

REJOICE!

A Small Group Study
on 1 PETER



TRIANGLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, 2010

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Welcome



Welcome to Triangle Presbyterian Church's study of 1 Peter! We hope that not only will this study serve to encourage you in your faith in Jesus, but you will also be challenged to grow in a deeper and stronger relationship with God and His people. The epistle of 1 Peter was written to particular churches going through certain struggles in the first century, but the message still speaks to us today in our own circumstances here and now. The purpose of this study is to learn why this letter was originally written, what is its purpose and to discover how it applies to us today.

1 Peter is a short letter—only five chapters. It is likely that the letter was read aloud to the churches for their exhortation. Because this study will not be approaching the text verse by verse, but rather thematically, it will be helpful for all small group participants to familiarize themselves with the letter as a whole. Sit down and read the letter all the way through in one sitting (you can do this in 20 minutes or less). Take time to ruminate on the words and dwell on the message. Allow time for reading and re-reading the passage during the week between your small group meetings. Write down phrases or thoughts that strike you as interesting, and come to your small group ready to be changed by the Word of the Lord!

The first week of this study will be an introduction to the author, the recipients, and the situation of 1 Peter. We will get a glimpse of the circumstances surrounding the letter's composition, and discuss how these circumstances relate to or differ from our own.

The next six weeks will each cover a different theme found in 1 Peter. We will dig into the text and seek to apply the message to our lives as members of the body of Christ Jesus.

Each week ends with a guided prayer, and it is intended to lead your group into a time of deeper prayer. Pray for the needs of your group, the needs of the community, and pray for one another, that the Word of God would dwell richly in your hearts.

Rejoice for God has spoken to us through His Word! Open your hearts and minds and listen to what our Lord has to say to us. May you and your group be blessed through this study of 1 Peter.

Introduction to 1 Peter



Before we begin this small group study on the themes of the letter of 1 Peter, it would be wise to spend some time knowing who wrote it. Who, when receiving a letter in the mail, doesn't first look to the top-left corner to see the identity of the sender? We get excited if it is from family or a friend, but disregard the contents if it is another advertisement or credit card offer. Who the author is dictates whether we even will open some mail. Also of great importance is knowing the recipients of the letter. 1 Peter isn't directly addressed to you—it wasn't put in an ancient time capsule to be opened in the year 2010. It was written to Christians spread around modern-day Turkey, and knowing who they were helps us in understanding what Peter wanted to say. By determining the ways that we are the same or different from those of the early Church, we will be guided in making better sense of what this letter means for us today.

Hopefully by now you will have read this short book. If not, take some time to read it together as a group. Here is an outline to help you be aware of the organization of the five chapters.

The Letter

Outlined below is a brief summary of the content and flow of the epistle in order to help you navigate the material in the text.

1:1-2	Greeting
1:3-12	Thanksgiving for salvation in Jesus Christ
1:13-2:10	Characteristics of the Christian's life
2:11-3:7	Christians' conduct in the world <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Among the Gentiles (2:11-12) ▶ Relationship to Authorities (2:13-17) ▶ Masters and Slaves (2:18-20) ▶ Jesus Christ as the Basis for Actions (2:21-25) ▶ Husbands and Wives (3:1-7)
3:8-4:19	Responding to Suffering

- ▶ General Instructions (3:8-12)
 - ▶ Christ's Suffering (3:12-22)
 - ▶ The Calling to Purity of Lifestyle (4:1-6)
 - ▶ Life in the Christian Community (4:7-11)
 - ▶ Judgment and Rejoicing (4:12-19)
- 5:1-5 Christian Leadership
 5:6-11 Closing Instructions and Encouragement
 5:12—14 Final Greeting

 After reading through the letter and looking over this outline, how would you describe the mood of the letter?

What would you say is the purpose of the letter?

Author

Who wrote 1 Peter? We don't have to look far into the letter to determine the author, for the very first verse indicates that Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, is the sender. The epistle of 1 Peter does not provide us with any personal information about its author, but we know from the Gospels that Peter was a Galilean fisherman and a disciple of Jesus. What else do we know about Peter?

Read the passages listed below from the Gospels and discuss the following questions:

Matthew 14:22-33 Luke 5:1-11 Luke 9:18-20

Luke 22:31-34, 54-62 John 21:15-19

 What do we learn about Peter?

What do we learn about his relationship with Jesus?

What is Peter called to do?

Jewish laws had a great deal of importance placed upon setting yourself apart. There were certain boundaries that could not be crossed. There were certain foods

that were clean, and others were unclean. The same applied to people as well, some clean and others unclean. In Acts chapter 10, Peter has a vision that challenged that whole perception. In the vision he saw all the animals and foods that he once considered unclean being held by something like a sheet, and Peter was told to kill and eat. He at once rejects such a notion, for he has never eaten any unclean thing. But Peter hears a voice telling him not to call impure or unclean anything that God has made clean. Peter didn't immediately understand the full impact of this vision, but when a centurion named Cornelius sent for Peter and brought him to his home, Peter realized that the Gentile people, a people whom he had thought to be unclean, were now being called clean by God. The good news of Jesus Christ was not for Jews alone, but for all peoples. Speaking to Cornelius and a group of Gentiles, Peter said:

"I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear Him and do what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all. You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached— how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how He went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with Him.

