

**Christianityworks**  
**A Confident Life in Uncertain Times**  
**0056-1**  
**Chosen with a Purpose**

You know when stuffs blowing up all around you and when there's confusion, there's fear and there's uncertainty and you don't know where life is going, God's saying, "I chose you. You are destined to be with me."

**The Reality of Uncertainty**

Well I'm excited because this week we're starting a new series on Christianityworks, a series of four programs, that I've called 'A Confident Life In Uncertain Times'. Why are we doing that? Because uncertainty takes so many different forms. In affluent societies like the one that I come from here in Australia, we have so much choice. Careers, entertainment, belief systems, take your pick anything goes. It sounds so great to start with but what's happening?

In affluent societies people are suffering from this centrelessness. Who am I? Where do I fit in all of this? Where's my life headed? What's the point of all this? It's almost like; well sometimes it feels as though we don't belong, like we're exiles in a foreign land. I think we've all experienced that and then there's uncertainty that comes from adversity.

I mean so many people in this world are living in poverty amidst political instability. You look at the Pacific nations, you look at some of the African nations and parts of Asia and there are wars and civil wars and there's hunger and famine, will I have enough to eat tomorrow? How is it all going to turn out for me and my family?

Adversity happens amidst affluence and it happens amidst poverty. Sickness can happen, disease can happen, divorce can happen. And here's the thing about uncertainty, none of us really likes it very much.

I mean when you're watching a sporting game if you enjoy sport, I do, there's a degree of tension and uncertainty. It's about the excitement of the game. And people who love sport essentially love that feeling of tension, of uncertainty, of the twists and the turns of the game. It's almost like a muscle that needs exercising in us.

If you're watching a good movie it's the same thing; the tension, the excitement, the anticipation, it's that, that keeps us entertained,

it keeps us riveted to the screen, watching right to the end. I mean without that sort of tension and uncertainty and excitement there's no anticipation. So we don't mind uncertainty and tension in sport and entertainment but when it comes to our own lives, well that's an entirely different thing.

In entertainment and sport, uncertainty equals anticipation, it equals excitement. But in our own lives uncertainty equals pressure and tension and so often it involves fear. How is it going to turn out? Even when it's kind of good tension, I remember when I was courting my now wife, Jacqui, and I'm thinking, 'Will she marry me? Is this going to work out?'

Because we have a certain end in mind, we want it to finish a certain way but when we don't know, when there's ambiguity, when there's uncertainty there is a kind of pressure, there is a kind of fear. And it can be something like sickness - cancer; it can be something like retrenchments - am I going to lose my job. And here's what happens with uncertainty, here's the anatomy if you like, of uncertainty.

When we don't know how something is going to end, when it's outside our control and uncertainty creeps in and we desperately want one outcome but we can imagine all of the other bad outcomes that could happen instead, uncertainty turns to worry and fear and isolation. We feel like an alien, we feel like no-one else understands and we become prisoners in the fears that come from uncertainties.

Let me tell you, ambiguity and uncertainty are a fact of life; it's just the way it is. Every day of every week of every year is going to have some uncertainty in it but if we let that turn into fear it gnaws away at us, it drains the juices, it drains the life out of us, it's debilitating. And that's why we're going to do a four week series, starting today, called Living a Confident Life in Uncertain Times.

And there's no better place to start, if you have a Bible I'd like you to grab it, open it up in a place called 1 Peter. It's the first letter of Peter, it's pretty much towards the end of the New Testament, we're just going to look at the first two verses of the first chapter of this letter called 1 Peter, let's read it:

*"Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ to the exiles of the dispersion scattered through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus*

*Christ and to be sprinkled with His blood. May grace and peace be yours in abundance."*

Now this is like the introduction of a lot of these letters or they call them epistles. They're essentially letters written by people like Peter and John and Paul to Christians in particular circumstances and we'll look at the circumstances of people whom this was written to in a moment. But this is just a very short introduction.

I don't know about you but I tend to quickly skip over these introductions to get to the main bit, this is just the 'Dear John' part of the letter but actually, just those two short verses have so much to say. We're going to spend some time today just in this short passage to get our hearts and our minds around what God is saying to us today.

Now Peter, the name Peter in Greek is Petros means rock. Now that's what Jesus called him. This man's name initially was Simon which means 'to be someone who listens' but once Peter identified Jesus as being the Son of God, this is what Jesus said to him:

*"I tell you that you are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it."*

You can read that in Matthews's Gospel, chapter 16 and verse 18. So Peter is a rock, he's an apostle, he is someone who is sent out by Jesus Christ. So Peter the rock, an apostle, somebody who has been sent out by Jesus Christ himself. Now, who's he writing to? He's writing to the exiles of the dispersion. The dispersion began to happen, you can read about it in Acts, chapter 8. There was some persecution, it was fuelled by Saul who later became Paul, who wrote much of the New Testament.

