

Mount Pisgah A.M.E. Church

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Bible Study, Wednesday, April 20, 2016

Survey of the Bible

Lesson 62: 1 Peter

The Book of 1 Peter

The 1st Epistle of Peter is another of what are known as the “General Epistles”, written to be distributed throughout an entire region. In this case, the letter is intended for Christians (“believers”) in the region known of Eastern Asia Minor, which included Galatia, Cappadocia, Bithynia, and Pontus. 1 Peter is a letter of encouragement and instruction for Christians, telling them to “hold on to their faith” and “live holy lives” in the midst of an increasingly hostile environment. In this way it is similar to many of the general epistles.

Author

The early church universally acknowledged the authenticity and authority of First Peter, and that it was written by the apostle Peter. There are definite similarities between certain phrases in this letter and Peter’s sermons as recorded in the book of Acts. Although some have argued that the type of suffering that the letter suggests that Christians are going through did not come until after Peter’s lifetime, there is evidence that the beginnings of such persecution came very early in the life of the church. Others have argued that the Greek that is used in the letter is too sophisticated for a Galilean like Peter. However, it is clear that Peter grew in his knowledge of Greek as he was exposed to Gentiles. It is also possible that the letter was actually penned by Silas as Peter dictated it.

The Times and context of 1 Peter

This letter is addressed to “strangers and scattered sojourners” who were “called out of darkness into light.” There are reasons to suggest that the audience contains both Jewish and Gentile readers whom God was forming into a people with two things in common: a testimony of Jesus Christ and an experience of suffering for it. Peter was considered “an apostle to the Jews” but he also ministered to Gentiles so this letter was consistent with that. This epistle was addressed to Christians throughout Asia Minor, indicating the spread of the gospel in regions not yet evangelized when Acts was written. Although there is no evidence that Peter spent much time in Asia Minor, he apparently wrote this letter in response to news that there was growing opposition to believers there. Hostility and suspicion were mounting against Christians in the empire; they were hated for their life-styles and subversive talk about another kingdom. Christianity was not banned, but things were heading in that direction.

Peter’s life was dramatically changed after the resurrection. He played a central role in the spread of Christianity to Samaritans and Gentiles (Acts 2-10). After the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, little is recorded of Peter’s activities. Early church tradition states that he traveled throughout some of the Roman provinces. He refers to being in “Babylon” (5:13), but it is thought that he means that symbolically. Rome was the center of idolatry and paganism and many referred to Rome as Babylon, so it’s thought that Peter wrote the letter from Rome. Tradition also indicates that Peter spent the last years of his life in Rome, before being crucified upside down (believing himself not worthy of being crucified in the same manner as Our Lord), sometime prior to the Roman Emperor Nero’s death in 68 AD. This letter would have been written shortly before the outbreak of persecution under Nero in 64 AD.

Overview

Peter addresses this epistle to “strangers” in a world that is growing increasingly hostile to Christians. Peter uses this letter to give believers counsel and comfort by stressing the reality and VALUE of the living hope that they have in the Lord, and By standing firm in the grace of God (5:12), they will be able to endure their “painful trial” (4:12), knowing that there is a divine purpose behind their pain. He also emphasizes that the value of what they are to receive, and the spiritual maturity that they will develop in this life, will far outweigh the weight of their suffering. They must seek to maintain strong character and the right attitude even under pressure, because this is part of the process of God’s perfection. Peter begins by emphasizing the value of the salvation they have been chosen for, and then turns to the attitude that will propel them toward it, and finally the purpose in their suffering.

