September 23/24, 2017

Chosen For Love

Hope Filled Living in a Culture of Despair

1 Peter 1:22-2:10

Pastor Bryan Clark

Just hours before Jesus was to be arrested, he washed the disciples' feet, including Peter. Shortly after that he said something kind of odd. He said, *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you."* He followed that up by saying, *"By this, all people will know that you are my disciples."* What's kind of odd about that is why is that a new commandment? The commandment to love your neighbor as yourself had been around for hundreds of years. What is *new* about that? And what is it that allows the Christ follower to love at such a level that is *other than* what is possible without Christ, that it actually becomes the distinguishing mark of a follower of Jesus? I would suggest to you that in that moment in the upper room, Peter had virtually no idea how to answer those questions. But thirty years later he would write a beautiful theologically-rich explanation of the answer to those questions.

That's what we want to talk about this morning. If you have a Bible, turn with us to 1 Peter, Chapter 1. We have been working our way through 1 Peter. We find ourselves in Chapter 1, Verse 22. I mentioned last week the importance of understanding Christianity is not a try-harder religion. It is understanding what God has done for us through Christ, then believing that, and based on a new belief system, there is an outflow of new behavior. I mentioned last week Paul writes his letters that way with the frontend loaded with doctrine and the backend loaded with application. Peter does it a little differently; he keeps weaving the two together back and forth through the whole letter, and that is evident in our text this morning. So Verse 22:

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls… (*NASB, 1 Peter 1:22a)

So this is past tense. The Greek grammar is the perfect tense which means something that happened in the past, but has ongoing ramifications. Since verses 3-12 are true, you have been radically born again on the basis of the mercies of God. **In obedience to the truth** basically is Peter's language for having believed the gospel. You'll see him use this terminology consistently. To obey is to believe; to disobey is to disbelieve. So on the basis of our belief—our acceptance of the gospel—our souls have been **purified**. It's temple language. He uses that a lot in his letter. In verse 2 he talked about *sprinkled with the blood*, which is temple language. Last week in a previous paragraph he talked about *the blood of the lamb*, which is temple language. Here again, temple language: on the basis of our obedience—our belief in the gospel—we have been *cleansed* from the sin that defined us, so we stand righteous in the presence of a holy God. But it is *for* something. Whenever you read through the Bible, we are always called, chosen, saved *for* something. It is not ever an end to itself, but *for* something. In this case,

...for a sincere or genuine love of the brethren, fervently love one another... (Vs. 22b)

So if that's what we're saved *for*, you get to the commandment: then do it **fervently**, passionately. It's the word that was used to describe Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he was praying. It is a very strong term. It's kind of *get your game face on* and do it. If you are saved for it, then do it:

…fervently love one another from the heart, (Vs. 22c)

Why?

for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and enduring word of God. For,

"ALL FLESH IS LIKE GRASS,
AND ALL ITS GLORY LIKE THE FLOWER OF GRASS.
THE GRASS WITHERS,
AND THE FLOWER FALLS OFF,
BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD ENDURES FOREVER."
And this is the word which was preached to you. (Vs. 23-25)

Again, the basis by which we love is not trying harder, it's that we have been radically changed; we have been born again through a seed which is imperishable. The idea of a perishable seed is illustrated in the quotation from Isaiah Chapter 40: Life in the flesh, life apart from the imperishable seed of God is like **grass**; it's like a **flower**—*here today, gone tomorrow*. But when that's all we have, it creates these fears, these insecurities, this hopelessness, this despair. It creates this performance-based system because everything about it is self-oriented. When I'm in charge of my own safety and my own security, when I'm functioning as my own god, the system requires me to be selfish, to be focused on myself. I am self-righteous; I am self-sufficient; I am selfish. That's really the only option on the table until we have been set free from that orientation that defines us. That's the result of the *perishable seed*—that's who we are apart from Christ. What makes us dramatically different is when we have been born again by an *imperishable seed*, now everything we've talked about in verses 3-12 is true of us, not based on our performance, but based on the grace and mercy of God. That completely changes our orientation and allows us to be set free to actually love one another. What was different about Jesus' commandment? "A *new* commandment I give to you," is that Jesus said, "You love one another *as I have loved you*." That was virtually not possible until God fulfilled the promise of salvation—that we might be radically born again and all those longings and desires and insecurities could be addressed in who we are now in Christ, and our hope is found in Him. Now that we have been set free from the selfishness that defined us, it is possible to love one another at a whole new level. That's in essence what Jesus was talking about there.

