

Vacation in Paradise by Jeff Strite

1 Peter 1:1-1:12

OPEN: (Video of MercyMe's "Shake")

How many of you have ever been on a vacation?

Me too. Going on Vacation can be a very pleasurable experience...as long as you know where you're going and what to expect when you get there. But not everybody does. Travel agents have told stories about people who misunderstood those things:

* One agent said: "I had someone ask for an aisle seat on their airplane so that their hair wouldn't get messed up by being near the window."

* Another said he had a client who called inquiring about a package to Hawaii. After going over all the cost information, she asked "Would it be cheaper to fly to California and then take the train to Hawaii?"

* Still another agent he got a call from a woman who said she wanted to go to Cape Town. He started to the length of the flight to Africa and the passport information when she interrupted saying: "I'm not trying to make you look stupid, but Cape Town is in Massachusetts."

He explained, "Cape COD is in Massachusetts, Capetown is in South Africa."
She hung up.

* One man called his travel agent, furious about a Florida package they'd done for him. The agent asked what was wrong with the vacation in Orlando. The man responded that he was expecting an ocean-view room.

The agent tried to explain that wasn't possible - Orlando is in the middle of the state. The man replied, "Don't lie to me. I looked on the map and Florida is a very thin state."

* A very nice lady called her agent. She wanted to know how it was possible that her flight from Detroit left at 8:20am and got into Chicago at 8:33am. The agent tried to tell her that Michigan was an hour ahead of Illinois but she could not understand the concept of Time zones.

Finally he told her the plane went very fast, and she bought that!

* Then there was the businessman that called and had a question about the kinds of documents he needed in order to fly to China. After a lengthy discussion about passports, the agent reminded him he needed a visa.

"Oh no I don't, I've been to China many times and never had to have one of those."
The agent double-checked and sure enough, he told the businessman his stay needed a visa.

The businessman scoffed: "Look, I've been to China 4 times and every time they have accepted my American Express."

APPLY: My point is this – a Vacation can be a very pleasurable experience as long as you know where you're going and what to expect when you get there.
These folks didn't, and so they ended up getting frustrated.

In our text this morning, Peter reminds us that we are "strangers in the world." 1 Peter 1:1

We don't belong here.

This isn't our home.

We were REborn to live somewhere else.

And IF we don't remember that, we can get truly frustrated in this life.

Jesus told us – "In this world you will have trouble" John 16:33

And here Peter tells the Christians he's writings to the same thing:

"...for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." 1 Peter 1:6

Peter acknowledges the pain... but then he explains WHY we should rejoice about that. He writes: "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith— of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire— may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed." 1 Peter 1:6-7

In other words, EVEN our present difficulties in this life have value for us. And the reason they have value for us is because we have so much else going for us.

Notice (in these opening verses) all the things Peter says we have as Christians:

1. We are the "elect" – God has chosen us out of this world to be His people (vs. 1)
2. We have been sanctified by the Spirit - set apart from the world (vs. 2)
3. We have been saved by being sprinkled with the blood of Jesus (vs. 2)
4. We have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Christ (vs. 3)
5. We have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us (vs. 4)
6. We are guarded by God's power are for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (vs. 5)

We've got so much going for us that it should make us want to stand up "shake like we're changed"

It's like that song by MercyMe called "Shake":

"Maybe He came to you when everything seemed fine
Or maybe your world was upside down and hit you right between the eyes
No matter when it happened at 7 or 95
Move your feet 'cause you are free and you've never been more alive."

And the chorus says:

"You gotta shake, shake, shake like you're changed, changed, changed
Brand new looks so good on you, so shake like you've been changed."

That's what Peter is saying to the Christians of his day.

Shake like you've been changed.

Walk and run and dance because you've been given something the rest of the world doesn't have.

Put a spring in your step because you've got grace and peace and mercy and hope.

AND the reason we can walk like that is because we don't belong here.

We've got a citizenship in Heaven.

