

1 Peter 1:1-9 – Rejoicing in Hope¹

Prepare the lesson: Print a copy of the handout for each class member (“Glory in Suffering”).

Fellowship question: (Use this to break the ice, to begin some discussion and lead into the study):

Have you received an inheritance? If so, what kinds of things did you receive? (money, property, furniture, etc.)

What exercise do you dislike yet appreciate because it makes you stronger?

Information

Today, we begin a new series on 1 Peter. It is difficult to know just when this book was written or even who the author was.

“The letter we call 1 Peter is written in an excellent, almost literary style of Greek, and it seems to address Gentile converts more so than Jews. Many modern scholars are convinced that the apostle Peter could not have written this book, since he is believed to have died before the outbreak of widespread Roman persecution. [He] was described as an uneducated man (Acts 4:13) and was primarily known as an apostle to the Jews (Gal. 2:7-9). Thus, they usually assign the book to one of Peter’s disciples, or to another early leader who used Peter’s name as a pseudonym, a common practice in the ancient world. Other writers find those arguments lacking, and confidently assign the book to the apostle Peter himself.”²

What we do know is that the letter was so helpful to churches in what we now call the country of Turkey that the letter continued to be passed on to other churches.

It is referred to as one of the “general epistles” because it was written to the Church in general, not to a specific church. From reading the letter, it is obvious that the Christians are undergoing some type of persecution, though it is not possible to know if this is a “social” persecution or an “official” governmentally sanctioned persecution.

As an example of the literary sophistication of this book, count the sentences your translation has for verses 1:3-12.

[Give time to read and count in silence.]

¹ This lesson is copyrighted by Dr. Rick Jordan, Great Bible Teachers, Inc, 2023. More lessons may be found at greatbibleteachers.com.

² Tony Cartledge, “Hopeful Faith: Digging Deeper: Who wrote 1 Peter?,” *Nurturing Faith*, April 27, 2014.

How many sentences does your translation have for verses 3-12? You can see how many words and thoughts are packed into those verses. However, if we were reading this verse in the original Greek language, it would be obvious to us that verses 3-12 are all one long sentence!

“Present-day readers have not been trained to retain the line of thought as were the listeners to a speech in ancient times. ...The long periods of the Greek language are not a sign of unwieldiness or tediousness: they are rather an expression of inspiration approaching ecstasy.”³

Thankfully, we can take this sentence in bite sized pieces!

- Have a class member read 1 Peter 1:3-5.

In verse 3, Peter begins with one character trait of God – what is it? (mercy)

“Mercy” is the most common translation for the Hebrew word, *hesed*. Michael Card describes this mercy as, “When the person from whom I have a right to expect nothing gives me everything.”⁴

Can you share a time you experienced mercy from someone? Has someone done something for you that you didn’t deserve? Has someone given you something that you didn’t earn? How does that experience illustrate God’s mercy to us?

“Mercy is pity or kindness to those in need.... Peter exclaims that God’s mercy is abundant, or great, indicating that God is not stingy or reluctant to show love, as some human parents may be. Peter’s words correspond to the celebration of God’s transforming work in Ephesians 2:4-5, ‘But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved.’ The transformation of which Peter speaks is described as new birth.”⁵

God’s mercy is through a “new birth in a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus.”

How is Jesus’ resurrection a “new birth”? (a new era began; out of darkness into light; he lives again; weakness/dependence into freedom/strength, etc.)

Jesus once told Nicodemus, a religious leader, “You must be born again.” (John 3:1-21) Was this true even for Jesus?

³ Bo Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, The Anchor Bible, 37 (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 79.

⁴ Michael Card, *Inexpressible: Hesed and the Mystery of God’s Lovingkindness* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018), 5.

⁵ Dennis R. Edwards, *1 Peter*, The Story of God Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 40.

Peter rejoices that what God offers us, because of Jesus' resurrection, is a new birth. This new life creates/births within us a "living hope."