So when we're talking about loving one another, what exactly are we talking about? It's helpful to remind ourselves biblical love is not defined by a feeling. It doesn't mean we gather together and have kind of warm, fuzzy feelings about each other. That's probably not realistic. Biblical love is a commitment of the will; it's a choice I make to think of someone else as more important than myself, to stop thinking about myself all day long and to think of others which is really not possible until we have experienced the new birth in Christ. There are a lot of good deeds that unsaved people do, but at the end of the day it's rooted in self-orientation. It's about their own shame; it's about their own guilt; it's about their own self-righteousness; it's about a feeling they want to get. At the end of the day, it roots back to something selfish within them that is driving the action, and it's only when we have been radically changed by the power of Jesus that something real and dramatic within us changes, and we choose to love one another.

Now let's face the fact that the church is made up of people—sinners and misfits and losers—who have been made right by the power of Jesus. The fact is people are quirky...are odd...are a little bit weird. I know I am. It's true of all of us, isn't it? We're all kind of quirky and weird. I've often thought if something ever happened to Patti, I doubt I could remarry. I can't imagine letting someone else into the weird world that is Bryan. We all are odd in our own ways. And yet at the end of the day, what brings us together is our understanding of what is true of us in Christ: that every single one of us who has trusted Christ as Savor—what is described in Verses 3-12— is equally true of all of us. We learn to see one another through a new lens, a lens of theology that describes how absolutely magnificent we are in Christ.

One of the things that our world, our culture is really struggling with is there is this growing sense of tension between peoples. There's more anger. There's more racial tension. You kind of feel all this stuff unraveling. There's this desperate desire to somehow bring us together, but it's not getting better; it's getting worse. And what people don't realize is a secular worldview does not have a belief system that pulls people together. It actually has a belief system that repels people. It's so selfish and protective and self-oriented that ultimately it's only going to create more and more anger, more and more conflict. I'm not a prophet, but I would suggest to you it's going to get a lot worse before it gets better if we continue down this path.

However, the Christian worldview actually has a belief system by which we come together. First of all, we believe that all people are created equally in the image of God; nobody *more than,* nobody *less than.* But for those who by faith have trusted Christ as Savior, we all stand equally righteous in the presence of a holy God because it's not based on our performance; it's based on who we are in Christ. Therefore it's irrelevant if you're black or white, male or female, rich or poor, if you're two months into the journey or fifty years into the journey. We all stand equal before a holy God on the basis of the righteousness of Christ. Therefore, it's a belief system by which we come together as one people to love one another. That is kind of the unique thing that distinguishes us as the people of God from those who choose not to believe.

Now I have to say, the older I get, the more weary I am becoming of Christians who are so cynical about the church. I expect that from unbelievers. Cynicism is a position of superiority. Somehow those that are cynical believe somehow they've figured it out and they sit in a position of superiority above everybody else who apparently can't figure it out. And for those who are so cynical, a good starting place to gain some perspective is perhaps to look in the mirror and realize that they have their own struggles and baggage. They don't sit superior. They're no better; they're no worse, but we all come equally on the basis of who we are in Christ together as the people of God, and that's how we should view one another. I grant you, if you want to find hypocrites in the church, you can. They're in every church. Frankly, they're in every gathering of people anywhere in the universe. I acknowledge that. Nobody's ever said the church is a gathering of perfect people. But I'll also tell you this: If you're willing to open up your eyes and look, the church is full of wonderful, serious, God-honoring Christ followers. This weekend thousands of people will walk through these doors who love Jesus. They are serious about their faith. Some are new believers; some are mature believers, but they are people that sincerely want their lives to matter. Every week they lay their lives down. They sacrifice a considerable amount of time, talent and treasure to invest in the things that will last forever. They deeply care about representing Christ out into the marketplace, the community, the schools and the neighborhoods and their families. They're people who sacrifice a great deal to make a difference in the world, and those people are all around you if you choose to

look. I tell you this morning, unapologetically, "I love the church and I love *this* church. This church is full of people who wonderfully model what it means to be a Christ follower." I will tell you this, "One of the great privileges of my life is the opportunity I have to call you people, my family {*clapping*}. We are the people of God, called out and made radically new by the power of Jesus, and our calling is to fervently love one another, which goes to Chapter 2, Verse 1:

> **Therefore,…(**because this is true)**…putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander…**