ILLUS: Back when I was in the Purdue Glee club we went over to Europe. It was during the last days of the Cold War and the Berlin wall was still up. At one point we crossed over into East Germany and armed guards boarded our bus and sternly warned us in no uncertain terms that we were NOT to take any pictures of the guard post as our bus made its way into communist Germany.

So guess what we did?

We took pictures.

Now, why on earth would we do that???

Because we were idiots.

These were communist soldiers armed with submachine guns.

At the very least we could have created an international incident.

But we didn't care. We were AMERICANS!

We were a free people from one of the most powerful nations on earth!

And no communist thug was going to tell us what to do!
We weren't about to stand for that.
There was NO threat they could make that would rob us of that.

And Peter is telling us the same thing.
You and I are CHRISTIANS – we are a free people.
We are part of THE most powerful Kingdom on the face of the earth.
And nothing this world can threaten us with can rob us of the blessings of that freedom.

So Peter's telling us - shake like you're changed.
Because you're a free people – walk like it; talk like it.
Act like those who have been chosen and sanctified and saved and born again to a living hope.
Don't let the forces of sin cow you into silence and conformity.
You've got something the rest of the world does not.
You've got something to offer that many of your friends don't have.

It's like vacationing in a foreign land. You live right now in one of the richest nations on earth and you have advantages locals in many foreign lands you might visit don't have.

And what advantages as Christians do we have???

For one thing, we've got the power to start our lives all over again... to begin anew.

Peter writes: "... you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (I Peter 1:9) The goal of Christ's living in us to give us the ability to experience God's forgiveness. The people of this world rarely have the ability to experience forgiveness. They don't have the resources to remake and renew their lives.

ILLUS: We just had a celebration where everybody stayed up til midnite.
Do you know what it was called? NEW YEAR'S EVE
It's a celebration that is the focus of almost every nation on the face of the earth. It doesn't matter if you vacation in New York or Tel Aviv or Tokyo seemingly everybody everywhere celebrates the New Year. It's a celebration that symbolizes starting their lives over again.

And what tool do people use to try to remake their lives???

RESOLUTIONS

Seemingly everybody makes "New Year's Resolutions"... resolutions they believe will

change their lives for the better.

But do they?

Do those resolutions actually change people?

Sometimes. But most of the time... No!

It's a recognized truth that most people's resolutions never last more than a month.

They just don't seem to work.

Why not? Why don't those resolutions work?

Because the success of resolutions depends upon OUR will-power.

And it's our own LACK of will power that got us into the messes we want to change!!!

But Peter tells us that the change in our lives doesn't depend upon YOUR will power.

No. You and I have received a "new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..." (I Peter 1:3)

God tells us Our ability to change our lives comes about because God works inside us.

It's a change that doesn't come about because we've made a PLEDGE but because God has made a PROMISE – a living promise embodied in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead

And the problem with most resolutions is that folks believe that their peace of mind will come from something God says won't work. They believe that if they can just be more popular/more successful, more intelligent, have more leisure time, more possessions, more money - THEN they could be truly happy.

But it never seems to work.

Ecclesiastes says all of those things end up being empty and vain.

ILLUS: A preacher named Rick Stacy tells the story of the man he once met. This man was the manager for the House of David Greenhouses in St. Joseph, Michigan. He'd been raised by the members of a religious cult as a child and now he was the manager of one of their businesses.

"My friend knew the religion and business well – but he didn't know Jesus. One night about 10:00 he called me and asked if Ecclesiastes was true when it said that everything in this world was empty and vain – because if it is he might as well just kill himself and be done with life.

I explained that Solomon had discovered that the accumulation of wealth does not satisfy. That it was like trying to catch the wind. I also told him that Solomon also discovered that it was the whole duty of man to serve God always. Ecclesiastes 12:13

I went to his home that night and told him about Jesus and that same night about 11:30 I baptized him in his swimming pool.”

So, we are a FREE people.

A people who are blessed with advantages this world does not have.

And because our best blessings are in heaven we have one more advantage over the world.

That advantage?

We don't have to fear death.