And the Christians in Jerusalem and Judea, not long after Christ rose again and ascended into Heaven, began to be persecuted and so they were dispersed through the known world, through Asia Minor. And so when Peter is writing to these people he is talking to exiles of this persecution, scattered through the known world. And it was terrible persecution, a time of great persecution.

Early on Christians were initially okay under Roman rule because, remember the Romans were the world power, it was the Roman Empire. But later in the 1st Century when Peter's writing here, there were riots against the Christians in Rome and severe persecution arose I mean to the extent that the emperor, the Roman emperor would tar them and put them on sticks and burn them as torches at his garden parties. I mean it was awful stuff.

And many of these Christians were Jews, they were dispersed by this persecution through Asia Minor. They were fearful, they were living in uncertain times. So Jesus sends out this Peter, this Petros, this rock to declare a message to them, a message of certainty, a powerful message for you and me here and now. So what is God saying?

### **Exiles in a Foreign Land**

Whenever I speak about uncertainty people think I'm going to be talking about taking away the things that cause uncertainty. I mean in a perfect world there'd be no uncertainty, but we don't live in a perfect world. The list of things that we can worry about is about as long as our arms, from sheer survival to passing exams, from whether our child will make it through this sickness to whether we'll get a job promotion that we applied for.

And uncertainty can often lead to debilitating fear, doesn't matter who we are, where we live, it crosses all borders and boundaries in people's lives and if you think about it, if there was no uncertainty, there'd be no need for faith. We're looking at what Peter the apostle wrote to the Christians who were dispersed through persecution in the first century; this is what he said:

*"Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ to the exiles of the dispersion scattered through Pontus, and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with His blood. May grace and peace be yours in abundance."*

Now who's he writing to? The exiles of the dispersion scattered to the four winds by persecution. People in fear for their lives scattered to every part of Asia Minor, to Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia, all over the place. Now in the first century you had the whole Christmas thing, you had Jesus, you had all the wonderful things He did and said and healed people and He died and He rose again and He ascended into Heaven and then God built this new Church, wow!

God seemed to have a pretty amazing plan and Peter even says that the people he is writing to have been chosen and destined by God, and all of a sudden this persecution comes along, all of a sudden this dispersion comes along. You know something, no persecution, no dispersion.

You know what we're like we get very comfy, great I'm saved, let's stay in Jerusalem together and be saved, let's stay in Judea together and be saved. No! God allowed persecution to come into His new Church and this persecution dispersed the believers throughout the known world spreading the good news of Jesus Christ to everybody.

It wouldn't have happened without the persecution. The persecution led to a dispersion which scattered Jesus' disciples like a farmer scattering his seed. New Churches were planted, they grew, more people learned about Jesus, this was God's plan, it's there in what Peter writes, let's read it again, *"To the exiles of the dispersion scattered through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia who have been chosen and destined by God the Father."*

So the people who are being persecuted and scattered were the very same people who had been chosen and destined by the Father, God's chosen people who have been scattered. God foreknew them, what an awesome thing.

It applied to them, then. It applies to you and me now. God foreknew us and He planned out our walk, our path and our journey before the foundations of the universe were even laid. Those very people whom God foreknew are the ones who are exiles in foreign lands just like us, followers of Jesus Christ. Paul the Apostle in Philippians, chapter 3, verse 20, writes that, *"Our citizenship is in heaven."*

We are exiles in a foreign land and you know something, it can be a tough gig for exiles; but Jesus said exactly that when He prayed for you and me just before He was crucified, you can read about it in John, chapter 17. He said:

*"That we're not of the world but we're in the world." Jesus specifically prayed, 'Father, I don't ask you to take them out of the world but that you protect them while they are there.'"*

We are all exiles in a foreign land, God's plan. But while we're here God has some good plans for us. Look at the Israelites when they were desperately exiled centuries before in Babylon. Jerusalem had been destroyed, the Temple had been destroyed, they didn't know what had happened to their God and this is what God says to them in Jeremiah, chapter 29:

*"This is what the Lord almighty, the God of Israel says to all those I carried into exile." Notice His words, "From Jerusalem to Babylon." "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens,*

*eat what they produce, marry, have sons and daughters, find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number, don't decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it because if it prospers, you too will prosper.*

*This is what the Lord says, "When 70 years are completed for Babylon I will come to you and fulfill my gracious promise to bring you back to Jerusalem. For I know the plans I have for you", declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you, not to harm you. Plans to give you hope and a future, then you will call upon Me, then you will come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*

In other words, God's saying, 'this whole exile thing, this whole life that is full of joys and difficulties and uncertainties, it's my plan. Get on, live your life, prosper where you are, marry, have kids, increase, I am with you because before the foundations of the earth I had a plan for your life. A plan to prosper you, a certain plan, a good plan but there's a bigger plan, an eternal plan.'

