

The 1st Letter of Peter

I am always impressed by the honesty and openness of the writers of scripture. In the Gospels Simon Peter is shown to be impetuous (John 21, verse 7: Matthew 14, verse 28) and often impatient and promising more than he can possibly deliver (Luke 22, verse 33), and yet he is called to be an Apostle and empowered by the Holy Spirit to fulfil a leadership role in the early Church.

The words of the Lord Jesus Christ to Peter in Luke 22, verse 32, and again after the Resurrection in John 21, verses 15 – 17, can be taken as an incentive for the writing of this Epistle. “. . . *when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren*” and “. . . *feed my sheep*”. This Letter of Peter to the scattered Christians in the five provinces of Asia Minor does just that! It strengthens them (and us!) in their faith, encourages them to be steadfast in persecution and difficulties and points to an everlasting glory which is to come for those who believe. At a time when we live with the threat of environmental disaster, marketplace unrest and rising prices we need the assurance of the love of God in Christ.

Read I Peter, Chapter 1, verses 1 -9

Verses 1 – 2 The Greeting - is to “the exiles”.

The word is better translated “aliens” = those staying for a time in a foreign country but who do not belong to it. Note the same word is used in chapter 1, verse 17 and chapter 2, verse 11 where it can be translated “stranger”. In other words Peter is writing to those who do not belong. Not just to those Christians who are living away from home and family, but to those who recognise that they are only sojourners here on earth (Psalm 39, verse 12) and are seeking the City which is to come. (Hebrews 13, verse 14).

Most important is the naming of the Three Persons of the Trinity in verse 2! A sermon (or two!) could be preached on that one verse! Elect according to the foreknowledge of the God the Father (Romans 8, verse 29): sanctified by the Holy Spirit (II Thessalonians 2, verse 13): cleansed from defilement through the continuing sprinkling of the Blood of Christ (Hebrews 12, verse 24). The whole of the saving Gospel in a few words.

Verses 3 – 8 Words of encouragement!

Again, there is more than one sermon in these verses! Ephesians chapter 2, verse 8 “*by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God*”. We have a living hope, preserved in heaven for us and we are guarded by the power of God through faith. The gift of the Holy Spirit gives us the strength and power we need to stand firm and to witness to the love of God the Father as shown in Jesus Christ. The problems we face are nothing compared to the glory which shall be revealed at the last time. “*We have a hope which is steadfast and certain, gone through the curtain and touching the throne*” (From the modern hymn “Jesus is King and I will extol Him”)

“*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.*” (John 20, verse 29) We do not see Jesus our Lord but we love Him. And in loving Him we are obtaining the final outcome of our faith, eternal salvation.

*Truly Jerusalem name we that shore,
‘Vision of peace’ that brings joy evermore.
Wish and fulfilment can severed be ne’er,
Nor the thing prayed for come short of the prayer.*

*There, where no troubles distraction can bring
We the sweet anthems of Sion shall sing.
while for thy grace, Lord, their voices of praise
Thy blessed people eternally raise.*

*Now in the meanwhile, with hearts raised on high,
We for that country must yearn and must sigh;
seeking Jerusalem, dear native land,
Through our long exile on Babylon’s strand.*

From the hymn “O what their joy and their glory must be” by Peter Abelard 1079-1142