"We are witnesses of everything He did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed Him by hanging Him on a tree, but God raised Him from the dead on the third day and caused Him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen— by us who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about Him that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."

Acts 10:34-43

Recipients

Who were the recipients of Peter's letter? Again, we find the answer at the very beginning of the letter. 1 Peter 1:1 says, "To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." These are the people Peter is called to minister to in Acts 10, not just Jews, but Gentiles as well. How do we know this? Peter makes various references to the people's "former way of life," and suggests that relationship with the one, living God is a new way

of life for these people. (See 1:14, 2:10).

This letter was meant to be circulated among these various churches in the region of present-day Turkey. They are called “elect,” meaning chosen, called by God. The words “exiles” and “dispersion” are references to being outside one’s homeland. Are these people literally *resident aliens* or are the phrases used metaphorically, referring to the fact that these individuals live in a land where they don’t feel quite at home? The text itself doesn’t tell us how to interpret the meaning of exiles or dispersion, but however the term is intended, we will find through studying this letter that these Christians lived among people who had different traditions and beliefs from their own. They acted differently, and the culture around them recognized these differences. The Christians suffered as a result of living in obedience to Jesus.

Q Does knowing the Gentile background of these Christians change the way we read or understand the letter? Would it be different if the recipients were Jews?

What about us? Is our situation different or similar to these “resident alien” Gentiles? Do we have more or less in common with our culture? Do we still live in Christendom (where Christianity is accepted and expected)?

Many people belonged to cults that worshipped various gods during the time of the writing of 1 Peter. Feasts and festivities celebrating the pagan gods were common and accepted. If one, for instance, belonged to the cult of Zeus or Isis, he or she wouldn’t be bothered by their neighbors. We know that the city of Ephesus, for example, had a large population that followed Artemis, and the people erected a temple there. If an Ephesian worshipped one of the *other* Greek or Roman gods, they likely wouldn’t be bothered, as long as it did not interfere with the worship of Artemis. The pagan worshippers were not disturbed from their devotion as long as they followed the status quo. But, neither would they receive a letter from someone hundreds of miles away, written to cheer and support them. The Christians were a minority religious group in this area, who did not adhere to the status quo, but they were not alone, and not without encouragement. They may have been “strangers in the world” but they were not strangers to Peter, because they are known to God and chosen by Him (1:1-2).

Q How do we enter the world of people who have ‘other gods’ (whether

they are literally other gods of other religions or gods like politics, money, work, etc.)?

Are there reasons that we would face suffering because of what we believe? Or do our beliefs just fit in? Do our neighbors think we are a bother because of our faith, in good or bad ways?

In what ways do we provide encouragement and support to our brothers and sisters in Christ in other communities around the world? How can we challenge ourselves to connect even more? Why does it matter?

Closing Prayer:

Grant, Almighty God, that since under the guidance of thy Son we have been united together in the body of thy Church, which has been so often scattered and torn asunder, --O grant that we may continue in the unity of faith, and perseveringly fight against all the temptations of this world, and never deviate from the right course, whatever new troubles may daily arise; and though we are exposed to many deaths, let us not be seized with fear, such as may extinguish in our hearts every hope; but may we, on the contrary, learn to raise up our eyes and minds and all our thoughts to thy great power, by which thou quicken the dead, and raise from nothing things which are not, so that, though we be daily exposed to ruin, our souls may ever aspire to eternal salvation, until thou at length really show thyself to be the fountain of life, when we shall enjoy that endless felicity which has been obtained for us by the blood of thine only begotten Son our Lord. Amen.

~John Calvin

Understanding the Old Testament



You may have noticed that the authors of the New Testament often include many references to the Old Testament in their writing. Modern editors have helped by adding the proper citations, but when Peter or Paul quoted a passage, they were most likely going from memory and didn't bother with footnotes. Someone like Peter, a Jew, would have had a great knowledge of the Old Testament and he didn't hesitate to incorporate it in his letters. Clearly, these authors believed that

the God who is revealed in Jesus Christ is the same God who spoke long ago to the people of the Old Testament, and what was said then is still important to our faith now.



How do we understand the Old Testament?

Why is it called the *Old* Testament?

Is it as important as the New Testament?

As mentioned in the first week, Biblical scholars maintain that the recipients of 1 Peter were mostly a Gentile audience, while some of them were likely Jewish. A good number of the first Christians who heard the letter read to them probably came from a pagan background, meaning they believed in and worshipped many different gods. Upon hearing the Good News about Jesus, they turned their lives around and committed to following Christ. Following Christ meant that these people experienced a substantial life-change.

In his letter, Peter seeks to help these new Christians understand what it means to be a Christian and to have their identity in Christ. One way that he achieves this is through the use of Old Testament language and imagery originally used to refer to Israel. Peter takes up this language and uses it to describe the church. In a way, he tells these new converts that Israel's history is now their history, too. Peter assumes that the Christians (Jews and Gentiles alike) have taken up the Old Testament as *their* Scripture.

Listed below are some of the Old Testament references found in 1 Peter. Think about what it would mean to the Gentile converts to hear these words addressed to them and for them for the first time.

1 Peter 1:24-25

In this passage, Peter conveys to his readers that they have been drawn into relationship with Christ through the Word of God. He quotes the prophet Isaiah, through whom God spoke, warning the people that though there would be times of pain and suffering, they are to look to that which is eternal: the Word of the Lord.