When we focus on that plan then a million uncertainties evaporate, they just don't matter anymore because He has a plan for here and now and a plan for eternity.

### **Abundant Peace**

We're talking today, on the program, about leading a confident life in uncertain times, just focusing on this one short passage, 1 Peter, chapter 1, verses 1 and 2. It says this,

*"Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ to the exiles of the dispersion scattered through Pontus and Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen and destined by God the Father and sanctified by the spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with His blood. May grace and peace be yours in abundance."*

Peter's a rock, Peter is someone solid sent out by Jesus Christ himself with a message, a message of confidence and certainty amidst the terrible persecution that these dispersed Christians were suffering. Despite their suffering, despite all that was going on, He says to them, "*May grace and peace be yours in abundance.*" That's what God's saying here. We want God to take away the things that

are causing the uncertainty and the fear and the difficulties in our lives.

You know something, sometimes He does and sometime He don't! God does what God will do. But in the middle of whatever we're traveling through, in the middle of the uncertainty, in the middle of the fear, Peter is saying, "*May grace and peace be yours in abundance.*" And he gives them three reasons for that in just this short introduction, he says, 'Sure, you have been scattered to the four winds through persecution but have a look at this. You've been chosen and destined by God, you've been sanctified by the spirit and you've been sprinkled with the blood of Christ.'

Peter's saying something really profound here. Those three things are kind of the three pillars of which that abundant grace and peace rest. That's an awesome thing, when we look at the circumstances of the people he is writing to and then we take a look at Gods eternal purposes for just a minute. We've been chosen and destined to be with Him for all eternity.

You know when stuffs blowing up all around you and when there is confusion and there's fear and there's uncertainty and you don't know where life is going, this is like one of those passages of, "*Be still and know that I am God.*" Even though the nations are raging around us, God is saying, "***I chose you, you are destined to be with Me.***" That alone brings such an incredible peace, everything you and I are going through He knew before, everything that you and I don't understand, that we're uncertain about; He knows and those things are in His hands.

We have been chosen and destined by God the Father and then, secondly, **sanctified by the spirit, day by day**, scrubbed clean by God's Spirit Himself, like a special vessel set aside for God's service here in the world. A living God, not some distant God, not some idol, not some figment of anyone's imagination but by the living God active in our lives. All this uncertainty, things we can't control in the world, God uses each one of them to scrub us clean.

Okay, some days it feels a bit like steel wool and sand paper doesn't it? When He's scrubbing us clean, some days it's not a lot of fun but other days He uses them as a polishing cloth and what happens, is that as He does that day after day, through each experience, through each uncertainty as we trust in Him, this gentleness and this peace and this joy emerges, that's what happens when we trust in Him through those trials and tribulations in exile.

And thirdly He says, "**We're sprinkled with the blood of the lamb.**" Now what does that mean? There are only a few instances where blood was sprinkled in the Old Testament. It was part of the sacrificial system, and principally the blood of this unblemished animal was sprinkled in the Holy of Holies, inside the sanctuary in the temple on one day a year. It was Yom kippur, the Day of Atonement, the day when the people's sins were forgiven.

Now, that's the picture here, that we have been sprinkled with the blood of the lamb. In other words every day when we make mistakes, (do you? I do), day by day we have been, are being and will be forgiven through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. I don't know about you but I do make mistakes every day and if God didn't forgive me through the sacrifice of Jesus every day then I would drift further and further from Him because He is a good God, He is a holy God and the only way that you and I can come before Him is because we believe that Jesus Christ's blood was shed to pay for our sins.

We need never be afraid of God's anger and His wrath and His judgment and His punishment; we've been chosen and destined by God. Every day we're being sanctified by the spirit, scrubbed clean and set apart to be obedient to Jesus and we're sprinkled with His blood, we're forgiven day by day by day and they're like the three pillars on which the last statement of this passage rests, "May grace and peace be yours in abundance."

Now if we just think on those three things. I've been chosen and predestined by God. I am being sanctified, made clean by the spirit. I am forgiven every day for my failures. If we just rest in those, let them flood our senses into our very being, do you know what you get? Grace and peace in abundance, overflowing so we can't contain it.

Peter, a man sent out by Jesus Christ himself to the exiles of the dispersion, in Australia, in New Zealand, in South Africa, in Cameroon, in Ghana, in Denmark, in Singapore and China and Rwanda and wherever you are at this very moment. You have been chosen and destined by God the Father, scrubbed clean, made holy, set apart for God's purposes by the Holy Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and to be sprinkled with His blood. May God's grace and God's peace be yours in abundance right in the middle of your exile, here and now. That, my friend, is what God is saying to us today.