So the question would be, "Well what exactly, practically speaking, does this love look like?" What Peter offers is a clothing metaphor. *Putting off* is like taking off articles of clothing, and then he lists five things that we *put aside*. These are behaviors that should not define us. **Malice** is kind of like mean-spiritedness, being unkind to others. **Deceit** is literally a Greek term that was used to describe the baiting of a hook or the baiting of a trap. Those of us that love to fish understand that fishing is the art of deception, and that's ultimately what this word is referring to. Deceit is *half-truths*; it's *deception*. Not only have we as a culture abandoned the concept of absolute truth, we by and large abandoned the concept of truth. We just lie as a way of life. As long as our version of truth advances our cause, then that's good enough for us. We live in a culture where everybody lies. The government lies; the politicians lie; the media lies; the schools lie; the preachers lie; husbands lie; wives lie; everybody lies as a way of life, and this is devastating our culture. There is no possibility of cultivating genuine love in a culture of lies and deceit. It requires that we are people of truth. **Put aside...hypocrisy.** It's a theatre term. It means *to wear a mask or to play a role*. It's pretending to be one thing at church and something else at home or out in the marketplace. If we're going to be people of love, then we're authentic; we're genuine. **Envy and slander**—those are kind of cousins. **Envy** is *I'm jealous of something*. I'm jealous of who you are, your status, your money, your stuff, your looks, your power, your position...whatever. **Slander** is, as a result of that, *I talk you down to other people*. So you can kind of turn it around and take the positive. What does it mean to sincerely love? Well, we are *kind-hearted* to one another, we are *truthful*, we are *genuine*, we *celebrate one another*, and we *build one another up* with our talk. Verse 2:

> **…like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.** (Vs. 2-3)

Basically Peter reaffirms that what's necessary to *live* this way, what's necessary to *love* this way is that we feed on the word of God. You have to understand it; you have to believe it, and then the outflow is behavior. So how is this love possible if you are not feeding on the word of God in order to nourish your soul? He uses the imagery, the metaphor *like a baby longing for milk.* The word of God is to us spiritually what milk is to a baby physically. Now that's a great metaphor that leads me to offer the suggestion of an experiment. A lot of Christians are dissatisfied with their Christian life. It feels kind of dull and boring and it doesn't really work for them; they kind of get frustrated, "Why isn't it different?" And yet for some reason there is a disconnect—they spend very little time feeding on the word of God and then they wonder why their spiritual lives are so malnourished.

So here's a way to think about it: I want you to think about this last week and, honestly, how many times did you spend feeding on the word of God—not the little blip on the radio—but actually opening up the book and spending some time feeding on the word of God? So let's say you were

here last week, so we'll count that; that's a really good option. That's once. So maybe one other time during the week let's say that you opened up the Bible and actually spent some time reading it and trying to nourish your soul. So, twice in a week? Let's go with that. So here's the experiment: This coming week—however many times you partook of the word of God last week— match that with how many times you eat food this coming week. So two times is not two times a day; it's two times. So over the next seven days, eat twice and notice the effect on your physical body. Notice the loss of energy; notice the struggle, the distraction. Notice everything that goes with that, and then maybe get a clue that neglect of the food of the word of God has an equal effect on your ability to grow spiritually. That's in essence what Peter just said. Verse 4:

> **And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For *this* is contained in Scripture:**
>
> **"BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*,**
> **AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."**
> **This precious value, then, is for you who believe.** (Vs. 4-7a)

So for all believers, there is the fulfillment of the promise of Jesus. When Jesus said to the religious leaders, *"You tear down this temple and I will rebuild it in three days*," what Jesus was referring to is not the rebuilding of a physical temple but the rebuilding of a spiritual house that is made up of living stones, with Him being the chief Corner stone, the stone upon which this new living building is built. So the text tells us we came to *The* living stone, but we too are living stones that He is using to build together a spiritual house. Often you hear Christians refer to themselves as the *temple of God*, and that is true; there are a couple passages that reflect that. But the overwhelming majority of passages in the New Testament reflect that we, together, are the new house of God. It's not who we are individually; it's who we are together—the building stones, the living stones that make up this new house of God. It is really important to understand that *this* is not the house of God; *we* are the house of God. There is nothing spiritual about this building when it's empty. It's only spiritual when the church is here. Technically you don't *go* to church; you *are* the church. We are the church gathered and we are the church scattered when we go out into the marketplace, neighborhoods, and schools during the week. It's now a living house of God.