- ▶ Isaiah 40:6-8 “All flesh is like grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades when the breath of the Lord blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”

1 Peter 2:4-8

Peter emphasizes the change that the Christians have undergone in following Christ, the Living Stone. The prophets of the Old Testament foretold His coming and told the people of Israel that the Messiah is the only true foundation for their lives. Peter goes on to associate the Christians with the priests of Israel, the ones who interceded between God and the people.

- ▶ Isaiah 28:16 “Behold I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation: ‘Whoever believes will not be in haste.’”
- ▶ Psalm 118:22 “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”
- ▶ Exodus 19:6 “And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”
- ▶ Isaiah 61:6 “But you shall be called the priests of the Lord; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast.”

1 Peter 2:10

Peter refers to the prophet Hosea, emphasizing again the change in status of the new Christians. They who were once lost have been called into the family of God.

- ▶ Hosea 2:23 “And I will have mercy on *No Mercy*, and I will say to *Not My People*, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God.’”

1 Peter 2:11

Peter makes use of language associated with Abraham's travels among foreign people. Though he was in a foreign land, God was with him and directed him, just as God is present with the Christians to whom Peter writes.

- ▶ Genesis 23:4 Abraham said, "I am a sojourner and foreigner among you."

1 Peter 2:22-25

Peter uses the language of Isaiah to remind the Christians of the suffering that Christ endured on their behalf. Jesus' patient endurance is to be an example for them to follow.

- ▶ Isaiah 53:4-9 "Surely he has born our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. And we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent; so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth."



How do you think these Gentile Christians responded to hearing the words of the Old Testament applied to them?

What is the significance of Peter's use of this language to refer to the Church and to address the Church?

The way 1 Peter uses the Old Testament can help correct two current trends in the understanding of the Old Testament. One of these trends views the Old Testament as a disposable text that is unnecessary for Christian faith and practice. The argument goes that the Christian Church has been given the New Testament,

which supercedes and replaces the Old Testament, which was a book meant only for Israel. But, the letter sent by Peter tells us something different. The history of God's interactions with the people of Israel is the history that Christians are meant to claim as their own as well. The God who created the world, who led the Israelites out of Egypt, who sustained them in the wilderness, who gave them a land of abundance to live in, and who spoke to them through the prophets is the same God that the Christians worship and follow. He is the Father of their Lord Jesus Christ.

Another common trend in the study of the Old Testament tends to completely separate the Old and New Testament and to understand each on its own terms. This trend calls for people to avoid searching for references to Jesus in the Old Testament. It is argued that people should read and study the Old Testament as a history of the Hebrew people and nothing more. But, again Peter demonstrates a very different understanding. He quotes prophecies of the Old Testament and maintains that these refer to Jesus, the Messiah. Even with our children, we try to remind them that the Old and New Testaments are part of the same book, and that the God of the Old is the same as the New, and He is the one we worship today. We teach the song, "Father Abraham," and sing out that we are all children of Abraham because we all praise the one, true God.

Q Do you think of your own faith as in the same line as Israel?

Do you think of our spiritual predecessors as including Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—or just Peter, Paul and Mary?

What difference does it make to see ourselves as being part of God's people, who stretch back to Adam?

Each week we will consider the following questions regarding what we have studied every week. These questions are meant to help you to internalize and apply what has been considered during this week's study.

**Q What Good News did you hear from 1 Peter today?
How is the text calling us to change?
How does the text teach us to understand the world we live in?
How does this text send us out into the world?**

Closing Prayer:

Good, all-powerful God, who cares for every one of us, as if you care for us alone; and who cares for us all, as if all were but one! O God, our parent, supremely good, beauty of all beauty, to you we entrust whatever we have received from you, and so shall we lose nothing. You have made us for yourself and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. Amen

~St. Augustine)

Nature of Faith



The topic of faith is likely to stir various emotions and opinions in different people. Some individuals consider faith to be an entirely private matter—like politics—a personal choice not to be discussed. For others, faith may be something they have in common with their families and a part of their lives they share with only the most intimate of family and friends. And for others still, their faith may be one of their most obvious and recognizable characteristics, inseparable from the very core of who they are.



Do you think faith is more a public or private matter? Why?

Read the following passages from 1 Peter to be considered during today's study:

2:9-12 3:13-16 4:8-11
5:1-5 5:8-11

According to 1 Peter, life as a follower of Christ is not a private issue. More than merely *inward* beliefs and feelings, faith involves commitment to God, which has *outward* ramifications. One commentator on the letter has written, “allegiance to God has no outer limits but reaches into the nooks and crannies of all of life.”¹ Faith in Jesus Christ draws us into relationship with other believers and it affects the way we relate with those who don't know Christ.

Do we tend to talk about *my* faith, *my* walk with Jesus, *my* work for God's Kingdom? Such language may signify the importance we place on our individual responsibility to answer God's call in our lives. But, it also may be a sign of our inclination to diminish the importance of the Body of Christ, the community of believers. How often do we find ourselves speaking of *our* faith, *our* journey, *our* labor for Christ and His Kingdom? 1 Peter, like most letters in the New

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Testament, automatically draws our attention to the life of faith as a shared experience because it is a letter written to a group of believers who followed Christ together. 1 Peter 1:3 highlights that which Peter has in common with these believers. He writes, “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 Christ from the dead.” Their relationship to Christ and their calling bond them together.