Outline

- I. Salutation (1:1-1:2)**
- II. Chosen for The Gift of Salvation (1:3-2:12)**
 - A. The Nature of the Gift (1:3-1:12)
 1. Hope Of The Gift (1:3-1:5)
 2. Polished through Trials (1:6-1:9)
 3. Forecasted in The Past (1:10-1:12)
 - B. Preparation Through Sanctification (1:13-2:12)
 1. Holy Living (1:13-1:21)
 2. Love One Another (1:22-1:25)
 3. Desire God’s Word (2:1-2:3)
 4. Praises from God’s Chosen People (2:4-2:10)
 5. Don’t Live Like The World (2:11-2:12)
- III. The Attitude of the Believer (2:13-3:12)**
 - A. Submission to Government (2:13-2:17)
 - B. Submission in Work (2:18-2:25)
 - C. Submission in Marriage (3:1-3:7)
Submission in All Life (3:8-3:12)
- IV. Equipped For God’s Use (3:13-4:11)**
 - A. Work on Your Attitude (3:13-3:17)
 - B. Christ’s Example (3:18-3:22)
 - C. A New Direction For the Believer (4:1-4:6)
 - D. Let God Use You (4:7-4:11)
- V. The Suffering of The Believer (4:12-5:9)**
 - A. “Go Through” for the Right Reasons (4:12-4:19)
 - B. Ministry in The Midst of Suffering (5:1-5:9)
 1. Elders: Feed the Flock (5:1-5:4)
 2. Believers: Trust God (5:5-5:9)
- VI. Benediction (5:10-5:14)**

Keys to Understanding 1 Peter

- The basic theme of First Peter is the proper response to Christian suffering. He wants his readers to see that:
 - They have been specifically CHOSEN – and what they are going through is evidence of that
 - Anyone who follows Christ will go through suffering.
 - The reward for bearing up under suffering in THIS LIFE is the development of godly character, and godly character will be the way to successfully deal with future suffering that will inevitably come.

- The reward for suffering in THE LIFE TO COME is beyond value, a reward that people throughout the ages have coveted - a soul that can live eternally in presence of God.
- Humility and submission among people are important means of distinguishing oneself from those who simply allow their troubles to make them bitter.
- “Submitting” in this context is the opposite of retaliating (see 2:23). Peter was doing two things here.
 - Equipping his readers to survive in an atmosphere where Christians were suspected of being subversive (undermining and disrespecting the authority of the empire) by showing them not to be just “troublemakers” but people of conviction.
 - Preparing his people to be willing to stand up for truth (i.e., doing good) in a culture where selfishness and deception ruled.

In doing this Peter is not necessarily condoning institutions as they are. There is underlying belief that the world as it exists is passing away. Peter wants people to be ready for the kingdom of God to be revealed.

Some Lessons from 1 Peter

- There are some things “worth fighting for.” Peter reminds us that temporary discomforts and troubles will come, but they are of NO COMPARISON to the wonders for which God is preparing us.
- Spiritual disciplines (prayer, fasting, hunger for the Word, exercising love and service) are equipment that God gives us to make it through a world/culture/society that is often not friendly to people of faith. The more we focus on these things, the stronger we will be in dealing with our issues and drama.
- Many people argue over who “God’s chosen people” are. Peter makes it clear – it is those who have believed the gospel of Christ. “Good fortune” (i.e., prosperity, wealth, “the Midas touch”) is not necessarily a measure of “the favor of God” on a person’s life. Sometimes favor is displayed by the craziness that a person goes through and that they wind up still standing at the end.
- God expects his chosen ones to PRAISE HIM – this is how we demonstrate that we know we are a part of God’s holy nation.
- Trials that we go through can either make us bitter or they can make us better. The difference indicates the extent to which the spirit is being allowed to work in our hearts and minds.
- It is important for believers to FOCUS ON THE HOPE. We can allow little things to so easily distract us from what God is trying to lead us to.
- Some of us adopt a “victim’s attitude” and talk about “all that we’re going through” without really examining the extent to which WE are contributing to the problem. Peter makes it clear that some suffering we bring on ourselves. We need to continually examine ourselves to make sure that what we are going through is not being caused by us.
- Struggles can make us bitter or make us better...it is our choice.