It refers to us then as a **holy priesthood.** It's probably hard for us to grasp the imagery like they would have in the first century. For those who had lived during the time of the temple, who understood that the presence of God was housed in the Holy of Holies in the temple, that sacrifices, that worship, that access to God had to go through the priest, and the people could only experience so much and then it was passed on to the priest. Only once a year the high priest would enter into the ultimate presence of God—the Holy of Holies—on Yom Kippur. But when Jesus was crucified, the veil that separated the Holy of Holies was torn in two, representing the fact that now we as God's children are the **priests**. We no longer have a mediator; there is no one between us and God other than Jesus Christ. There was no longer a two-tiered system with some clergy class that has more access to God than you do. You're the priest; you offer your sacrifice to God. You have access into the very presence of God 24/7. It's actually a remarkable thing. We learned in verses 3-12 that what we as this generation since the resurrection of Christ experienced is what the prophets longed for. They wondered: who would be the generation that would actually live in the fulfillment

of these promises? We were told it is so magnificent the angels long to look and to watch the fulfillment of these promises. We take so much for granted that *we are* the generation that live in the fulfillment of these promises; we function as believer priests with direct access into the presence of God.

For those of you that might be visiting with us this morning from another church, there are a couple of things to think about: If you are part of a church or a denomination that claims they are the only church or the only way to God, if they claim that you need them as a church or a denomination to get to God, run...RUN! You will never find your freedom in Christ in a place that believes what is so theologically incorrect. If you attend a church and the impression is that somehow the pastor, the minister, the priest has more access to God than you do, and somehow you have to go through that pastor, minister or priest in order to gain something from God, my advice…RUN! It's simply wrong; it's bad theology. Now on the basis of the shed blood of Jesus, you are a living stone making up the new spiritual house of God, and you yourself function as a believer priest with direct access into the presence of God. It's such a wonderful truth we're left with, well who would possibly then not believe this? Well, the second part of Verse 7:

> **...but for those who disbelieve,** (meaning they disbelieve the message of he gospel)
>
> **"THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED,**
> **THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*,"**
> **and,**
>
> **"A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE";**
>
> **for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed.** (Vs. 7b-8)

There's no question who the rulers are. Jesus actually quoted this same passage when he walked on this earth, and he identified the rulers that rejected the **Corner stone** that God chose as precious as the religious leaders of the day. Religion is about position; it's about power; it's about status; it's about control. It's about needing the religion and the religious leaders to somehow get to God. In the first century the Jewish religious leaders ran the show. You had to have them; you had to have their religion; you had to have their position and power to have any access to God. They were wealthy; they were powerful; they were in control; they had it all figured out. Then along comes God's choice, precious Corner stone to begin to build a new spiritual house that was not based on a bunch of religious activity. It was based on the grace and mercy of God—that apart from religion, if anyone would choose to believe by faith, they could be radically *born again in Christ*. This completely undercut the power, the position and the control of their religious system. So the rulers rejected, they were offended by, they stumbled over this new choice living Corner stone which was Christ—the one that God Himself had sent to fulfill the promise of salvation.

Have you ever asked yourself, "Why in today's world is Christianity uniquely set apart for criticism and attack?" Once again in 2016 research showed that the demographic of people in the world that were most persecuted around the world were Christians. Why is that? Why is it that even in our own country people seem to bend over backwards to explain away even the worst behavior by people who are religious unless they're Christians? Christians are uniquely targeted for criticism and even persecution. Why is that? The answer is because what every world religion has in common is it is

based on a form of *self-righteousness* which allows people to keep their own self-righteous ways intact. What is dramatically different about the message of the gospel is it starts with the message, "You are a sinner." People stumble over that; people are offended by that. "How dare you say that. Who are you to say that I'm a sinner?" The message of the gospel goes on to say, "And by the way, you cannot save yourself." Self-righteousness will not do. Therefore, there is only one hope and that is to believe that this living chief Corner stone choice, precious in the sight of God—Jesus Himself—is the only way of salvation. The culture reacts to that. They stumble over that. They stumble over the claim that they're sinners; they stumble over the claim they can't save themselves, and they stumble over this idea that Jesus is the one and only way of salvation. Therefore, they **disbelieve**; they reject the message of the gospel. What was true in the first century is equally true today—people are offended and stumble over this message. But to those who believe, it is the message of salvation. It is the life-changing message of the gospel. He ends this part of the discussion in verse 9 by pulling phrases from the old covenant and identifying us today as the fulfillment of these words.

