

Text

1 Peter 1:1

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

Main Point

Peter's Call to Christian living in a hostile world

Introduction (300)

Hook

A truth is received with different weight depending on who says it.

There is little reception when a wealthy person tells you to trust God for all your needs.

There is little impact when a healthy person encourages you to rejoice in all circumstances.

But when a quadriplegic, like Joni Erkinson for example, is able to say:

"I boast in my affliction. I rejoice in the limitation. I glory in the infirmity because I know then that Christ's power rests on me"

Then there is weight in such a statement.

Or when, a blind hymn writer, made blind by the mistake of a doctor at that, such as Fanny Crosby, writes:

“Perfect submission, perfect delight, visions of rapture now burst on my sight, Angels descending bring form above, echoes of mercy whispers of love. This is my story this is my song praising my saviour all the day long...”

These statements have weight because of who says them.

They are not fluffy truisms, but have been forged through the realities and pains of life, and we do well to receive them as such.

Link to book

Today we begin our study in the book of 1 Peter.

First Peter is full of encouragement and instruction to people facing major suffering.

This letter is all about encouraging Christians to live well in a hostile world.

And it would be enough for us to pay careful heed to these instructions simply because they are God’s word.

But in God’s providence, he chose the Apostle Peter to write this letter on this topic.

Peter’s life and his experience bring weight to this letter. The truths stay true regardless of who says them, but as we hear them from Peter, they have added impact.

Outline

Tonight, as an introduction to this book, I want to trace with you three major themes of this letter, and for each theme, I want to remind you of some key events in the life of Peter that bring weight to these themes.

These three themes will form the outline of our study:

1. First, we will see the theme of Christians suffering
2. Second, we will see the theme of Christians being pilgrims and sojourners in this world
3. And thirdly, we will see the theme of trusting God and imitating Christ in all circumstances

Part 1 – Christian Suffering

Suffering Expected

So let us begin our first section: Christian Suffering.

Peter is writing to people who are currently facing suffering.

But he is also writing in anticipation to future suffering.

Peter is well aware of the warning Jesus gave his disciples:

John 17:18-20

¹⁸ “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰ Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also

persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

The world hated Jesus. Now that he was gone, they would hate and persecute his people.

Peter knows this. In 4:12 he says:

¹² Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.

Suffering for the Christian is to be expected.

Type of Suffering of the recipient

Now Peter is writing to people who are facing all sorts of different types of suffering. Peter is writing to a wide audience, not a specific situation in a specific church.

Look again at verse 1 to keep in mind who Peter is writing to. He is writing to Christians in the “*Dispersion*”.

He lists the names of five regions: *Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia*. These five regions cover vast areas of land in the country of modern day Turkey.

It would be like saying he is writing to the Christians in Canterbury, Otago, and Southland.

Peter is writing to a wide range of people from a wide range of places and so the types suffering are generic enough to be relevant to all.

Suspicion of this “new religion” which denied all other Gods led to slander and verbal abuse, maybe even physical abuse. There was also an element of social exclusion, maybe economic discrimination.

But Peter also writes about generic pressures:

1. He acknowledges the **seduction** of non-Christian worldviews and practices.
2. He warns against **conflict** within the Christian fellowship.
3. He expects **doubt** of God to creep in the hearts of Christians
4. And he reminds us of the ever-present danger of **Satan** wishing to.

Suffering is real, ever-present and takes various forms.

Set the Date

It is also helpful to keep in mind that the letter was written somewhere between the years AD 62 and 63. (That is about 30 years after the Resurrection of Christ.)

At this time in history, Nero is the emperor in Rome, but the Great Fire, which sparked horrible state driven persecution has not yet happened. Maybe Peter is sensing that the hatred against the Christians will soon be used for some political purpose but there is no reference to these horrors.

So the suffering Peter is talking about is not state-funded persecution. This is suffering due to prejudice and suspicion on the Christian faith by the general population.

Real, painful, unjust, crippling, frightful suffering, but Christians were not being **executed** as criminals yet.

Peter's Major encouragement in the face of suffering

Peter's major instruction and encouragement in the face of suffering is to focus on eternal realities. Focus

on the resurrection. Focus on eternal inheritances. Focus on Christ. Trust God.

How we respond to suffering shows what we are focused on.

Peter knows our human tendency. We tend to focus on ourselves and the temporal and so we tend to respond to suffering by sinning. When we face difficulties we think we are afforded rights. But Peter says:

- Never sin in response to suffering.
- Sin is far worse than suffering.
- The biggest enemy is sin, not suffering

A good example of this is 1 Peter 4:1

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh,^[a] arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin,² so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

Or listen to this exhortation. An exhortation to those who suffer by those in authority over them.

