

Feed My Sheep: 1 & 2 Peter

An Inheritance Incorruptible

Lesson #2 for April 8, 2017

Scriptures: 1 Peter 1:1-25; John 3:16; Ezekiel 33:11; Leviticus 11:44-45.

1. In this lesson we will take on the challenge of understanding 1 Peter 1. We have suggested on numerous occasions that in order to fully comprehend the meaning of a letter, which 1 Peter is, we must try to understand: 1) The person who was writing; 2) The person or people to whom it was written; and, if possible, 3) Why it was written; and 4) The setting in which all of this happened. Much of the New Testament is composed of letters. Each time we look at one of those letters, we must ask the same questions. And, ultimately, what does this message and an understanding of it—in depth—mean to us in our day? What does it say about God? We believe these letters were inspired by God. What is God trying to say to us?
2. There is a lot of discussion among scholars about almost every book of the New Testament. Who wrote these books? And, when did they write them? First Peter is no exception. Although there are skeptics who claim that 1 Peter was written by someone else sometime in the 2nd century, most scholars agree that there is good evidence that Peter himself wrote it sometime in the 60s A.D. Consider what William Barclay wrote.

What is most significant of all is that the theology of First Peter is the theology of the very early church. E. G. Selwyn has made a detailed study of this; and he has proved beyond all question that the theological ideas of First Peter are exactly the same as those we meet in the recorded sermons of Peter in the early chapters of Acts.

The preaching of the early church was based on five main ideas. One of the greatest contributions of C. H. Dodd to New Testament scholarship was his formulation of these. They form the framework of all the sermons of the early church, as recorded in Acts; and they are the foundation of the thought of all the New Testament writers. The summary of these basic ideas has been given the name *Kērugma*, which means the announcement or the proclamation of a herald.

These are the fundamental ideas which the Church in its first days heralded forth. We shall take them one by one and shall set down after each, first, the references in the early chapters of Acts and, second, the references in First Peter; and we will make the significant discovery that the basic ideas of the sermons of the early church and the theology of First Peter are precisely the same. We are not claiming, of course, that the sermons in Acts are verbatim reports of what was actually preached, but we believe that they give correctly the substance of the message of the first preachers.

(i) The age of fulfillment has dawned; the Messianic age has begun. This is God's last word. A new order is being inaugurated and the elect are summoned to join the new community. Acts 2:14-16; 3:12-26; 4:8-12; 10:34-43; 1 Peter 1:3, 10-12; 4:7.

(ii) This new age has come through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, all of which are in direct fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament and are, therefore, the result of the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. Acts 2:20-31; 3:13, 14; 10:43; 1 Peter 1:20, 21.

(iii) By virtue of the resurrection Jesus has been exalted to the right hand of

God and is the Messianic head of the new Israel. Acts 2:22-26; 3:13; 4:11; 5:30, 31; 10:39-42; 1 Peter 1:21; 2:7; 2:24; 3:22.

(iv) These Messianic events will shortly reach their consummation in the return of Christ in glory and the judgment of the living and the dead. Acts 3:19-23; 10:42; 1 Peter 1:5, 7, 13; 4:5, 13, 17, 18; 5:1, 4.

(v) These facts are made the grounds for an appeal for repentance, and the offer of forgiveness and of the Holy Spirit, and the promise of eternal life. Acts 2:38, 39; 3:19; 5:31; 10:43; 1 Peter 1:13-25; 2:1-3; 4:1-5.

These declarations are the five main planks in the edifice of early Christian preaching, as recorded for us in the sermons of Peter in the early chapters of Acts. They are also the dominant ideas in First Peter. The correspondence is so close and so consistent that we almost certainly with entire probability see the same hand and mind in both.—Barclay, W. (Ed.). (1976). *The Letters of James and Peter** 140-141. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press.

3. Peter was obviously repeating the basic core message of the gospel. But, Peter was writing to his fellow Christians in a time of great difficulty.