But you are **A CHOSEN RACE, A** royal **PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR** *God's* **OWN POSSESSION…** (Vs. 9a)

A CHOSEN RACE because we root back to one seed, the imperishable seed of Christ. **A royal PRIESTHOOD**...we already talked about that; we are believer priests. **A HOLY NATION**—citizens of heaven, aliens on earth—one nation, the people of God. But I think my favorite is that we are ***God's* OWN POSSESSION.**

One way to think about this…the world is full of several billion people. I have lots of friends; I have lots of acquaintances; I have lots of people I know that know me. But of the billions of people on planet earth, there are three that are uniquely special to me because they belong to me. One of the greatest privileges for me in life is the opportunity to be a dad, and there are only three people on planet earth, out of the billions of people that live here, that can genuinely call me dad, that are unique and special to me because they are mine. They are my children. This is in essence what Peter is saying. Out of the billions of people on earth and all the people that have ever lived, there is a group of people—a very special people—chosen, called out, and radically redeemed—that God says, "You, out of all these people on planet earth are my special possession. You belong to me." It is powerful imagery.

> Why? **...so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him** (in other words, bring glory to the One) **who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.** (Vs. 9b-10)

Why? In order that we might declare to the world that we have been transferred **out of darkness into light**. At one time, we were nothing more than sinners, misfits, and losers; now we are the people of God. At one time we were people under condemnation; now we have **received mercy**. The calling to love flows out of what is true of us now in Christ. *How do we declare the excellencies of God? How do we declare that we have been transferred from darkness to light? In how we love one another*! By this the world will know that you are my disciples—set free from our selfishness, set free from our self-sufficiency, set free from our self-righteousness, but also understanding that when my days are defined by fear, by anxiety, by despair and by hopelessness,

that requires me to be self-focused. The problem with these negative emotions is I just think about myself all day long; I think about how everything in the world affects *me*. But to ultimately find my hope in Christ that is safe and secure is because it's not based on my performance, but it's based on the grace and mercy of God, when ultimately my hope is found in Christ. I can be set free from myself and actually free to think of others as more important than myself—to actually, genuinely *love my neighbor as myself*. The invitation to salvation is an invitation into the love that has defined God for eternity: the Father loving the Son, the Son loving the Spirit, the Spirit loving the Father. This is the life and the love that has defined God forever, and salvation is the invitation into that love. It's an invitation to dance with God to the music of *Amazing Grace*. But we don't dance alone. It is an invitation to come together as the people of God, to dance together in the presence of God, to declare the excellencies of the One who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light. My prayer is that we, having understood and believed the gospel, will dance together in the presence of God...for we *are* the people of God!

Our Father, we celebrate this magnificent truth this morning. God, I'm so thankful for this gathering of believers that is Your bride, that is Your church. Lord, we once weren't your people. We were just sinners and misfits and losers, but today we are Your people. At one time, we were under condemnation. Today we have received Your mercy. We dance together in Your presence joyfully for we are the people of God in Jesus' name, Amen.

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Chosen to Love

Hope-filled Living in a Culture of Despair

1 Peter 1:22-2:10

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. Do you believe Christianity is viewed like any other religion in our culture or is it criticized differently than the other religions of the world? Why is that?

2. What does despair, fear, anxiety and hopelessness do to us? How does this affect our ability to love others? How do these negative emotions make us selfish?

Bible Study

1. Read I Peter 1:22-25. According to these verses what were we chosen for? Notice the word "since" that opens verse 22. Since what is true we should then what? Why does the truth of 1:3-12 free us to love like Jesus?

2. How do the words of this paragraph, especially verses 24 and 25, bring hope to people who were aliens and undergoing persecution? How do these words help us deal with our struggles today?

3. Read I Peter 2:1-10. What are we to do and not do according to verses 1 and 2 in order to love one another? If you matched your physical food intake with your spiritual food intake each week, how would that effect your physical health? How might that explain some of our frustrations with our spiritual growth?

4. Who are we as believers according to 2:4-10? What do these images mean to you? Which descriptions seem the most meaningful to you and why?

5. What is true of those who disbelieve? Why do they stumble over and take offense at the cornerstone God chose to build the new spiritual temple? How might this help explain why Christianity is uniquely criticized in our culture?

6. What is the best way to proclaim the excellencies of God according to 1:22? See also John 13:5-11, 34, 35. What makes this kind of love unique and only possible for those who have been born again?

Application

1. The tendency after a text like this is to go out and try harder to be more loving. However the text is saying that our love flows out of our understanding of our salvation and the basis for our hope. What have you learned from I Peter so far that should cause you to love other believers more fervently?

2. Which description that Peter used for us as believers was most meaningful to you and why? What practical thing can you do to remember who you are now as a believer? What can you do to remember this great truth on those days when you are most likely to forget?

3. What are some practical and simple ways we can be more loving to the believers around us? What can you begin to work on right away?

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