PETER & 2 PETER – The Books of Peter**

On Sept 2nd 1666 there was a great fire in London. It began in a bakers oven in a back street and as most of the houses were timber frames it burned quickly. 200,000 people lost their homes, 90 churches were destroyed including St Pauls cathedral which was rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren. Blamed wrongly for the fire were the Catholics. In AD 64 another fire started in Rome which burned for 3 days wiping out much of the city again destroying temples and houses. The Emperor was Nero and many thought he started the fire to clear the ground for his building program but he decided it was these Christian followers of Jesus who were to blame…so began the most intense persecution of the church. Believers were tortured, and sewn into animal skins and then hunted by wild animals in the amphitheatre. Nero had some believers covered in oil and set alight as torches for his entertainment. It was against this backdrop that Peter writes these two Pastoral Epistles to encourage people to stand firm.

When the word ‘pastoral’ is used today it often implies that we feel all nice and warm and cared for – in fact, the opposite is the case. Being pastoral means telling the truth in love and the truth Peter conveys is that **life is not going to get better** in this world until we reach heaven. If you’re a follower of Jesus your life is going to come under *scrutiny and testing.* Now I want you to remember who Peter was – and why these books are so remarkable. From an impetuous passionate fisherman who failed publicly, so badly so that he would come to think there was no way back….and he goes back fishing, only to be confronted by Jesus on the beach and recommissioned. Jesus didn’t put him on probation or give him a role as a parking attendant, he said ‘upon you, I will build my church’…and the gates of hell will not prevail! Feed my sheep…do the job I called you to do. The books of 1 and 2 Peter answer this question - how can we live in this kind of world turmoil? The Answer - **With a *living hope.***

I’m caught with the **desire to make life here comfortable** and the realisation that as a follower of Jesus I’m also walking a road of discomfort to a **foreign destination** that I cannot see. The **recipients** of this letter were mostly **Jewish Christian refugees** who had been forced to leave their homes and cities and find a new place to live because of severe persecution and opposition. Can you imagine a refugee family from Syria reading these books and finding comfort and strength in them at this time?

Here is the essential message of 1 and 2 Peter. 4 things.

**1. The Permanence of God’s Heaven**

Peter reminds these people – you are **temporary residents** of this world. You are going to face **testing, trial, and opposition,** and what you need to know is that when this happens – there is **deep gold** in your life that will come to the surface.

**Malachai 3.3** *‘He will sit as refiner and purifier of silver and he will purify the sons of Levi.”*

Have you not found this also to be true? What happens when we come through hard times? We reflect on **what really matters** to us, and God speaks to us, he draws near to us, there is the touch of his hand on our lives amid the pressure and heat of the testing time. He is refining us and bringing to the surface the gold…..which is where the true value lies. He is changing us deeply so we can in turn be a blessing to others.

What Peter is saying is to **allow the permanence of heaven to be where your real home** is. Peter doesn’t tell these believers how to escape suffering and persecution but how to endure it. And to endure it by focussing on the central themes to their redemption….that here is not our real home. Peter says - What we face here is but for **short time**.

We spend our time trying to **avoid as much pain** and testing as we can. We **line our lives with what we believe will bring us comfort** and have this thinking that your will is that we are happy and free from problems, yet here you’re telling us that we **should rejoice in** tests and trials because in them we get to meet you! Peter says there is a **priceless inheritance** –

Kept in heaven for you (waiting), meanwhile you will have to endure trials and testing’s that will **prove whether your faith is real or not**. This is interesting….the **true test of real faith** is not how many gifts of the Spirit you exercise, not how generous you are with your money and time or any other number of things – it is whether you can withstand trial and testing, discomfort and opposition. **1:17** “Live as temporary residents” and **remember what it has cost God to rescue ‘ransom’ your life**.

When I see that word **ransom** I think ‘stick them up’…we are kidnapping you and someone will pay a ransom to get you back! **1:18** “Give us the money and you can go free”! But it was the sacrifice of his Son Jesus that God the Father paid for our freedom. Last week’s marathon message on Hebrews reminded us that Jesus was both the ‘offerer and the offering’. Incidentally, who did God pay the ransom to? He paid it to himself so that his holiness was not compromised by our sin and we could come into his presence. **Who else could pay the price** he would demand for our sin and failures? Only Jesus. Remember last week – the high priest and the sin offering was the ransom God demanded for our lives. So that’s the first thing….the permanence of God’s heaven….life here is like grass; here today gone tomorrow. **1:24-25**

So what is permanent in this whirlwind of life? God’s purposes. **2.11** Peter reminds us again…there is a **war on** against your souls. Everything around you pulls you earthwards to live for the here and now. This is all there is – it’s a lie. No – says Peter **Heaven is where your destination** is, you are temporary residents. And when I am facing tough times – that’s the message I need to be reminded of.

