

Getting Through Customs by Jeff Strite

1 Peter 3:18-4:6

How many of you have ever traveled to a foreign country?

For those of you have not, there's an arm of the government that you'll encounter on the way back in to the states. Does anybody know what government agency we're talking about?

It's called the U.S. Customs and Border Protection Agency.

In order to get back into the country, you have to go through customs.

Now, Customs has a very specific job. They make sure you don't bring anything into the country that doesn't belong here.

(At this point we put several images up on the screen)

- Things like these exotic animals (jpegs of contraband animals)
- Certain fruits and vegetables (jpeg of fruit)
- These fake Rolex watches (jpeg of fake watches being crushed by steamroller).
- Drugs such as Heroin, Cocaine or Marijuana (jpeg of drugs)
- And even something as harmless... as sand.

ILLUS: One lady told of being stopped by customs agents for bringing red sand from the beaches of Prince Edward Island in Canada - into the States. If the sand had been wet, she would not have been allowed to bring it into the country but since it was completely dry, they let her bring it through.

There are 100s upon 100s of items on the list of things you can NOT bring into the country. If you buy something overseas and try to bring it back into the states without declaring that you have it, Customs tends to get a little upset..If you fail to declare certain agricultural items that are on the restricted list (for example) the first time could cost up to \$300.

APPLY: Peter tells us we're "aliens and strangers in the world." 1 Peter 2:11 We're not home yet. We are just traveling thru this world... on our way to Heaven.

The day will come when we'll have to pass through Customs and go into Heaven. And the Bible tells us that there is ONE thing that we can't take with us into the Promised Land. Does anybody know what that one thing is? (Sin).

1 Peter 3:18 tells us that "Christ DIED FOR SINS once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, TO BRING YOU TO GOD...."

Jesus gave His life as a sacrifice to pay for your sins and mine. Without that sacrifice there's no way you I could get close to God, no way I could get into heaven - because my sins would keep me out of heaven.

In Isaiah 59:2 God told Israel "your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear."

If we tried to hide our sins in an overnight bag and tried to slip them through, that would keep us out of heaven. SO, in order for us to be able to come into God's presence our sins needed to be removed. And that's what John 1:29 tells us Jesus did for us.

"John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God WHO TAKES AWAY the sin of the world!'"

When Jesus shed His blood for us He offered us a chance to have our sins taken away. When we became Christians Jesus bought us with His blood. He paid the price for our sins.

ILLUS: My dad once said that – if you were selling something – you could ask whatever you thought was fair. But ultimately the value of that item is only worth whatever somebody was willing to pay for it.

For example, a couple of people have complimented me on my tie this morning. So – how many of you would be willing to pay me \$500 for my tie? (No).

Why not? Because it isn't worth \$500 to you.

You'd only give me \$500 if you thought the tie was worth that much to you.

In paying for our sins with the blood of His Son God was telling us that we were

worth more to Him than anything else in this world. He paid the ultimate price – Jesus' blood - for us and showed us how much He valued us.

ILLUS: A preacher named Allen Webster came up with a list about what Jesus' blood did for us:

- We were bought with His blood (Acts 20:28)
- We are forgiven through His blood (Romans 3:25)
- We are justified by His blood (Romans 5:9)
- We have redemption through His blood (Ephesians 1:7)
- We are cleansed by His blood (Hebrews 9:14)
- We are made holy through His blood (Hebrews 13:11-12)
- We are purified from all sin through His blood (I John 1:7)
- We overcome Satan through His blood (Revelation 12:11)

The Blood of Jesus makes us acceptable in God's sight because His blood removes all our sins. It empties out all our old baggage we've been carrying around and makes us acceptable to God.

But many people don't really want to give up their sins.

Many times they believe they can hide those sins away so that God won't see them.

That's why Peter says that a Christian should "...not live the rest of his earthly life for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God. 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.

Why would Peter tell Christians that they've spent ENOUGH TIME doing these things?

Well, because there are people who want forgiveness but they don't want to give up their sins. They want to keep their sins squirreled away in their overnight baggage hoping - when they get to heaven - they can slip them past Customs.