That this letter was written in a time when persecution threatened, is abundantly clear. They are in the midst of various trials (1:6). They are likely to be falsely accused as evil-doers (3:16). A fiery ordeal is going to try them (4:12). When they suffer, they are to commit themselves to God (4:19). They may well have to suffer for righteousness' sake (3:14). They are sharing in the afflictions which the Christian brotherhood throughout the world is called upon to endure (5:9). At the back of this letter there are fiery trial, a campaign of slander and suffering for the sake of Christ. Can we identify this situation?...

There was a time when the Christians had little to fear from the Roman government.

The change came in the days of Nero and we can trace almost every detail of the story. On 19th July, A.D. 64, the great fire of Rome broke out. Rome, a city of narrow streets and high wooden tenements, was in real danger of being wiped out. The fire burned for three days and three nights, was checked, and then broke out again with redoubled violence. The Roman populace had no doubt who was responsible and put the blame on the Emperor. Nero had a passion for building; and they believed so that he had deliberately taken steps to obliterate Rome that he might build it again.

Two of Nero's court favourites were Jewish proselytes. There was Aliturus, his favourite actor; and there was Poppaea, his mistress. It is very likely that the Jews through them influenced Nero to take action against the Christians.

In any event, the blame for the fire was attached to the Christians and a savage outbreak of persecution occurred. Nor was it simply persecution by legal means. What Tacitus called an *ingens multitudo*, a huge multitude, of Christians perished in the most sadistic ways. Nero rolled the Christians in pitch, set light to them and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He sewed them up in the skins of wild animals and set his hunting-dogs upon them, to tear them limb from limb while they still lived.

Tacitus writes:

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 burned, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserve extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for, it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty that they were being destroyed (Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44).—*Ibid.**146-150.

4. One might think that Peter would be very discouraged and, perhaps, the people to whom he was writing would be ready to give up their faith. But, Peter wrote to/of them:

(i) We are the Chosen People of God....

(ii) We are the exiles of eternity....

The Greek word for such a sojourner in a strange land is *paroikos*. A *paroikos* was a man who was in a strange land and whose thoughts ever turned home. Such a sojourning was called a *paroikia*; and *paroikia* is the direct derivation of the English word *parish*. The Christians in any place are a group of people whose eyes are turned to God and whose loyalty is beyond. "Here," said the writer to the Hebrews, "we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (Hebrews 13:14).

We must repeat that this does not mean withdrawal from the world; but it does mean that the Christian sees all things in the light of eternity and life as a journey towards God. It is this which decides the importance which he attaches to anything; it is this which dictates his conduct. It is the touchstone and the dynamic of his life.

There is a famous unwritten saying of Jesus: "The world is a bridge. The wise man will pass over it, but he will not build his house upon it." This is the thought which is behind the famous passage in The Epistle to Diognetus, one of the best-known works of the post-apostolic age: "Christians are not marked out from the rest of mankind by their country or their speech or their customs.... They dwell in cities both Greek and barbarian, each as his lot is cast, following the customs of the region in clothing and in food and in the outward things of life generally; yet they manifest the wonderful and openly paradoxical character of their own state. They inhabit the lands of their birth, but as temporary residents thereof; they take their share of all responsibilities as citizens, and endure all disabilities as aliens. Every foreign land is their native land, and every native land a foreign land.... They pass their days upon earth, but their citizenship is in heaven." [See Philippians 3:20.]

It would be wrong to think that this makes the Christian a bad citizen of the land in which he lives. It is because he sees all things in the light of eternity that he is the best of all citizens, for it is only in the light of eternity that the true values of things can be seen.

We, as Christians, are the Chosen People of God; we are the exiles of eternity. Therein lie both our priceless privilege and our inescapable responsibility.—*Ibid.** 167-168. [Content in brackets is added.]

5. It is important to recognize that in the early days of the Christian church, the Roman government recognized religions that were well-established and were connected to nations even of their conquered people. But, it was against the law to establish a new religion.