How does the resurrection of Jesus give us hope? (Jesus conquered the power and finality of death; we trust that he can keep his promise that "I go to prepare a place for you." (John 14:1); it helps us feel that regardless of how bad things get in this life, things will be better in Heaven, etc.)

How is hope different from faith?

Hope often seems "less than" faith. Yet, in a time of crisis, the best we can do is hope that what we believe is true. Our *faith* may be shaken. So, we need *hope* to keep us connected with God and God's family until our faith finds its footing again.

One scholar defines Biblical hope as, "not an abstract sense of optimism, but a confident expression of a good outcome based upon the work of God."⁶

[Distribute the handout.]

This concept of hope is very important in 1 Peter. Members of this community of faith are enduring persecution. We will look more at that in later lessons, but for now let's listen to what Paul said to the Roman Christians. Listen for the themes of faith and hope in a time of persecution.

- Have a class member read Romans 5:1-5 (from the handout)

What do you notice about the roles of faith and hope in this passage?

1 Peter says we will receive an inheritance. When do we receive an inheritance? Normally, an inheritance is something we receive when someone dies, but this inheritance happens when *we* die.

How is our eternal life an "inheritance?" How does this relate to the merciful character of God?

Note how the inheritance is described. In Greek, these words all begin with the letter *alpha* and have a pleasant rhythm together. [The following quote is on the handout.]

"The inheritance is future and eternal. It is also secure, as noted by three similar adjectives, each possessing the Greek letter *alpha* ('a' in transliteration) as a prefix indicting negation: *aphtharton* (imperishable), *amianton* (unspoilable), and *amaranton* (unfading). Michaels explains that 'each of these words in its own way drives home the point that the inheritance of which Peter speaks is an eternal one. In general, *aphtharton* refers to freedom from death and

⁶ Edwards, 42.

decay, *amianton* to freedom from uncleanness or moral impurity, and *amaranton* to freedom from the natural ravages of time.”⁷

Why do you think Peter felt the need to emphasize the nature of our inheritance with these three words? (to remind us that this life is not permanent; we will endure despite persecution; the eternal good that we long for will one day come to us, etc.)

Note in verse 5, that our salvation is to be revealed. We do not see our completed salvation yet. We hope for what is not yet seen. (Hebrews 11:1) We find this theme woven throughout 1 Peter. (1 Peter 1:5,7,12,13,20; 4:13; 5:1) God is a revealing God. But we do not see all that we wish to see when we wish to see it.

Evelyn Underhill was a popular Christian author in the early 20th century. Her writings are classics in Christian spirituality. [The following quote is on the handout.]

“Christianity is not a pious reverie, a moral system or a fantasy life; it is a revelation, adapted to our capacity, to the Realities which control life. Those Realities must largely remain unknown to us; limited little creatures that we are. God is a great mountain of corn from which [a person], like a sparrow, takes a grain of wheat: yet even that grain of wheat, which is as much as we can carry away, contains all the essentials of our life. We are to carry it carefully and eat it gratefully: remembering with awe the majesty of the mountain from which it comes.”⁸

How does the insight that we have only a small grain of revelation affect our “living hope?” How does it affect our hope for an eternal inheritance?

- Have a class member read 1 Peter 1:6-7.

The Church was undergoing trials in the form of persecution. Today, in some areas of the world, Christians undergo life-threatening persecution. In the United States, we do not suffer intense persecution, but we may find that we face “persecution” in other ways. Our beliefs may be mocked, our piety scorned, or our leaders misjudged. Some of this we bring on ourselves by non-Christlike demonstrations. Can you think of ways we bring persecution on ourselves?

At other times, however, our best beliefs, rituals and practices are threatened as we try to demonstrate Christ’s presence in the world. Of course, the world persecuted Christ Jesus himself. Jesus instructed us (a) not to be surprised at this, (b) to turn the other cheek, and (c) to love our enemies. More often, we (a) are stunned that anyone would question our motivations or our morality, (b) we turn to attack our persecutors, and (c) we use our influence to shame or punish our enemies. Why is it hard to do what Jesus told us to do when it comes to attacks on us or on our faith?