Talking to servants, but applicable to any who are the recipients of injustice. This is a call to all who suffer unjustly:

¹⁸ Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.^[e] ¹⁹ For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. ²¹ For to this you have been

called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.

Peter's life

This is a difficult approach in the face of suffering.

It is incredibly hard to live this way.

And Peter knows this.

In the midst of the most fearful situation in his life, when Jesus was betrayed and arrested, when Peter's life was in turmoil and in imminent danger, he was tempted to sin.

And in his fear and confusion he did sin, and he denied Christ 3 times. He knows what it is like when sin seems the only option in the face of suffering.

But he also knows the heavy consequence when we choose to sin to avoid suffering. His bitter tears are but an external show of the crushing guilt he faced.

But things had changed. Peter had been sanctified. And he understood now that obeying the will of God is far better than relief from suffering.

Later in his life Peter was faced with a choice: Stop preaching the Gospel or be thrown into Prison and death. What did he choose?

He was able to boldly say "*We must obey God rather than men*".

Peter was convinced that sin was worse than suffering. Even suffering of the worst kind.

Application – Sin worse than suffering

Are you convinced of that?

We are told that Suffering will come. When it comes, do you revert to sinning?

- Or do you see suffering as a chance to prove your faith?
- A chance to imitate Christ?
- A chance to show your true colours?

Regardless of the suffering do you live for the will of God?

Do you live like Peter tells us and shows us?

Link

But Peter's example and appeal to respond well in suffering is grounded in foundational truths. Without these truths it is impossible to respond to suffering in a God-honouring way.

Which brings us to our second point, and the second major theme in the letter: Christians as pilgrims and sojourners.

Part 2 – Christians as exiles and sojourners

Roman Empire

Peter wants to teach how Christians are to live in a hostile world.

Now, the Roman Empire was not all bad.

- There was a system of law and order.
- Generally, justice was served.
- There were roads and water supply.
- There was trade and prospect for prosperity.

- There was interaction of ideas and learnings from afar.

But even these good things have their dangers for the Christian.

- The allure of wealth.
- The seduction of pleasure.
- The influence of false teaching.
- The doubt instilled from other world views.

So the day in and day out living as a Christians was difficult. They were living in a hostile world. We have already mentioned the sort of suffering they were facing from their neighbours, but the political and social system they lived in was also less than ideal

- It did not reflect liberty, equality and brotherhood for all,
- There was no taxation only with representation.
- It was not a democracy with equal opportunity.

Remember this is the Roman Empire

- Taxation was required because of conquest
- Justice was easily corrupted by bribes
- Violence was a common answer to conflict
- Aggressive war is the foreign policy

Nero

And added to that, the emperor at the time of writing is Nero.

Nero is notorious even from a secular perspective.

He came into power at the age of 17.

And he was known for being corrupt, immoral, violent, overturning justice, arrogant and using tax money for his own benefit. His most infamous act towards

Christians is when he accuses the Christians of starting the great fire in Rome in 64 AD.

Listen to what Tacitus, the Roman historian, explains Nero is capable of instigating: the “they” refers to Christians.

Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.

Nero was a bad man and a terrible leader.

Peter in Rome

And it is important to bear in mind that Peter is not detached from the reality of living in the Roman Empire.

In fact as he writes this letter he is living in the very epicentre of the Roman empire. He is living in Rome while he writes. The difficulties felt in the provinces are felt all the more in the Capital city of Rome.

We know Peter is writing from the city of Rome because in the closing of his letter, chapter 5:13

He says:

¹³ She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, sends you greetings,

He sends greetings from his church, “Who is at Babylon”.

And Babylon is a common reference to Rome. Like we would say “garden city” in reference to Christchurch,

or “City of Sails” for Auckland. Rome was referred to as Babylon.

So as Peter writes this letter, he knows first-hand the hostility of the world people live in.

Exile and sojourner

And the mindset he wants Christians to have is that they would think of themselves as sojourners, as temporary residents, as pilgrims, as exiles in a foreign land.

We see this explicitly and then elaborated on in the letter.

1 Pet 1:1

*To those who are **elect exiles** of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,*

1 Pet 1:17

*⁷ And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the **time of your exile**,*

1 Pet 2:11

*¹¹ Beloved, I urge you as **sojourners and exiles** to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul.*

Our home is not here, but we are here for a time, and while we are here, we must live in accordance to where our home is.

Conformity and Resistance

And with this motif of exile or sojourner Peter gives us a mindset of how to live in a hostile world.

As we will see as we study this book, he gives us a balance to strike. A balance between Conformity with the world and Resistance to the world.

On the one side, we are a distinct people. We are God's people.

1Pet 2:9

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

And on the other side we have a responsibility to be active witnesses in the world. We must conduct ourselves in a God-honouring fashion in all areas of life. In the family, in the workplace and as good citizens.