B. F. Westcott gives us a quote of the Roman law of this period of early Church history: the Law of the Twelve Tablets, the heart of the constitution of the Roman Republic, said, “No one shall have gods for himself alone at his own pleasure, and men shall not worship in private new or foreign gods unless they are adopted by the state.” (Cicero, *de Legibus: The Political Works of Marcus Tullius Cicero: Comprising the Treatise on the Commonwealth; and His Treatise on the Laws*, vol. 2, trans. Francis Barham (London: Edmund Spettique, 1842), 96. William Ramsey says regarding this period in history, “At that time, treason was interpreted in a wide sense and was very severely punished. Anything that could be construed as disrespect to the Emperor was treason, and to speak of another Emperor or King was an unpardonable crime.” (William M. Ramsay, *Pictures of the Apostolic Church: Its Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: The Sunday School Times Company, 1910), 217.) Although the pagan temples and their gods continued to be worshipped throughout the cities of the Empire, it was a criminal offence not to worship the State and its leader, the Roman emperor.—Everett, G. H. (2011). *The Epistle of 1 Peter** 4-5.

6. A modern letter written to a group of people which the writer perhaps does not know personally might be addressed, “Dear Sirs.” However, ancient letters were addressed in a different way. Read 1 Peter 1:1. Peter was clearly identifying himself as the author. He was saying a few words about his qualifications as an apostle of Jesus Christ; and he was addressing a group of Christians in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. Those were various areas in Asia Minor, mostly in the northern part of modern Turkey, east of the Bosphorus. In Cappadocia the Christians built underground churches and communities.
7. Another great question arises as we read these first few verses of 1 Peter: Were those primarily Jewish Christians that he was addressing? Or, were they mainly Gentile Christians? Of course, we recognize that the churches in those areas would have included both Jews and Gentiles; but, they were almost certainly primarily Gentiles.
8. Peter addressed his audience as sojourners/exiles and as people of the Diaspora. These were terms which naturally belonged to the Jews living outside the Holy Land in the 1st century.
9. So, was Peter addressing primarily the Jews? (1 Peter 2:12; 4:3) These words do not seem appropriate for former-Jews who had become Christians. Was Peter taking the words formerly used for the Jewish community and applying them to the new Christian community which he regarded as the new family of God?
10. Read 1 Peter 1:2. What did Peter mean when he said: “You were chosen according to the purpose of God the Father...”? To answer that question, we need to read 1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16; and Ezekiel 33:11. These verses make it very clear that God wants everyone to be saved. The elect are those who choose to follow God’s plan for their lives. God’s plan has been in place since before the foundation of the world. (Ephesians 1:4)
11. This does not mean that God has chosen some to be saved and some to be lost. Not at all! It is God’s foreknowledge that allows Him to know the end from the beginning.
12. A mother can tell in advance whether a child is going to choose chocolate cake or green beans without being able to read the child’s mind. Does that mean she has foreknowledge? Or, does she just know her child very well?
13. Read 1 Peter 1:3-12. Peter was moving into the main message of his book. He wanted his audience to know that God the Father and God the Son are preparing a wonderful place for us. But, we must be tested now to prepare us to live in that place.