⁷ Edwards, 42. quoting J. Ramsey Michaels. *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, 49 (Waco: Word, 1988), xxxi.

⁸ Evelyn Underhill, *The School of Charity: Meditations on the Christian Creed* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1991), 8.

1 Peter elaborates on Jesus' teachings in this letter. We will look at those passages in future lessons. [1 Peter 2:12, 21-23; 3:9, 15-16; 4:12-14; 5:10]

For now, let's consider this quotation from a commentary writer:

“Pain, whether it arises from persecution or misunderstanding or heartache, is not just to be endured; it can be tapped for self-growth and increased maturity...Suffering is not required for faith, but it can strengthen it along the pathway to our ultimate salvation.”⁹

How has suffering strengthened your faith?

- Have a class member read 1 Peter 1:8-9.

Once again, Peter uses language that encourages hope and faith in what is not seen. Not only do we believe in an inheritance we have not yet seen, we trust in the One who offers us this inheritance. And, we love that One - God.

This trinity of faith, hope and love is sprinkled throughout New Testament letters – probably most familiar to us in 1 Corinthians 13. Love begins with God. A faithful love is like God's love – “patient, kind...rejoices in the truth”, etc. Not only may we receive this love from God, we may reciprocate. “We love God because God first loved us.” (1 John 4:19)

How does hope in God affect our love for God? How does hope affect our faith in God?

Transformational Exercise

Think about things we do not see, but do believe in. What are some of those things? (electricity, air, gravity, atoms, jet stream, polar vortex, etc.)

Although we believe in these things that we cannot see, there is no sense of reciprocal love with them. Peter says, “Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him...”

We are Easter people. That means we are bearers of hope.

We believe that Jesus rose from the dead. None of us were eyewitnesses. But we trust the words of those who loved him and walked with him, who saw him crucified, dead, and buried. We trust their words that they saw him alive again.

This week, pay attention to things you believe in, although you do not see them. As these things come to mind, say a prayer of gratitude to our unseen, all-loving God.

[Close in a prayer something like this:] *You are more powerful than electricity or gravity or any other unseen power we can experience. You are more, because you are love. That is what gives us hope. Help us to trust in you with a living hope based on our faith in your love. Amen.*

⁹ Cartledge.

Glory in Sufferings

Romans 5:1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ²through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. ³Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (NIV)

Your Inheritance

“The inheritance is future and eternal. It is also secure, as noted by three similar adjectives, each possessing the Greek letter *alpha* (‘a’ in transliteration) as a prefix indicting negation:

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amianton (unspoilable), and
amaranton (unfading).

Michaels explains that ‘each of these words in its own way drives home the point that the inheritance of which Peter speaks is an eternal one. In general,

aphtharton refers to freedom from death and decay,
amianton to freedom from uncleanness or moral impurity, and
amaranton to freedom from the natural ravages of time.”¹⁰

A Mountain of Corn

“Christianity is not a pious reverie, a moral system or a fantasy life; it is a revelation, adapted to our capacity, to the Realities which control life. Those Realities must largely remain unknown to us; limited little creatures that we are. God is a great mountain of corn from which [a person], like a sparrow, takes a grain of wheat: yet even that grain of wheat, which is as much as we can carry away, contains all the essentials of our life. We are to carry it carefully and eat it gratefully: remembering with awe the majesty of the mountain from which it comes.”¹¹

¹⁰ Dennis R. Edwards, *1 Peter*, The Story of God Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 42. quoting J. Ramsey Michaels. *1 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary, 49 (Waco: Word, 1988), xxxi.

¹¹ Evelyn Underhill, *The School of Charity: Meditations on the Christian Creed* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1991), 8.