ILLUS: Now when it comes to US Customs, there are people who KNOW that they're bringing things into the country that are forbidden. So what do you suppose they do with these forbidden things? (They hide them)

- Sometimes they hide things in their shoes (jpeg of drugs in soles of tennis shoes)
- Sometimes in the linings of their purses and wallets (jpeg of counterfeit money found in purse linings)
- Sometimes in their clothing like this woman who sewed pockets into an apron and hid it under her dress with the pockets filled with bags filled tropical fish (jpeg of that)
- And then there are folks who are really determined (jpeg of an x-ray showing spots inside a man who swallowed 38 balloons filled with cocaine)

The reason these folks try to do this is because occasionally people can actually successfully hide things from customs and slip into the country without being caught.

The fact of the matter is... none of us will be able to “slip” into heaven with hidden sins.

Hebrews 4:13 tells us: “NOTHING in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. EVERYTHING is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.”

We can’t hide any sins from God. He knows all about us. It does us no good to try and cover our sins. He knows every thought and every word and every action. The good news is that He has no desire to allow those sins to dominate us. He desires to help us remove those sins from our lives.

1 John 1:9 reassures us: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Now, I could spend a lot of time this morning focusing on the sins that Peter describes here. But you need to be aware that this list isn’t exhaustive. Peter’s list here is just a sampling.

ILLUS: One preacher told his congregation there was a list of 700 different sins in Scripture. He said that right after the sermon 46 people asked for the list. And one little boy was overheard saying to his friend: (PAUSE) “There’s a list?”

You don’t have to have a list.

If you study your Bible and go regularly to church/Sunday School God will confront you with those sins when he knows you're ready to change them.

The closer you walk with Christ, the fewer sins you'll have in your life. I talk to people who are afraid of becoming Christians because they're afraid that after being baptized they'll sin again and anger God.

I explain that "All of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Every Christian falls down in their faith once in a while. But the longer we walk with Christ... the less often we fall down.

ILLUS: I compare it skating. How many of you know how to skate? When you first learned how to skate, did you ever fall down? Of course you did. A lot. But if you went skating now, would you fall down as much as you did at the beginning? No, probably not.

But have you ever watched professional ice skaters on TV? Have you ever seen one of them fall down? Of course you have. But they fall down a lot less often than you and I would, and they fall down doing tricks that would kill me! How can they skate like that? They can skate like that because they are on skate so often that it's almost like walking to them. It's as natural as breathing. But they still fall down once in a while.

In the same, even the most seasoned Christian "falls down" once in a while. But they fall down far less often than they did when they first became Christians. And every step of the way God is working in their lives to trim more and more sins from their lives.

But that's all about how to deal with sin NOW that you've become a Christian. But how do you deal with sin if you're NOT a Christian?

Well Peter addresses that too.

"...God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also— not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience towards God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right

hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.” I Peter 3:20b-22

Baptism now saves you?

ILLUS: A friend of mine baptized a woman not long ago. The family was present (most of them from a church that doesn't believe baptism is involved in the salvation act). As he prepared to baptize her he read this passage from I Peter. Afterward some of the family approached my friend and asked “Is that passage in the Old Testament or the New?”

They'd never heard this passage before because it contradicts everything their group stands for.

But that's what it says.

It says baptism now saves you.

Why would the water of baptism be involved with our salvation?

Peter tells us that water often serves as a kind of “boundary line” between life and death.

Here in I Peter 3, we're told that water served as the boundary line in the flood. It separated those who were saved and those who died. As one person noted: “Noah didn't get wet... but water DID separate him from the world.”

Later, in Exodus, we're told that when Israel left Egypt there was a point at which they left the death sentence of slavery and walked away a free people.

When was that?

When they came to the Red Sea.

The Red Sea was the dividing point between death and slavery... and the hope of God's presence of life.

Then in the book of Joshua we see Israel being led OUT OF the desert (a place of death) into the Promised Land (a place of life). At what point did they enter into the Promised Land?

