

1 Peter 1:1-12

How we think about ourselves is a crucial question. Peter refers to his readers as *exiles scattered throughout the provinces of* (1) For them, placing their faith in Jesus Christ brought stress and difficulty into their lives. Later in the letter he will refer to *the pagans ... who accuse you of doing wrong.* (2:12) They will be subject to *'the ignorant talk of foolish people'* (2:15)

As our culture becomes more hostile to Christianity we will increasingly find ourselves at odds with those around us. This though is not a letter inviting us to feel sorry for ourselves but rather to be amazed at our privileges.

Christians are *Gods elect*, those who have been *chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father*. (Foreknowledge is best thought of as fore-loved) Gods Spirit through the death of Jesus Christ (*sprinkled with his blood*) has put us right with God (his sanctifying work). And this mighty work of God enables us to live lives that are obedient to Jesus Christ.

We are invited to rejoice in our security. These people maybe living as second class citizens in what today would be Turkey but they have a great homeland of their own. They are reminded of their inheritance that can never perish spoil or fade *kept in heaven for you!* (4) And not only so but they are being *'kept'* in order that they will share in this great future. (5)

We are invited to see beyond the *'grief'* that trials can bring into our lives. Perseverance is the mark of genuine Christianity. *But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart who hear the word, retain it and by persevering produce a crop.* (Luke 8:15) When difficulties come and we don't allow them to derail us it confirms the genuineness of our faith.

We are invited to focus our love and faith on the Lord who we have never seen. (8,9) This priority is enable by others who have never seen Christ. In v10-12 Peter writes of the prophets who spoke of the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. Their precise and accurate predictions serve us, as we see how perfectly they were fulfilled in the ministry of Jesus Christ. They enable us to believe and love the one we have never seen.

- How do we think about ourselves, as victims or those who are hugely privileged?
- Our faith in our unseen Lord is strengthened through the ministry of the prophets. In writing as they did they were not serving themselves but us. Do we read what they wrote?
- The emphasis in this section is on praise and joy. Allow these verses to lead you in thanksgiving today.

1 Peter 1:13 – 2:3

This immense kindness and mercy of God set out in the first part of the chapter, looks for a response. The God who has given us new birth looks for obedient children. (14) We are to bear the family likeness which Peter describes (15,16) as *be holy in all you do*.

This process begins internally. *Therefore with minds that are alert and fully sober....*(13) We are overstimulated. We live in a world that relentlessly wants to choose what we are going to think about. If we are not to be *conformed to the evil desires* we had when we lived in ignorance we need Gods filter on our thinking. See Phil 4:8.

Our motivation to live a holy life comes in part from the prospect set out in v17. *Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially*. Only because we have already been informed to *set our hope on the grace to be given to us when Jesus Christ is revealed* can we contemplate this prospect without crippling fear.

Peter though adds several layers of encouragement to this challenging section.

We have been redeemed from the empty way of life by the precious blood of Christ. As Israel was redeemed from Egyptian slavery so we have been delivered from pursuing the prizes of our culture. The priority of the Lord Jesus to please his heavenly Father, casts a long shadow over all the pursuits we are tempted to place at the forefront of our lives.

We have purified ourselves from the false promises and mistaken independence of our old life. *Obeying the truth* has brought us under the authority of a better master and he directs us away from the selfish life in order that we will love one another.

We have been born again by the living and enduring word of God. This gospel word is destined to produce a worthwhile harvest in our lives as it is allowed to do its work. In the first three verses of chapter two he informs us of the kind of behaviour that needs to go if we are to mature as Christians.

- Take care over what you 'think' about.
- Does 'holiness' feature at all in our list of concerns?
- Believing the gospel ought to increase our concern for one another. This passage encourages us *to love one another from the heart*. Give some thought to what is going on below the surface in your life.

1 Peter 2:4-10

Gospel privileges. (4,5)

Peter wants to impress upon us the privileges that are ours through our faith in Jesus Christ. He describes becoming a Christian as 'coming to the living Stone'. We are those who through faith are united to the living Lord Jesus Christ.

As the apostle most closely connected with the establishment of the Church, for Peter Christianity can never be thought of as an individual pursuit. To come to Christ is to come to others. *You also like living stones are being built into a spiritual house*. And he opens to us the huge privilege of considering ourselves priests, those with special access to God, called to intercede for others.

Gospel rejection (6-8)

Peter writes as a Jewish believer. He quotes the Jewish scriptures (v6, Isaiah 28:16) But the Jewish nation has largely rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Does their rejection not call into question the reliability of this claim? Peter's answer is to show that rejection is written into the script. He quotes from Psalm 118 where the '*builders*' are described as rejecting the precious cornerstone. Jewish rejection does not defeat God's plan, in fact the very opposite is true. (7)

Gospel responsibility (9-10)

The Church composed of Jewish and Gentile believers inherits the privileges first conferred on the nation of Israel (Exodus 19:6) But with the privileges comes responsibility. We are to *declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*. (9) This will involve more than our words and likely includes the ministry of '*offering spiritual sacrifices*' described in v5. The next 2 chapters will set out some of the ways we can declare God's praise.