We have an inheritance that “... can never perish, spoil or fade— kept in heaven for you” 1 Peter 1:4

ILLUS: I recently read about a book by a historian named Rodney Stark. He wrote a book called “The Triumph of Christianity: How the Jesus Movement Became the World's Largest Religion.”

He explained that in ancient Rome the Pagans had two philosophies that were diametrically different than Christianity.

1st – the Romans feared death. They believed the grave either led to non-existence... or, at best, a drab existence in a shadowy underworld. So they literally ran from death and clung to life for all they were worth

2nd – the Romans viewed mercy and pity as things to be scoffed and looked down upon. The philosophers of the day taught that mercy was unreasonable and that “the cry of the undeserving for mercy” must go “unanswered.” (E. A. Judge)

Then in 165 A.D. something happened to change that. A plague struck the Roman Empire.

Now, when plagues came to town, those who could—left town.

Those who couldn't get out of town did everything they could to avoid the sick.

“[W]hen their first symptom appeared, victims often were thrown into the streets, where the dead and dying lay in piles”

Even physicians like the famous Roman doctor named Galen... simply ran away.

Everybody seemed to run away.

But the Christians didn't.

They cared for their own sick and... for many of the sick of their own neighbors.

But why would they do that?

First, Jesus had taught them that mercy was the highest form of Godliness.

And 2nd - they didn't fear death. They had an inheritance kept in heaven that wouldn't perish, spoil or fade. They believed that if they died while caring for the ill the result for them would be glorious, and so they were able to overcome their fears.

In those days, the ancient world lacked antibiotics and other effective medicines.

So what could the Christians give to the sick?

The very basic things of life: Food, water, and compassion.

And because the Christians of that day refused to fear death when helping the sick they not only kept a vast number of fellow Christians and others from dying, but they caught the attention of the rest of culture. They literally shook the Roman world because of their self-sacrifice.

You see Christianity isn't just about "shaking like we're changed".

It's about shaking the world.

It's about displaying the love of Jesus in our lives in such a way that the world around us becomes jealous of our love for Him and become hungry and thirsty to have Him in their lives as well.

My last point is this: This world is not our home.

You know the old Spiritual don't you?

"This world is not my home, I'm just passing through"

That was always one of my favorite songs, and when I felt down I could sing it so mournfully - and it would make me feel better. And when I felt good I'd sing it to myself and it would make me feel even better.

This world is NOT my home.

My Dad used to get back from vacations.

And you know what he'd always say when they were over?

"I'm Glad To Get Home!"

This world is not my home. We're just a passing through.

I can't feel at home in this world anymore, because this world is NOT my home.

It's only a short time here compared to eternity in our true home: heaven.

ILLUS: We recently had a man pass away and as he lay dying on his deathbed I went out to their home and read this passage from I Peter 1 to him. And to me it was more than just a bunch of scriptures that were there to read. This was an exciting declaration of what lay in store for this aged saint. Because this world was not his home, he was just

passing through.

That's one of the beauties of what God has explained to us.

The grave will not hold us.

One day we'll hear the voice of the angel and the trumpet call of God and we will rise from the grave to meet Jesus in the sky.

We'll be going home.

That's the promise we've had ever since we became Christians.

That's promise that was declared to us in our baptism.

You remember when you were baptized? You were lowered into the water as into a grave.

And how long did you stay in that watery grave? How long did they hold you under?

Not very long.

They held you under only a short and then they raised you out of that grave.

You were raised – if you will – from the dead.

And in that act, God declared to you that one day you will rise from the grave and meet Jesus in the sky!

This world is NOT our home.

Our present life is like a vacation in that sense.

It's a short time for us to be here while we are away from home.

And when people get home from their vacations they share their memories. They show the pictures they've taken to friend and relatives. They post them on their computers and on Facebook. It's almost like the most important part of their vacation was the memories that they hope will last a life time.

That's why people take pictures and videos of their experiences.

When you get home to heaven... what memories will you be able to share?

What lives have you touched for Jesus?

What people will be able to be in heaven with you because you took them to church?

Or introduced them to Jesus?

Or showed them the love and mercy God has given you?