How does our relationship to God change when we become Christians?

How does Peter describe our relationship to God in 1 Peter 1:17-18?

In light of 1 Peter 4:10-11, how can we share God’s grace to others in our community? How might God use us in this role? How are you called to this task?

When do we need to hear the reminder that we are not alone (5:9)? How does this truth give you comfort?

Once we have established and recognized the importance of the community to which we are joined when we follow Christ, we also need to consider how our community relates to those outside of it. There are two extremes that we should seek to avoid. First, we need not choose complete isolation from society, in which we have no interaction or relationships with those who are not followers of Christ. Secondly and just as important, we must avoid a blind embrace and approval of culture which disregards our differences from unbelievers. Some churches follow this first extreme, setting up entirely isolated communities, which encourage interactions only *within* the church excluding all others. Other churches have gone to the opposite extreme, trying to recreate within their churches a community that exactly reflects the society at large, in hopes of making outsiders feel comfortable. These churches are no different from the world and the Christians of those churches live lives no different from those who do not know Christ.

In regards to the first extreme, Peter assumes and encourages the Christians to whom he writes to be in relationship with those outside their community of faith. The hope is that the Christians will bear witness to the love and good news of Jesus Christ through their words and actions in the world. 1 Peter 2:12 says, “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” Peter urges the Christians to avoid the second extreme by answering God’s call to be holy. Peter tells them not to be “conformed

to the passions of your former ignorance, but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct” (1:14-15). It’s certainly not easy to maintain the balance between these two extremes, but nonetheless we are called to it.

Q In regards to that balance, do you find it easier to lean to one of the two extremes (isolation from the world or embracing culture)?

What does it look like to live as an “alien and sojourner” in the world?
What steps can we take to be in but not of the world?

How does the church pursue holiness while still engaging the world?

Based on 1 Peter 5:1-5, what is the role of the leaders of the church in regards to helping the community avoid the two extremes?

Why does Peter mention the devil (5:8)? Where do we see him active in the world today? When are we the weakest, most vulnerable to the devil?

Faith is an occasion for rejoicing because by faith we know that we have been rescued from darkness and drawn into God’s marvelous light. We walk by faith. We live by faith. Faith cannot be private because the truth of Christ encompasses our whole lives. We can choose to hide our faith or to rejoice and let the light shine! The letter of 1 Peter shows us that we, as Christians, need to be reminded to allow the light of Christ to shine in and through us. We need to remind one another to rejoice and to share the wonderful gift of faith that we have been given. Peter provides further instructions for sharing one’s faith in 3:16: “Do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.” We are to speak our faith *publicly*, yes, but we are to do so with gentleness and respect.

This call to interact publicly with the world is a hard one. The tight-rope walk of being in the world but not of it is a lifelong task. We must remember to love our neighbors and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, because that is what God has done for us and what Christ has called us to do. Yet we must also keep obedient to Christ in another way, in loving Him and not loving the things of this world. We are to cast off the sinful things that ensnare us and cling to Christ, living in ways different from the rest of the world. In so doing, we are showing our love for God and further doing the work of showing others the good news of Jesus Christ.



What Good News did you hear from 1 Peter today?

How is the text calling us to change?

How does the text teach us to understand the world we live in?

How does this text send us out into the world?

Closing Prayer:

Lord, our God, you know who we are: People with good and bad consciences; satisfied and dissatisfied, sure and unsure people; Christians out of conviction and Christians out of habit; believers, half-believers, and unbelievers.

You know where we come from: from our circle of relatives, friends and acquaintances, or from great loneliness; from lives of quiet leisure, or from all manner of embarrassment and distress; from ordered, tense or destroyed family relationships; from the inner circle or from the fringes of the Christian community.

But now we all stand before you; in all our inequality equal in this, that we are all in the wrong before you and among each other; that we all must die some day; that we all would be lost without your grace; but also in that your grace is promised to and turned toward all of us through your beloved Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ.

We are here together in order to praise you by allowing you to speak to us. We ask that this might happen in this hour in the name of your Son, our Lord. Amen.

~Karl Barth

Suffering and Trials



Religious suffering or persecution can take many forms-- physical, psychological, emotional, and political. For the majority of us in the United States, we do not suffer physical persecution as a result of our faith in Christ. Unfortunately, this is not the case in other areas of the world. Physical suffering for those who follow Christ is real and a cause for fear. When it comes to our faith, perhaps we are not strangers to suffering in other ways.



Is there a time when you were insulted for your beliefs?

How did you feel? How did you react?

Are Christians persecuted for being holy or 'holier than thou'?

Read the following passages to prepare for the lesson today:

Romans 5:1-5

1 Peter 4:12-16

1 Peter 2:21-25

Matthew 16:21-23

Peter wrote this letter to communities of believers who were suffering persecution at the hands of those around them. He seeks to comfort them during their trials and urges them to respond in appropriate ways. In the book of 1 Peter, we see two unlikely words paired together: *rejoice* and *trials*. Peter writes, "In this [salvation] you *rejoice*, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various *trials*" (1:6). Peter bids them to rejoice even though they encounter trials or sufferings of many sorts. Again, later in the letter, Peter says, "*Rejoice* insofar as you share Christ's *sufferings*, that you may also rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed" (4:13). The Apostle Paul makes a similar statement in Romans 5:3-5, "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through

the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.” We can rejoice because we are not alone in our sufferings—we are not abandoned by the Lord, and Christ showed us that suffering is not the end of the story. Praise God that suffering and death were overcome by Jesus Christ! We are able to rejoice because of the hope given to us in the power of the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Counselor.