- To belong to the church is to be part of an ongoing construction project. How is the process of *being built into a spiritual house* going in our lives?

- Thank God that he has brought you into such a secure place through uniting your life to the chosen and precious cornerstone of his Son.
- Will we remember that all of this is a product of God's grace? *Once you were not a people but now you are the people of God. Once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy. (10)*

1 Peter 2:11-17

The next 3 sections of the letter (2:13-17, 2:18-25, 3:1-7) cover citizenship, work and marriage. It aims to answer the question, 'how can we declare the praises of our God in these locations'. V12 summarises the aim: *Live such good lives among the pagans..... that they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*

Before though we engage with the 'pagans' we need to deal with ourselves. There is an internal battle to be entered into: *abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul. (11)* From all kinds of angles our culture seeks to promote sinful desire. If we are to win this war we will know what it is to daily pray for the help of the mighty Holy Spirit.

Submit is the Bible's key term in this section. (13,18, 3:1). We are not to be under any illusions of what to expect. V12 refers to *being accused of doing wrong*, and v15 references *the ignorant talk of foolish people*. Notice though the emphasis is not on argument but behaviour. It is by 'doing good' that Christians will silence their critics.

This goodness is defined for us in v16. We are those who have been set free to become Gods slaves. Jesus gives us a little glimpse of this kind of freedom in Matt 5:38-42. This is the section where he rescinds the restriction on retaliation (*you have heard that it was said an eye for an eye*) and instead tells us to turn the other cheek. In other words he shows us that we are free not to retaliate. This is coupled with learning to relate to the various 'people' who make up our lives in a way that God calls 'good'.

- Would you describe yourself as someone who is submitted to every human authority? Where might you need to make some changes?
- Take a moment to consider what is going on under the surface in your life. What kind of desires are particularly prominent? Do we need to abstain from some of these?
- Consider v16 and look for ways to increasingly submit to these various influences in your life.

1 Peter 2: 18-25

None of these situations that are described here are easy. To be a Christian living under a Roman emperor or a Christian wife married to a pagan husband would have involved real cost. Perhaps though all that is exceeded by the lot of a Christian slave owned by a harsh master. Yet the Bible called on such individuals to behave submissively. The challenge is not merely to be ready to do good but to be prepared to suffer for doing good. (20)

In writing these challenging words Peter sets before us the example of the ultimate slave, the Lord Jesus. Isaiah predicted the behaviour of the Servant of the Lord and Peter has drawn on that material as he describes the conduct of his Master.

He informs us of the 'mindset' of Christ. *When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. (23)* The idea is of 'handing over'. As Judas handed him over to the Jewish authorities or Pilate handed

him over to the soldiers the Lord Jesus handed himself and his reputation over to his Father. In our situations of injustice we are urged to do the same.

Christ has died for us so that we will '*die to sins and live for righteousness*' This is what righteousness looks like in Gods order of things.

The reason we can behave like this is because we know ourselves to be in a secure place. We are not at the mercy of circumstances or evil people. *We have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of our souls.*

- Do we think of work as a place where we can serve God?
- How do we tend to respond when we are treated unfairly? How does this passage encourage us to behave?
- How can we help one another not to think of ourselves at the mercy of unreasonable people but rather under the care of a great Shepherd?

1 Peter 3:1-7

Peter's emphasis on the power of a good life continues as he addresses the issue of marriage. In Ephesians Paul emphasises how husbands are to love their wives, here Peter instructs wives how to be submissive to their husbands. These instructions go beyond Christian marriages and have particular relevance for those married to unbelieving partners. Here is behaviour that 'wins people over'.

Husbands will see something visible and attractive. But this beauty is not purely external and it does not set out to merely impress people. *Your beauty should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is of great worth in God's sight.* (4)

This is certainly not a modern approach to marriage. And perhaps even in Peter's day there was an aversion to these things. It is though how the *holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves.* (5) Those who hope in God are able to entrust themselves to his care as people like Sarah and others illustrate. The question becomes who do we want to line up with; the pattern of the age or the holy people of the past?

Husbands are to live in an understanding way with their wives. They are to be sensitive to their physical needs but conscious of their spiritual equality. It is taken for granted that husbands as those with the responsibility of leadership in their homes will pray. There is a close connection with how they treat their wives and how God responds to their prayers.

- Purity and reverence are compelling qualities. Have we been persuaded to think that authentic holiness is a disadvantage when it comes to sharing the gospel?
- How are things internally? The bible commends a 'gentle and quiet spirit' as the kind of beauty to aspire to.
- Have those of us who are husbands made the link between our relations with our wives and our prayer life?

