

The Living Hope of the Gospel

1 Peter 1:1-12

Welcome to week one of our series through the book of 1 Peter. Written by the Apostle Peter for circulation among the churches listed (1 Peter 1:1), the tone of the letter is warm, pastoral and full of encouragement. It is clear that the original recipients of the letter were experiencing significant suffering for their faith. So Peter writes to encourage them to 'stand firm' (5:12) in the grace that God has given them, to fix their eyes on future glory and live as God's chosen people in this world.

Before we jump into the study for week 1, take some time to share what you felt God speaking to you through the message on Sunday.

To scattered exiles experiencing suffering

In the opening verses of his letter, Peter is quick to remind his suffering brothers and sisters of their true identity as well as indicating his awareness of their present sufferings. In the midst of your own struggles, do you find yourself naturally focusing more on your struggles or on your identity in Christ?

Like us, many (if not all) of Peter's readers would have identified strongly with the culture and communities they grew up in. At the time of writing, those very same cultures they belonged to were turning against them and their faith, and persecution was breaking out to the point where Peter calls them "exiles" (1:1) and "foreigners and strangers" (2:11).

- Can you imagine how hard this would have been for these early believers? What thoughts would go through your mind? What would be some of your natural responses to this kind of suffering?
- In what ways can you identify with them in your experience of being a Christian in Australia today?

In many ways these early believers truly were exiles; they no longer belonged to their worldly culture. However, Peter is quick to assure them that they do belong, they belong to God himself! How does your identity as one of God's chosen people bring you encouragement in the midst of suffering or persecution?

Secure salvation with a living hope

Read verses 1-5 again. Simply put, Peter is telling us that salvation is the work of God! With all the trials these believers were facing, this was an unshakable truth: they were saved.

- What testimony do you have about how God has worked in your life (and in the lives of others) to bring about salvation?
- What are some of the heresies that these verses safeguard us against?

- Notice that all members of the Godhead (Father, Son & Holy Spirit) have a role in our salvation. In your own words, how would you explain the work of the Trinity in saving? What roles do the Father, the Holy Spirit and the Son play?

New birth (v3) describes the radical nature of the transformation that a person experiences in becoming a Christian. What other passages can you think of which speak in similar language? What exactly does 'new birth' mean? Share some of the things that have changed in you since putting your faith in Jesus?

Through the resurrection of Jesus, Christians have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. William MacDonald calls this inheritance death-proof, sin-proof, and time-proof!

- What exactly is this inheritance that is kept in heaven for us?
- Verse 5 tells us that believers through faith are shielded by God's power...what are they shielded from? And in what ways does God shield them?
- Does this verse mean that Christians can never lose their salvation?
- What are some of the alternative things we can be tempted to put our hope in which are subject to perishing, being spoilt/defiled and fading with time?

Purposeful suffering

Without a doubt, believers have so many incredible blessings in Christ! However, that doesn't mean that we don't also experience great difficulties in this life.

What is the connection between knowing the blessings of 1:3-5 and then having joy even in the midst of trials in 1:6-9? Is such an 'inexpressible and glorious joy' really possible despite your circumstances?

In what ways do trials reveal or prove the genuineness of your faith? (compare with Romans 5:1-5; James 1:2-4, 12; Psalm 66:10-12 if time permits)

What are some of the trials you are going through now, or have gone through in the past?

How can our response in the midst of suffering 'result in praise, glory and honour when Christ is revealed'?

Spend some time praying for one another and also for our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world that we all might experience such an inexpressible and glorious joy because of God's saving work in our lives.