

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Overview Book of 1 Peter

6/7/17

CRUSHED, overwhelmed, devastated, torn—these waves of feelings wash over those who suffer, obliterating hope and threatening to destroy them. Suffering has many forms—physical abuse, debilitating disease, social ostracism, persecution. The pain and anguish tempt a person to turn back, to surrender, to give in. Many first-century followers of Christ were suffering and being abused and persecuted for believing in and obeying Jesus. Beginning in Jerusalem at the hands of their Jewish brothers, the persecution spread to the rest of the world—wherever Christians gathered. It climaxed when Rome determined to rid the empire of the “Christ-ones”—those who would not bow to Caesar.

Peter knew persecution firsthand. Beaten and jailed, he had been threatened often. He had seen fellow Christians die and the church scattered. But he knew Christ, and nothing could shake his confidence in his risen Lord. So Peter wrote to the church scattered and suffering for the faith, giving comfort and hope, and urging continued loyalty to Christ. Peter begins by thanking God for salvation (1:2-6). He explains to his readers that trials will refine their faith (1:7-9). They should believe in spite of their circumstances; for many in past ages believed in God’s plan of salvation, even the prophets of old who wrote about it but didn’t understand it. But now salvation has been revealed in Christ (1:10-13).

In response to such a great salvation, Peter commands them to live holy lives (1:14-16), to reverently fear and trust God (1:17-21), to be honest and loving (1:22-2:1), and to become like Christ (2:1-3). Jesus Christ, as “a chosen and precious cornerstone” upon whom the church is to be built (2:4, 6), is also the stone that was rejected, causing those who are disobedient to stumble and fall (2:7-8). But the church, built upon this Stone, is to be God’s royal priesthood (2:9-10).

Next, Peter explains how believers should live during difficult times (2:11-4:11). Christians should be above reproach (2:12-17), imitating Christ in all their social roles—masters and servants, husbands and wives, church members and neighbors (2:18-3:17). Christ should be our model for obedience to God in the midst of great suffering (3:18-4:11).

Peter then outlines the right attitude to have about persecution: Expect it (4:12), be thankful for the privilege of suffering for Christ (4:13-18), and trust God for deliverance (4:19).

Next, Peter gives some special instructions: Elders should care for God’s flock (5:1-4), younger men should be submissive to those who are older (5:5-6), and everyone should trust God and resist Satan (5:7-11). Peter concludes by introducing Silas and by sending personal greetings, possibly from the church in Rome, and from Mark (5:12-14).

When you suffer for doing what is right, remember that following Christ is a costly commitment. When persecuted for your faith, rejoice that you have been counted worthy to suffer for your Lord. He suffered for us; as his followers, we should expect nothing less. As

you read 1 Peter, remember that trials will come to refine your faith. When they come, remain faithful to God.

VITAL STATISTICS

PURPOSE: To offer encouragement to suffering Christians

AUTHOR: Peter

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE: Jewish Christians driven out of Jerusalem and scattered throughout Asia Minor

DATE WRITTEN: Approximately A.D. 62-64, possibly from Rome

SETTING: Peter was probably in Rome when the great persecution under Emperor Nero began. (Eventually Peter was executed during this persecution.) Throughout the Roman Empire, Christians were being tortured and killed for their faith, and the church in Jerusalem was being scattered.

KEY VERSE: "These [trials] have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith . . . may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed" (1:6-7).

KEY PEOPLE: Peter, Silas, Mark

KEY PLACES: Jerusalem, Rome, and the regions of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia Minor, and Bithynia

SPECIAL FEATURES: Peter used several images that were very special to him because Jesus had used them when he had revealed certain truths to Peter. Peter's name (which means "rock") had been given to him by Jesus. Peter's conception of the church—a spiritual house composed of living stones built upon Christ as the foundation—had come from Christ. Jesus had encouraged Peter to care for the church as a shepherd tending the flock. Thus, it is not surprising to see Peter using living stones (2:5-9) and shepherds and sheep (2:25; 5:2, 4) to describe the church.

THE BLUEPRINT

1. God's great blessings to his people (1:1—2:10)

2. The conduct of God's people in the midst of suffering (2:11—4:19)

3. The shepherding of God's people in the midst of suffering (5:1-14) Peter wrote to Jewish Christians who were experiencing persecution for their faith. He wrote to comfort them with the hope of eternal life and to challenge them to continue living holy lives. Those who suffer for being Christians become partners with Christ in his suffering. As we suffer, we must remember that Christ is both our hope in the midst of suffering and our example of how to endure suffering faithfully.

MEGATHEMES

Salvation

EXPLANATION: Our salvation is a gracious gift from God. God chose us out of his love for us, Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sin, and the Holy Spirit cleansed us from sin when we believed. Eternal life is a wonderful gift for those who trust in Christ.

IMPORTANCE: Our safety and security are in God. If we experience joy in relationship with Christ now, how much greater will our joy be when he returns and we see him face to face. Such a hope should motivate us to serve Christ with greater commitment.

Persecution

EXPLANATION: Peter offers faithful believers comfort and hope. We should expect ridicule, rejection, and suffering because we are Christians. Persecution makes us stronger because it refines our faith. We can face persecution victoriously, as Christ did, if we rely on him.

IMPORTANCE: Christians still suffer for what they believe. We should expect persecution, but we don't have to be terrified by it. The fact that we will live eternally with Christ should give us the confidence, patience, and hope to stand firm even when we are persecuted.

God's Family

EXPLANATION: We are privileged to belong to God's family, a community with Christ as the founder and foundation. Everyone in this community is related—we are all brothers and sisters, loved equally by God.

IMPORTANCE: Because Christ is the foundation of our family, we must be devoted, loyal, and faithful to him. By obeying him, we show that we are his children. We must accept the challenge to live differently from the society around us.

Family Life

EXPLANATION: Peter encouraged the wives of unbelievers to submit to their husbands' authority as a means of winning them to Christ. He urged all family members to treat others with sympathy, love, compassion, and humility.

IMPORTANCE: We must treat our families lovingly. Though it's never easy, willing service is the best way to influence loved ones. To gain the strength we need for self-discipline and submission, we need to pray for God's help.

Judgment

EXPLANATION: God will judge everyone with perfect justice. We all will face God. He will punish evildoers and those who persecute God's people. Those who love him will be rewarded with life forever in his presence.

IMPORTANCE: Because all are accountable to God, we can leave judgment of others to him. We must not hate or resent those who persecute us. We should realize that we will be held responsible for how we live each day.