1 Peter 3: 8-22

This letter never lets us forget the cost that following Christ may entail. For Peter's readers that suffering included malicious words (16) and threats (14). These things though are not simply to be endured they have potential to challenge opinions and to raise questions in people's minds. *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you*

have. (15) It is the kind of reaction set out in v9 that challenges common perceptions. *Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary repay evil with blessing....*

Peter goes on to quote Psalm 34. This psalm comes from a period in David's life when he got a lot of things wrong. (lied to Ahimelek the high priest and sought refuge among the Philistines. The first failure cost the priest his life and the second nearly ended David's) At bottom it was a failure of faith, he forgot *'that the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer'*. If I live in the light of this I will be more inclined to *'seek peace and pursue it.'*

The alternative to fearing our opponents is *in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. (15)* At the centre of my life I need that clear conviction that I am not the victim of circumstances or even my own sin but rather that Jesus Christ rules over every detail of my life.

The rest of the section underlines for us that we are part of a success story. We may be the target of 'slander' (16) but that doesn't affect the achievements of the gospel. The death of Christ has *'brought us to God' (18)* If I have been brought back into fellowship with God I am in a safe place. And however we understand some of the details of this section the conclusion is clear: Christ *has gone into heaven and is at Gods right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him. (22)*

- The excerpt from Psalm 34 (v10-12) would be worth memorizing.
- Pray that God would help you to 'revere Christ as Lord in your heart'
- Peter presumes that all Christians will be baptised. Have we taken this step to profess our faith in Christ.

1 Peter 4:1-11

Jesus readiness to suffer revealed his readiness to obey his Father rather than to please himself. The Scripture urges us to adopt a similar attitude. We are to be those who don't live the rest of our lives pursuing our selfish desires but rather aiming to obey our heavenly Father. Peter urges us to 'arm ourselves with this attitude'. In other words this will involve us in a measure of conflict.

There is an urgency about this. *You have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do(3) The end of all things is near. (7)* Earlier he has referred to *the rest of our earthly lives (2)*. To be a Christian is to have a new attitude to time. Its in short supply and is to be used with an eye on eternity.

Happily Peter tells us what the will of God is that we are now to pursue. (7-11)

We are to pray. (7) The Bible gives us a realistic view of prayer. To pray is to engage in spiritual conflict. Consequently we need to be alert and clear about the priorities and opportunities. Peter may be reflecting on his failure in Gethsemane when he slept rather than remained alert with Christ. We are to love one another (8) In the same way that God the Father has chosen to cover over our sins with the sacrifice of his Son so we are to adopt a similar attitude to the petty annoyances and offences that come our way. This love is also expressed positively as we open our homes to one another. *Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. (9)*

We are to serve one another. Sometimes that will be through speaking and sometimes through practical care. The emphasis is on doing things not in our own strength but in a way that lets people see our resources come from God. (11)

- How would you describe your attitude? Is there any urgency to do Gods will?

- There is a balance of thought and action here. Some of us are happier praying than serving, and some find practical matters come more easily. Which side of the equation do you need to work at?
- Is hospitality (come round for coffee, join us for lunch, stay for the weekend) an important part of our relationship with God?

1 Peter 4:12-19

This letter sums up the Christian life as 'suffering and glory'. It's a pattern that runs all through all five chapters (1:6,7; 5:1; 5:10) and especially here (13) *But rejoice in as much as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you maybe overjoyed when his glory is revealed.*

We are not to be surprised when suffering crosses our path. It comes to test the genuineness of our faith and is an inevitable consequence of following a rejected Messiah.

We are to remind ourselves that those who share in his suffering will also share in his glory. (13) But it is not all future. Those who are insulted for the name of Christ enjoy the sustaining blessing of Gods Spirit. Perhaps no one illustrates this better than Stephen. Falsely and violently accused by the Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria, they were confronted by a man whose physical presence radiated the reality of God. And even as they murdered him the harmless life of Christ emerged. The spectators heard him pray: *Lord do not hold this sin against them. (Acts 7:60)*

We are not to be ashamed. (16) To suffer because you are a Christian is not a cause of shame but one of honour. Paul wrote to the church at Philippi *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him but also to suffer for him. (Phil 1:29)* All too easily we draw the conclusion that if our lives are difficult it must mean God doesn't really love us. Its only Gods word that can keep this counter cultural perspective before us.

Peter sums up this section by referring to suffering under the heading of God's judgment. There is a costly refining process going on as our faith is purified and we are made ready for the world to come. And if that is the case for Gods children what will become of those who do not obey the gospel? V19 provides a fitting conclusion to this long section: *those who suffer according to Gods will should commit themselves to their faithful Creator and continue to do good.*

- To be referred to as a 'Christian' in Peter's day was to experience an insult. Perhaps that is the direction in which we are headed. What will keep us from being surprised should that happen?
- Shame and honour are powerful emotions. The world implies we ought to be ashamed of our views and consequently keep our 'heads down'. God would encourage those who suffer for Christ to see themselves as honoured by him.
- What will it mean for us to commit ourselves to our faithful Creator and continue to do good?