14. Once again, we notice that in 1 Peter 1:1-2, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all mentioned. The Father and the Son are spoken about in more detail in 1 Peter 1:3-9; the Holy Spirit and His work of inspiring Scripture are discussed in 1 Peter 1:10-12.
15. Read 1 Peter 1:3 and John 3:7. Christians are those who have been truly born anew from above. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the reality of which our baptism is only a symbolic repetition.
16. Peter's audience was suffering a lot of persecution. They never knew when they would be arrested or killed. They could rejoice only in the hope of a resurrection to eternal life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was the key to that Christian hope.
17. Read 1 Peter 1:10-12. What did Peter mean when he said the prophets of the Old Testament made careful search and investigation into salvation?
18. Read 1 Peter 1:4. What does it mean to have a place reserved in heaven? In Philippians 3:20, Paul described Christians as "citizens of heaven." Is that true of us now? Or, is that only a future hope?
19. Read 1 Peter 1:12. What was it that God revealed to the prophets of the Old Testament for the benefit of the people in Peter's day and in our day that even angels would like to understand? Clearly, Peter understood that the plan of salvation involved more than just the salvation of human beings. Does the plan of salvation somehow involve even the unfallen angels? What would that mean?
20. Read 1 Peter 1:13-16. Peter was challenging his audience to be alert and be prepared for action. No matter what happens, be obedient and do not fall back into your old patterns of living as you did in ignorance. Instead, you must be holy because God is holy. (See Leviticus 11:44-45.)
21. Read 1 Peter 1:17-21. Peter said that there are great motivations for becoming Christians and living the Christian life. He turned first to the character of God. He exhorted Christians to be holy as God is holy. (Again see Leviticus 11:44-45.)
22. Secondly, he reminded them that a judgment is coming. And everyone will be judged fairly by that holy God.
23. Thirdly, he reminded them that they should rejoice in the fact that they are redeemed as Christians. They had been bought with a very high price—the precious blood of Christ. (1 Peter 1:19)
24. Furthermore, Peter reminded his listeners that their salvation was certainly no afterthought. It was something planned before the foundation of the world. (1 Peter 1:20)
25. So, what should motivate us today to be Christians? Is it popular to be a Christian in our day? In Syria? Or, Iran? Or, China? Or, in the intellectual centers of America? Why do we choose to be Christians? For many of us, is it just because our parents are/were Christians?
26. Read 1 Peter 1:22-25. In these verses Peter discussed the ultimate prize for which Christians are living. We have an immortal inheritance as children of our heavenly Father because we choose to be like Him and live pure lives. Thus, we have become members of God's family, brothers and sisters who love each other. Peter believed that through the purification that came along with baptism and the effort to live holy lives, Christians would come to love each other. They would continue to live obedient, loving lives.
27. There are several different words in Greek which are commonly translated as *love* in English: *philia* (friendship), *eros* (the passionate love of a husband and wife), and *agape* (a pure love that seeks the good of the other). Peter recognized that not every Christian, especially not

those who have newly become Christians, will be immediately lovable and attractive. So, he expected Christians to exercise *agape* love toward all in the church. That kind of love comes only from a God who loves in that same way. *Agape* is not the selfish, self-centered, ordinary human kind of love.

28. In this first chapter of 1 Peter, we have seen that Peter was expecting a deep and faithful experience to be the norm for Christians.

His [Peter's] letters were the means of reviving the courage and strengthening the faith of those who were enduring trial and affliction, and of renewing to good works those who through manifold temptations were in danger of losing their hold upon God.—Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles** 517.1. [Content in brackets is added.]

29. Twice in this chapter, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is mentioned. (1 Peter 1:3,21) What does that have to do with our motivation for being Christians? What does the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have to do with our daily Christian experience?
30. While almost everything on this earth is subject to change and corruption, Peter reminded us that we are eligible for an inheritance which is incorruptible.
31. In light of Peter's words in this chapter, do you think of yourself as being born into the household of God? What does it mean to you to be born again into the resurrection of Jesus from the dead?
32. Reviewing what we know from the Old Testament, this is not the first time that people faithful to God have found their lives threatened. Read Psalm 64. Think of David's situation when he was writing that psalm. He never knew when he would be surprised or even killed. Think of the children of Israel while still in Egypt. And what about the children of Israel in the days of Esther?
33. We do not know very much about the spread of the gospel through the northern portions of Asia Minor or modern Turkey. It is possible that some people were forced to flee there as Christians because their lives were in danger where they came from. It is also very possible that both Peter and Paul spent time in some of those communities. Obviously, Paul wrote a letter to the Galatians. The experience of those people may have been just an example of how the gospel spread through the ordinary efforts of regular Christians.
34. How many of the people that Peter addressed do you think became martyrs?
35. Try to imagine yourself living in the circumstances in which they lived. Would you pretend to go about your life as if everything was okay? Would you spend a lot of time praying and studying Scripture, trusting in the protection of God?
36. Surely, Peter and the people to whom he was writing had their focus on the future. The times in which they lived were not very hopeful. But, they looked forward to the same thing to which we can look forward: An eternal, immortal inheritance.
37. Would you dare to witness to your neighbors or others in the community under circumstances like that? It is very likely that the days will come before long when we will face similar circumstances. Are we ready?

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