Q Do we find it hard to answer Peter’s call to rejoice during times of suffering?

Is it hard to encourage others to rejoice in suffering?

In Matthew 16:21-23, how had Peter respond to the idea of suffering?

To rejoice in suffering does not come easily, and as we see in the Matthew passage, we need to learn the purpose of suffering from the Master himself. Jesus did not lift up suffering as an honor to be grasped at for its own sake. Jesus was prepared to suffer as a sacrifice *for others*. Peter writes, “He himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls” (2:24-25). What great news this is! The cost of suffering was worth it so that the Son of God could rescue His people. In the same way, Peter encourages the Christians to rejoice in their suffering for doing good, and in this way, God will be honored and glorified. Though they may suffer unjustly, the goal is to point to Christ so that others might come to know Him. Peter reminds them, “You have been ransomed...with the precious blood of Christ” (1:18-19). Suffering and trials do not get the last and final word—they do not determine the success of a Christian’s life. In the midst of trials, we are to KNOW and BELIEVE that we have been rescued. We have reason for faith and hope.

Q How would you describe the hope we have in the midst of suffering?

How would you “make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you” (3:15)?

Peter provides specific instructions to these Christians regarding the proper response to the sufferings they encounter. The letter highlights the importance of

maintaining “good conduct” among non-believers so that they may see their good deeds and give glory to God (2:12). They are to live and act righteously for the sake of those outside their Christian community, even if they are the cause of their suffering. The Christians’ response to suffering is based upon Jesus own response: “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. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. 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” (2:21-23). Justice and judgment belong to the Lord—we are not to retaliate. “Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing” (3:9).



What makes it difficult to respond to suffering and persecution in the way Peter urges?

What does it look like to bless those who do evil against us or revile us?

Does a lack of retaliation make us prone to abuse and being taken advantage of?

Even though we may not personally suffer physical persecution because of our faith in Christ, other types of suffering are indeed a reality. Think of the teenager who is berated for not joining her peers in “just one drink.” Consider the college student who is criticized by his professor for believing that “ancient” Christian doctrine. Consider the employee who rejects the temptation to fudge the numbers for the sake of the company and is persecuted for being out of sync with others.

Following Christ may result in persecution and suffering, but we have reason to rejoice in the midst of these trials. Death has been overcome! Hope is not lost! Our Redeemer lives! When we suffer, we ought to place our hope and trust in the One who has rescued us, and when we see our brothers and sisters suffering, we ought to reach out to them with comfort and support as the body of Christ.



What Good News did you hear from 1 Peter today?

How is the text calling us to change?

How does the text teach us to understand the world we live in?

How does this text send us?

Closing Prayer

Holy God, to whose service I long ago dedicated my soul and life, I grieve and lament before Thee that I am still so prone to sin and so little inclined to obedience:

So much attached to the pleasures of sense, so negligent of things spiritual:

So prompt to gratify my body, so slow to nourish my soul:

So greedy for present delight, so indifferent to lasting blessedness:

So fond of idleness, so indisposed for labor:

So soon at play, so late at prayer:

So brisk in the service of self, so slack in the service of others:

So eager to get, so reluctant to give:

So lofty in my profession, so low in my practice:

So full of good intentions, so backward to fulfill them:

So severe with my neighbors, so indulgent with myself:

So eager to find fault, so resentful and being found fault with:

So little able for great tasks, so discontented with small ones;

So weak in adversity, so swollen and self-satisfied in prosperity:

So helpless apart from Thee, and yet so little willing to be bound to Thee.

O merciful heart of God, grant me yet again Thy forgiveness. Hear my sorrowful tale and in Thy great mercy blot it out from the book of Thy remembrance. Give me faith so to lay hold of Thine own holiness and so to rejoice in the righteousness of Christ my Savior that, resting on His merits rather than my own, I may more and more become conformed to His likeness, my will becoming one with His in obedience to Thine. All this I ask for His holy name's sake. Amen.

~John Baillie

Obedience to Christ



Following Christ involves the act of repentance. In his sermon at Pentecost Peter urges his listeners, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). Repentance is a common word in the language of the church, but what exactly does it mean? Our English word *repent* has roots in the Latin word *repere*, which means “to creep” and the Old French word *repentir* which means “to be sorry.” These two word origins may create a good visual for us of one crawling along the ground, remorseful for his actions. Even more helpful are the original Greek and Hebrew terms for repentance. In Hebrew, one of the words used to signify repentance means “to return.” In repentance we *return* to the living God, who has created and redeemed us, and we *turn from* our own ways. In Greek, the word for repentance means “to think differently” or to change one’s mind and after that, one’s conduct. To repent is to change, to turn away from ourselves and turn to God.



What changed for you when you answered the call to follow Christ?

How does your life look different to others?