1 Pet 2:16

Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants^[d] of God. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Peter gives us godly wisdom and godly guidelines as Christians find that balance. As Christians seek to walk that narrow path.

Peter striking the balance

And Peter knew well how hard it is to strike that balance.

In a desire to resist those who arrest Jesus, he strikes with his sword in a hope to defend His saviour and Lord. Yet Jesus rebukes him for his action. Resistance was not the answer. Resistance was not the way.

Or think of when Peter rebukes his Lord when Jesus announces that He will suffer and die. Peter wants to overthrow the political system and he wants Jesus to lead that. Peter does not want the road of suffering. He want's to overthrow the Roman oppressors. But this desire comes from Satan and Jesus strongly rebukes him.

Jesus has a better plan. A better path. The path of the obedient Son. The path for the salvation of many.

And later in Peter's story, he understands that. It takes a while, but he starts to understand.

In Acts 10 we see the account of Peter sharing the Gospel with a Roman Centurion. This is the narrow path Jesus wants us to follow. Yes the romans were the conquering nation, sometimes even the oppressors, yet they needed to hear the gospel of salvation. Peter was a pilgrim and a sojourner now. He had to live in accordance to his celestial home. He had to be a good witness of Christ. And so he proclaims the Gospel even to the Roman Centurion and his family.

Application

We are pilgrims and sojourners. That changed how Peter lived in his hostile environment, and that must dictate how we live in our hostile environment.

We praise God for this letter which helps us map the way and steer us away from dangers.

Link

Viewing ourselves as exiles helps us respond to suffering in a godly way. What is foundational to both these ideas is the faithfulness of God and the work of Christ.

Which brings us to our third and final point: Trusting God and imitating Christ in all circumstances

Part 3 – Trusting God and imitating Christ in all circumstances

Trust God

The trustworthiness of God is foundational to Peter's instruction in the face of suffering.

Listen to how Peter describes God and his Work: 1Pet 1:3-5

*³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to **his** great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

Peter is saying, "God is worthy of your trust!" Trust him. Yes your suffering is real, but God knows and he is still in control.

Verse 19 of chapter 4 highlights this:

¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

Trust God and do the next right thing.

Imitate Christ by Trusting God

And Peter makes the point that Christ himself gives us an example of how to trust God in the midst of suffering

1Pet 2:21-23

²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. ²³ When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Jesus was sinned against. Jesus faced injustice. Jesus faced slander. Jesus faced suffering.

But he did not threaten, he did not retaliate, he did not sin to remove suffering.

He entrusted himself to God.

He trusted God.

Peter and doubt

Now, Peter is not known for his unwavering trust.

- He doubted Jesus when instructed to cast out his nets to catch fish.
- He doubted Jesus that the crucifixion was the right plan, even rebuking his Lord
- He doubted Jesus by denying him three times
- He hid in fear after the death of Christ
- He doubted the resurrection

Peter knew what it was like to doubt God. It led to misery, despair, guilt and divine rebuke.

But he learned to trust God. He learned to trust God and do the next right thing. The next right thing for him, got him thrown into prison a number of times.

The “next right thing” for him would ultimately get him killed. But he learned to imitate Chris in all circumstances. He learned to entrust himself to him who judges rightly.

Application

You too can learn to trust God. Regardless of what you are facing. And this letter will help you do just that. Our God is bigger than any circumstance we face.

Conclusion

Friends, we are faced with suffering, we live in a hostile world, and our hearts are quick to doubt.

The Letter of 1 Peter gives us a light to follow as we seek to travel this narrow and dark path.

- We need to learn how to suffer as Christians.
- We need to believe that sin is worse than suffering.
- We need to live as exiles in this foreign land.
- We need to live as sojourners bearing witness of our homeland and of our King.
- We need to remind ourselves of the Character of the God we serve.
- We need to trust him with our life.
- We need to imitate Christ as He entrusted his life to God.
- We need to trust God and do the next right thing.

Friends, the book of 1 Peter gives us instruction and encouragement as we pick up our cross and follow Christ in this hostile world.

Peter picked up his cross and followed Jesus. The instructions we read of in this letter, he lived out.

Let his life, his commitment, his trust in God give weight to his words.

Peter picked up his cross and followed Jesus. History tells us that his life of suffering and his life as a sojourner ended when he was nailed to a cross and executed by Roman soldiers. It is said that he asked his executioners to crucify him upside down because he did not consider himself worthy to die like his saviour.

Peter imitated Christ and entrusted himself to God because he was convinced God was worthy of trust and obedience.

My prayer, my hope and my confidence is that you too would be convinced that God is worthy of your trust and your obedience.

Pray