It was when they crossed the Jordan River.

And now - here in I Peter - God is telling us that baptism serves as the marker, and

the water of baptism serves as a boundary line between life and death.
As I Peter 3:20 says "Baptism now saves you."

Baptism is the time when we can be sure that we've passed from death into life. That's what Romans 6:3-5 tells us when it says "don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection."

And Colossians 2:12 agrees when it says that once when you made that decision to be baptized you were "... buried with him in baptism and raised with him through your faith in the power of God, who raised him from the dead."

That's the promise of God. And 2 Corinthians 1:20 tells us.
And "...no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ."
In other words we can count on God's promises.
They are ALWAYS yes through Jesus.

ILLUS: A man once told his preacher he had doubts about whether or not he was saved.

The preacher asked him if he believed that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of the living God. (Yes)

Then he asked him if he had repented of his sins (Yes)

Then he asked him if he had made the Lord and Master of his life (Yes)

"And were you baptized for the forgiveness of sins." (Yes)

"Then friend – it doesn't matter what you FEEL (pause) God has promised you that when you believe in Him, you repent of your sins you confess Him as the Lord of your life and you are baptized into Christ -THEN YOU ARE SAVED.

That's the promise of God."

ILLUS: I once went to a Revival where a denominational preacher was preaching that if you didn't FEEL saved... you weren't. He told of preaching at one revival where a preacher's wife was convicted by her doubt and came down and prayed...

and was saved.

He browbeat the audience into such guilt about their doubts that dozens of people rushed out of their seats at the invitation time and he led them in the prayer of salvation

If he'd have come back the next year, the same group of people would have come forward and prayed that same prayer all over again.

Now, I want to make this very clear: That preacher was a liar!

He played on their fear. He played on their doubt.

He manipulated them.

And he had no right to do that.

He preached that their feelings were the judge of whether we're saved or not.

And he lied.

Salvation comes – not because of our FEELINGS – but because of God's FAITHFULNESS.

God is willing to give us assurance that if we respond in faith/repentance/confession and baptism He will save us.

ILLUS: A preacher recently told me about talking to a friend of his who belonged to a church where they use the "Sinner's Prayer" to ask for salvation.

He told the friend that baptism was necessary for salvation and the friend lifted his eyebrow in doubt

Then the preacher decided to take a different tack. He asked his friend if he'd ever doubted his salvation.

"Yes" the friend replied.

"And did you ever stop 'doubting' your salvation?"

"Yes (he answered), sometime during the time I was in college."

"Were you ever baptized?"

"Yes"

"When?"

"Sometime during my time at college."

"Did you ever doubt your salvation after you were baptized?"

(pause...) "No...."

God designed baptism to give a place of confidence.

A point in time where we'd know that God reached down into our lives and changed us.

CLOSE: But how can mere water save me? Isn't it just water?

Yes it is.

There's nothing magical in the water of the baptistery.

It didn't come down out of heaven and nobody on earth was called in to bless it.

In fact, that's exactly what Peter is saying in verses 21-22.

He wrote that the power of baptism in salvation DIDN'T come from "the removal of dirt from the body." "It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand— with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him." 1 Peter 3:21-22

In other words, baptism doesn't save us because of the water.

Baptism saves us because of the power of Christ's resurrection.

That's of course the whole message of baptism.

Baptism is the point at which we pass from death into life. We die to our past.

And what do we do with "dead people"? We bury them.

But when baptize people do we keep them in that watery grave? No, of course we don't.

We raise from the dead pointing to the power of Jesus' resurrection in our lives.

We have confidence in our salvation because we have laid hold of the power of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

ILLUS: In Acts 8 we're told the story of an Ethiopian Eunuch who had a Bible study with a Christian named Philip. After the Bible study, the Eunuch looked up and saw a body of water and asked: "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?"

"And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not

see him again, but went on his way rejoicing.” (Acts 8:38-39)

It was at his baptism that the Eunuch gained his confidence and his joy. And from that day forward he walked and talked and lived for Jesus.