Read the following passages before you begin the rest of today’s study:

1 Peter 1:13-19 1 Peter 4:1-5

Colossians 3:1-4 1 Peter 2:11-12

Obvious as it sounds, it is important to recognize that the source of change and the central focus for the Christian’s new life is *Christ*. Nothing and no one else could have reoriented the lives of the recipients of Peter’s letter. Their former lives were filled with ignorance (1:14), emptiness (1:18), darkness (2:9), a lack of mercy (2:10) and passions of human sinfulness (4:2). From this way of life they were ransomed (1:18), called out (2:9), and brought to God (3:18). They have been

born anew. It is as if they have started again, they have been born for the first time. They are a new creation! Peter exhorts these Christians to live into their new identity and to faithfully follow the One who has saved them. This means they are to be holy as the One who has called them is holy (1:15).

Q How do we know what holiness looks like? Where do we learn how to be holy?

We observed in week one that Peter's letter contains many references back to the Old Testament. 1 Peter 1:15-16 alludes to Leviticus 19:2 where the Lord, through Moses, commands the people of Israel to be holy, for the Lord their God is holy. Holiness is not a new requirement for Christians; rather God has always called His people to be holy, or set apart. The Good News for Christians is that Jesus Christ came into the world to demonstrate what a holy life looks like. As the Son of God, Jesus Christ lived a life of holiness and perfect obedience to the Father. Through Jesus Christ, we too are children of God, and we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us in our pursuit of holiness.

Q Based on Jesus' life, death and resurrection how would you define holiness?

1 Peter 2:9 describes the Christian community as a "holy nation." If Christians are already labeled as "holy," then what does it mean to be called to holiness?

How is it different to be a holy nation, as opposed to being holy as an individual? What aspects of holiness may be intrinsically communal?

Just as Christ was obedient to the will of the Father, so are Christians to be obedient children, seeking to follow God's will in every area of life. Jesus was obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross (Philippians 2:8). His life was characterized by sacrificial living, faithfulness, selfless love of others, humility, and obedience. Observe the way these words and ideas are used by Peter to describe the desired characteristics of the Christians' lives. Peter urges the recipients of the letter on to obedience to Jesus Christ and the will of God (1:2, 1:14, 1:22, 3:17, 4:2). He calls for them to be sober-minded and humble (1:13, 3:9, 4:7, 5:5, 5:6, 5:8). Their love for one another is to be sincere, pure, and

selfless (1:22, 2:17, 3:8, 4:8, 5:14). Their faith in Christ and their faithfulness to His calling are to be strong and genuine (1:7, 1:9, 5:9). And finally, their lives ought to be characterized by sacrifice, submission and service (2:5, 2:13, 2:19, 3:1, 4:10-11, 5:5). Surely Peter would echo the words of the Apostle Paul, “Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:2-3). In other words, Peter and Paul would both say to these Christians that the key to their new life is to live *in Christ*—to obey and follow Him with every ounce of their beings.

Q What does it mean that your life is “hidden in Christ”? Is this fact a comfort to you?

How does Peter’s description of the identity of a Christian change the way you regard the various areas of your life (family, work, church, etc.)?

When have you followed the lead of Christ and not done what you wanted or what you would have preferred to do?

Christ came into this broken and sinful world for our sake. The purpose of His obedience, His sacrifice, His faithfulness, His humility and His love was to draw us to the Father so that we might know Him. We cannot rejoice in this fact enough! To know that God spared no cost to call us to Himself, to rescue His children is to know the good news. Christ gave His life for us and has left us an example, that we might follow in His steps for the sake of others. Now, as ambassadors of Christ, the purpose of our lives is to point to Christ, to direct people to Him. We are called to share the Good News with others so that they too can rejoice in their salvation through Christ!

Q What result might our sacrificial living have on others? How is it a witness (2:12)?

What Good News did you hear from 1 Peter today?

How is the text calling us to change?

How does the text teach us to understand the world we live in?

How does this text send us?

Closing Prayer

O Heavenly Father, give me a heart like the heart of Jesus Christ, a heart more ready to minister than to be ministered unto, a heart moved by compassion towards the weak and the oppressed, a heart set upon the coming of Thy kingdom in the world of humankind.

I would pray tonight, O God, for all those sorts and conditions of people to whom Jesus Christ was accustomed to give special thought and care;

For those lacking food or drink or clothing:

For the sick and all who are wasted by disease:

For the blind:

For the maimed and lame:

For lepers:

For prisoners:

For those oppressed by any injustice:

For the lost sheep of human society:

For fallen women:

For all lonely strangers within our gates:

For the worried and anxious:

For those who are living faithful lives in obscurity:

For those who are fighting bravely in unpopular causes:

For all who are laboring diligently in Thy vineyard.

Grant, O Father, that Thy loving-kindness in causing my own lines to fall in pleasant places may not make me less sensitive to the needs of others less privileged, but rather more incline me to lay their burdens upon my own heart.

And if any adversity should befall myself, then let me not brood upon my own sorrows, as if I alone in the world were suffering, but rather let me busy myself in the compassionate service of all who need my help. Thus let the power of my Lord Christ be strong within me and His peace invade my spirit. Amen.

~John Baillie

Salvation



Salvation is likely one of the most used words in our Christian vocabulary. It is with good reason that the topic of salvation commonly fills our thoughts and conversations, for salvation in Jesus is the Good News. It is the news that we have received and which we are to share. The knowledge of this salvation causes us to rejoice and be glad. Since it is so essential to our faith, it is necessary that we should know the content of this salvation, how we receive it, and what we do

with it. These are questions whose answers can be difficult to put into words. We often leave it to the pastors and theologians to explain the intricate details. But, how much greater our joy and gladness can be when we come to know the nature of our salvation more and more deeply!