The second thing Peter reminds us is:

**2. The Positioning of God’s Cornerstone - Jesus**

Peter tells us **‘You are God’s building’**….God’s dwelling place on earth. Keep **growing** and keep **living your new life.** Bring your **life into alignment** and positioning with **who Jesus is**. Some years ago when I did a major renovation on our house, I employed a builder to set up the framing – because I know this, that if you get the alignment wrong in the early stages of building – it compounds the problem exponentially! You are being built into a temple with Jesus as the cornerstone, from which the whole building is **measured and built straight**. It is against him and who he is that you measure your life. When I recently built my caravan park, before I concreted the posts in and Matthew Osborne came around with a fancy piece of machinery that set levels on the posts – red lights flashed and marks were made but all based on the position of the R2D2 star wars shiny thing he put on the ground. Is your life aligned correctly with Jesus?

And inside this building, God is making you ***serve as*** a **living priest**….bringing offerings of worship. **But this cornerstone called Jesus will be either** a **blessing or a stumbling block**.

It will either cause you to bow your knee or you will stumble over it. **2:8** And how many people have found this to be true. They hear about who Jesus is and what he has done for us, but somehow they stumble over choosing to receive his forgiveness.

They stumble because they cannot get their heads around that what Jesus offers **cannot be bought** or earned…. But it is *received*. Remember to **live out what you believe**. Home, Church and workplace and in your relationships. There is teaching for husbands, wives, slaves, and young men. Use your **gifting with passion**. Love people deeply from your heart. Let your faith be real among those you relate to. How do I do that? Well, align your life to Jesus. Now comes 2 Peter and something else is added.

**3. The Promise of God’s Rescue 2 Peter 2:9**

The message of 2 Peter is clear that we have a choice to make, but not making a choice is also a choice! We either receive God’s plan to rescue us or we place ourselves under his judgement. **This verse 2 Peter 2:9 tells me*….”The Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials”.*** There is nothing you and I face that God cannot get us out of and that he does not know about.

Of these intense trials Peters says:

* Make sure you don’t deserve it – live your lives in a godly way
* Don’t take revenge on those who oppose you
* Don’t let the opposition get inside your head

**Cast yourselves on God – and let Him sustain you.** 2 Peter says **False teaching will infiltrate the Church** - that there will be a **massive deception in the final days** before Jesus returns and that deception will infiltrate the church. People who claim to know Jesus will adopt beliefs that suit their chosen lifestyle.People will use **liberty and freedom as a licence** for living how they want to….underneath their professing of faith will be greed, self-indulgence, lust and indulging of anything that satisfies their desires. Pride and arrogance will mark their **self-justifying behaviours**. And get this, many will follow this way. People will **mock and scoff** at those who declare Jesus as their Lord. Saying things like. ”Y*ou say you believe in Jesus why does this happen”? Where is God now? Why is your God so slow to turn up and come back?**As it was in the days of Noah….so shall it be.*

**One of the most difficult verses** in the Bible is found in this book. **2 Peter 3:19**

How does the sacrifice of Jesus work backwards (retrospectively) from the cross to those who lived earlier? Jesus’s gospel was preached to those who refused to believe through Noah’s preaching during his boat building! Did these get a second chance? No – because here is the flip side of this story – they had already made their minds up and refused – only 8 people got on board that boat and all were rescued! So the message from here is - get on board because the boat will save you. And by embarking you are doing what baptism does – declaring where your allegiance lies.

If there is any question about **who wrote this book then look at 2 Peter 1:17** there were only a few who went on that mountain top with Jesus….Peter was one. Now I want you to think for a minute…..who was the most outspoken, unstable, quick-tempered disciple? Peter…..do you see what has happened?

Peter writes these two books after God has worked on him for some years! He has learned and been shaped by Gods power in his life. I think this is a reminder to us that – God is not fazed by our passion or impulsiveness, neither is he impressed by our outspoken fearlessness. He is more interested in shaping the underneath of our lives from where both our greatest successes and failures come. This is what happened to Peter – the humiliation of his public failure(s) drove him towards the arms of God’s grace.

Years have gone by and Peter has become the rock, now even testings, trials, and suffering no longer terrify him. He is living for something out of this world. He has put his faith in the three things: *The Permanence of God’s Heaven, The Positioning of God’s Cornerstone, and The Promise of God’s Rescue and then in 2 Peter The Practice of Spiritual Maturity.*

**4. The Practice of Spiritual Maturity**

**2 Peter takes all the themes** of 1 Peter and proposes that God is up to something *underneath* all these trials. He is growing his people from the inside out. Bringing them into maturity through tough times.

The great verse – ***faith hope and love*** comes from here….

**Faith** in the word of God

**Hope** in pursuing a godly walk – virtue/ self-control/ patience/ godliness/ brotherly kindness.

**Love** in the community of God’s people.

***SO HERES MY STATEMENTS FOR SUMMING UP 1 AND 2 PETER.***

***And while the scoffer mocks - the believer bets his life on a future he cannot quite grasp, he aligns his life to following Jesus whom he cannot see and he gambles his life on a rescue mission he cannot control….And come what may, trials, testings, fire and persecution – you prepare yourself for the party to come.***

So when the **heat comes on your life**….it starts to cost you, choose to follow Jesus.

What will you do? Will you meet him amid the fire and find that the trial and testing is the refining of his hand on your life?

**Will you humble yourself under his mighty hand…..or will you stumble**?

Fall away as many have done and more will do.

***A living God wants to give you a living hope…today!***