How would you define salvation?

From which people or influences in your life have you learned about salvation?

Consider the following passages for today's lesson:

1 Peter 1:1-9

Philippians 2:12-16

One way that Peter describes salvation is as an “inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1:4). We often think of inheritance as something that we receive when someone passes away, something that may be given to us at a future time. In Biblical usage, the word inheritance has a much more present meaning. An inheritance is something that already belongs to us and our name is already on the deed. One who awaits an inheritance has been appointed to inherit it. In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) the youngest son asks for his share of the inheritance, for he understands what portion of it belongs to him. He *knows* that it is coming to him. Likewise, salvation is an inheritance that Christians know is coming to them, which they can *already* claim as their own. Not only is it guaranteed, but it is unlike all the

earthly inheritances we are familiar with. It is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading—it is eternal, pure, and it maintains its worth. Not only this, but it is kept in a safe and secure place—heaven. Through his letter, Peter encourages the recipients to take comfort in the guarantee of their salvation. Even though they face trial and persecutions, their salvation is secure.



Looking at 1 Peter 1:6-7, what sort of effect might persecution or suffering have on our faith?

Do you tend to view suffering as beneficial to faith? Why or why not?

Why does Peter use a word like “inheritance,” which suggests a familial understanding of salvation?

Peter links faith and salvation by stating to the Christians that the outcome of their faith is the salvation of their souls (1:9). Described in this way, salvation seems to be a future state that Christians look forward to and expect. The content of their hope is salvation. This understanding may seem contrary to our usual way of thinking about salvation. We speak of when we “got saved,” we comment on how wonderful it is that we are saved, or we tell our “salvation story.” What Peter is telling these Christians is that their salvation stories are not yet complete! Salvation certainly has a *here and now* element because their redemption *has been* accomplished in Jesus Christ through his sacrificial death and victorious resurrection. But Peter also describes salvation as an ongoing process. Again, we hear this thought echoed in the words of the Apostle Paul as well, “Therefore, my beloved...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13). In other words, God isn’t finished with you yet! What you know of salvation is only a foretaste! Peter does not want the hearers of his letter to grow complacent in their faith, but wants them to grow more and more deeply in their relationship with the Triune God, knowing better just how wide and long, high and deep is the love of God (Ephesians 3).



Read 1 Peter 2:1-3, and consider how we grow more fully into salvation here and now?

How is God’s action evident in the process? What is our role in the development?

Salvation is a continuing process in the life of the Christian. It involves past, present and future. It begins with new birth in Christ when one hears and believes the Good News. Throughout the Christian's life faith is grown and deepened through tests and trials. For this reason, Peter reinforces the importance of faithfulness and obedience to Christ, as we discussed last week. Salvation is revealed at the last time, at the final judgment, when Christ returns and the whole earth will be judged. Christians live in the "in between time" after redemption has already been accomplished through Christ's life, death and resurrection and before the final coming of Christ. For them, salvation is both *already* present and *not yet* complete.

The fact that salvation is still a future outcome is a source of joy and comfort, according to Peter. Waiting for salvation does not make it any less secure or certain. Peter reminds them to entrust their souls to God, their faithful Creator (4:19). God graciously upholds creation from beginning to end, and the Christians are to be confident in this. Additionally, Christians are given the Holy Spirit who guides and encourages Christians during the "already but not yet" time of salvation.



Is thinking in terms of "already but not yet" difficult or hard to grasp?

Do you hope for and expect our coming salvation?

Have we lost sight of what is yet to come? How can we correct this?

Being firmly rooted in what Christ has already done, yet looking ahead with anticipation for what He is still going to do can be difficult. But difficult things are often the most rewarding. Looking ahead will give us joy knowing that God has not been at rest for the last two thousand years, rather He is still at work in us and in this world.

We know that we are saved by God, but we still struggle with sin. Having learned that this salvation is ongoing, and is still being worked out by God in us, gives us comfort and assurance that our struggles are not an indication that we have completely failed. Although God has forgiven our sins, we still struggle against our sinful nature, and as God works His salvation in us, He is always offering His forgiveness to us, and has promised help to all who pray for it.

Already but not yet is difficult, but it makes us realize that we do not have in our possession all that is necessary for our righteousness. Jesus Christ is the

one who is righteous, and He holds our salvation. We cannot ever rely on ourselves for it. “Already but not yet” reminds us that we must now and always rely on Christ to be enough for us.



What Good News did you hear from 1 Peter today?
How is the text calling us to change?
How does the text teach us to understand the world we live in?
How does this text send us?

Closing Prayer:

O God, early in the morning I cry to you. Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you: I cannot do this alone. In me there is darkness, but with you there is light; I am lonely, but you do not leave me; I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help; I am restless, but with you there is peace. In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience; I do not understand your ways, but you know the way for me...

Restore me to liberty, and enable me to live now that I may answer before you and before me. Lord, whatever this day may bring, Your name be praised...Amen

~Dietrich Bonhoeffer

End Times



Peter does not merely focus on the present situation of the Christians who received his letter, but he draws attention to the future, to the end of the age. Peter doesn't hesitate to address issues regarding the end of time, and he doesn't wish the recipients of his letter to avoid the subject. Peter mentions the "last time" (1:5), Jesus' future revelation and His glory to be revealed (1:7, 1:13, 4:13, 5:1, 5:4), the "day of visitation" (2:12), the coming Judge and judgment (4:5, 4:17), and the end of all things (4:7). Today we will discuss four aspects of these "last things": Judgment, Glory, Joy and Witness.



What do we hear about the "end times" in church and in our culture?

Is our view of the end based on reading the *Left Behind* series or apocalyptic movies such as *2012*?

Do we find it more comfortable to direct our focus to the present rather than the future?

Read the following passages to begin today's study:

1 Peter 1:3-5

1 Peter 4:5-7

1 Peter 4:13-17

Peter talks about the coming judge and the existence of judgment both in the present and the future. He interprets the suffering that the Christians were experiencing as an aspect of God's judgment on the sin of humankind. Peter writes, "It is time for judgment to begin at the household of God" (4:17). All people, Christians included, must stand before the Judge. The Good News is that this Judge is a just judge, and not only that, He has given Himself to be judged in our place! When Christians stand before the judge, it is Jesus Christ in His righteousness who stands before them. Peter takes seriously this coming

judgment, but he does not consider it to be a reason for fear. Rather, he appeals to the coming judgment to serve as a warning to the Christians to continue in their obedience. Because of Christ, the Christian has no need to fear—not persecution, not suffering, not death or God’s judgment. Peter does not wish the recipients of his letter to grow complacent or take this knowledge for granted. He urges them to be watchful, self-controlled, and sober-minded (1:13, 4:7, 5:8). He wishes for them not to be distracted by the things of the world that have no eternal value. Jesus Christ has taken away their fear and they can now direct their attention to things of lasting worth.



How does Jesus alleviate our fears regarding the present judgment and the judgment yet to come?

How does Jesus’ resurrection provide us with hope for the future?

Peter insists that the Christians give their attention to the events of the future, and his pointing to the end time promotes rather than diminishes the importance of the present. He doesn’t argue that present sufferings do not matter because the afterlife will be so much better. It is not a “pie in the sky” line of reasoning. Rather, he reinforces the importance of obedient living *now* by highlighting its relationship to the future.



Does one’s view of the future influence how one lives their life here and now? How so?

How do the events of the past (Jesus’ life, death and resurrection) and the events of the future (Jesus’ return and final judgment) impact how we approach the present?

God’s glory is revealed in the midst of the sufferings of Christians when they remain faithful and do not turn away, even when facing persecution (4:14). Peter encourages the readers of his letter to persevere throughout their trials “so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” At the return of Christ, the faithfulness and obedience of His people will bring him the honor and glory that He deserves. Christians can

worship and glorify Christ through their faithful obedience and patient endurance during trials.



When is it easiest to worship God?

Do you find it difficult to worship God in the midst of suffering?

How might our attitudes toward trials change if we saw them as an opportunity to give glory to God?

Peter encourages the people to look for the return of Christ, to expect His second coming. The time of waiting and expectation is not so different from Advent, the season which we have just come out of in the church. Advent is a time in which we celebrate with hope and expectation the coming Savior. In reality, we have reason to rejoice in every day as if it were Advent. We know that Jesus Christ will come again because He has promised us that He will return. Jesus' resurrection assures us that we can endure anything this world throws at us, and death has no final power over us. All who believe will finally receive their promised inheritance. Looking forward to this time, to the end of the age, is to be the reason for the Christian's joy *now* and the source of encouragement to live lives of obedience to Christ *now*. For this reason, Peter can say with confidence, "Rejoice!"



How can we carry our Advent joy into every day of life?

How can we encourage others to live in expectation of Christ's return?

The hope of the future is the motivation for Christian witness—the hope that those who do not yet believe will be drawn to Christ. Peter encourages these Christians to be mindful of their words and actions, for these will impact their witness to the Gentiles. The command to be aware of one's conduct is not just given to the elders, but Peter tells all the Christians that their lives of faith matter. Even those who were at the lower rungs of society—slaves and women—are reminded of their evangelical task, to do all and say all to the glory of God so that others might be won over to Christ.

Do you think that you are called to share Christ with others? If not you, then who?

We see gifted speakers at conferences and on television. They seem to be so calm and collected and their words have such power. As much as they intend to inspire people, sometimes we are discouraged because we know we don't have the eloquence that they have in such abundance. But this should never keep us from being obedient to Christ and sharing His love with others. Looking forward to the day when He returns and looking back to the time when Jesus took our sins upon the cross, should excite us to share this good news. Even if it comes out stuttering or mumbled, if it sounds jumbled and we think we get it all wrong, we are to make Jesus Christ known, and we can trust that the Holy Spirit is working through us--even in spite of ourselves. Clearly, our sufficiency or adequacy is not the issue. We see that in what we have learned about the coming judgment. When it comes to the end times, it is not about whether or not I am good enough, because Christ is enough. Similarly, when it comes to witnessing to Christ, it is not whether or not I am sufficient, because we know God is the one truly at work.



What Good News did you hear from 1 Peter today?

How is the text calling us to change?

How does the text teach us to understand the world we live in?

How does this text send us?

Closing Prayer:

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!
My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.
Blessed are those who dwell in your house, ever singing your praise!
For a day in your courts is better than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God than dwell in the tents of wickedness.
For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor.
No good thing does he withhold from those who walk uprightly
O Lord of hosts, blessed is the one who trusts in you!

Psalm 84:1-4, 9-12