

Good Word Schedule
“Feed My Sheep”: 1 and 2 peter
April, May, June, 2017

1. **The Person of Peter**—*March 25-31*
2. **An Inheritance Incorruptible**—*April 1-7*
3. **A Royal Priesthood**—*April 8-14*
4. **Social Relationships**—*April 15-21*
5. **Living for God**—*April 22-28*
6. **Suffering for Christ**—*April 29-May 5*
7. **Servant Leadership**—*May 6-12*
8. **Jesus in the Writings of Peter**—*May 13-19*
9. **Be Who You Are**—*May 20-26*
10. **Prophecy and Scripture**—*May 27-June 2*
11. **False Teachers**—*June 3-9*
12. **The Day of the Lord**—*June 10-16*
13. **Major Themes in 1 and 2 Peter**—*June 17-23*

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1 and 2 Peter

General Introduction

This study guide is meant to accompany the Seventh-day Adventist Sabbath School lesson for the 2nd Quarter of 2017. The format of this guide follows a similar pattern for each week's lesson: an introduction to the topic, a short discussion on several verses or a bullet list of concepts for a passage, followed by questions in bold type. Please read through the Biblical passages, and then prayerfully consider the bolded questions. Perhaps you'll find better questions that should be asked, and answered!

It is my hope and prayer that our study of Peter's letters will encourage us as strangers in this world to live godly lives, and hoping in the Day of the Lord which is not far off...

Brant Berglin
February, 2017

Opening Question

Have you ever been asked to do something for which you were woefully unprepared?

Introduction

For the next 13 weeks, we'll be spending some time exploring a couple ancient documents: First and Second Peter. These small letters were written in the 1st Century, but they address Christians in ways that are neither outdated nor irrelevant.

Without question, Peter's life was one of dramatic highs and lows, of impetuous words and actions and at later, of powerful life-changing preaching, of conviction and yet of compromise and capitulation. For this lesson, we begin to explore the background of Peter in order to give some context to the author's life; this context can help us understand some of the convictions, mindset, and worldview of these epistles.

The Call to Discipleship: John 1:35-42

Our first glimpse of Peter is when his brother brings him to Jesus.

What evidence did Peter have at this point that Jesus was the Messiah?

The Catch of Fish: Luke 5:1-8

Peter's night of fishing hadn't ended well. As a "profession," he still was at the mercy of the fish being in the right place at the right time. When Jesus tells them to cast the net out again, and they bring in a huge catch, Peter is overwhelmed. He falls at Jesus' knees and tells Him to go away.

How do Peter's outward actions and words reveal his own internal turmoil in his experience with the Messiah?

The Call to a New Career: Luke 5:9-11

The disciples are amazed at the catch of fish. It makes sense since they'd caught nothing all night. But Jesus now offers them a new career: catching people! He relates the new work to their previous one.

How might Peter's previous experience as a fisherman prepare him to become a "fisher of men?" Or was Peter unprepared for this new line of work?

The lesson points out the need for Peter's sufficiency to be found only in Christ. If the work of catching people was as easy as catching fish for the Master, then Peter needed only to follow directions. Christ's method could bring success. Though a professional fisherman, Peter's methods couldn't even guarantee success in an area of life-time training.

But is the work of catching people actually easy?

The Experiences of Peter

Other stories in the New Testament give us insight into Peter's personality, failures and successes, and relationship with Jesus. These ultimately shed light on the transformation of character that resulting in power-filled work for Christ.

- Affirmation of Jesus as Messiah followed by Jesus' rebuke (Matthew 16:13-23)
- Betrayal of loyalty in the threefold denial (Matthew 26:69-75)
- Reinstatement to ministry after reversion to fishing (John 21)
- Spirit-filled preaching and leadership in Acts (see especially chs. 1-4)
- Paradigm shift recognizing "Gentile others" as being clean and receiving Spirit (Acts 10)
- Yet his rebuke by Paul for declining table fellowship with the same Gentiles (Galatians 2)

Closing Comments

The lesson pointed out Peter's four calls: to service in catching people; to confess Christ; to humility; and to faithfulness. While the confession of Jesus as Messiah was voluntary on Peter's part, these certainly reflect our own calling by Jesus as well. None of these are callings for which we are sufficient without divine power, as Peter's life reveals.

Opening Question

What do you hope for most in this life?

Introduction

In this lesson, we examine the first chapter of 1 Peter. The first several verses provide typical Greco-Roman letter features: Author, audience and their situation, a greeting, and a blessing from God.

How different are current letter-writing conventions from those Peter uses?

Authorship

Before we examine the verses, a note about the author is necessary. Until the 1700s, there was no question that this Peter was the fisherman-turned-disciple of Jesus, the brother of Andrew (see John 1:35-42). But when the Bible became an object of literary and historical criticism, Petrine authorship started to be questioned. How could it be that an unlearned fisherman, as Acts 4:13 suggests, be as eloquent as Peter? The Greek of this letter is exquisite, and the themes are certainly lofty. Because little is said of the actual life of Jesus as recorded in the Gospels, Peter couldn't have been the author and thus the letter is "pseudonymous," that is, written by someone who used Peter's name thus borrowing his authority.

But many scholars still believe that good evidence from within the letter itself points to Peter as author. First, the stated author is Peter, who calls himself an Apostle. The early Christian church founded on truth and honesty would not have accepted and preserved a letter with a false name attached. Second, details within the letter point to its author being personally acquainted with the life of Jesus, as will be noted throughout this quarter's lesson. Finally, Peter's sermons in Acts are by no means simple, and 1 Peter 5:12 suggests this letter ultimately came through Sylvanus (or "Silas"), who probably acted as a scribe. And so, Peter's thoughts and ideas are put down in the words of someone fluent in educated Greek, making sense because the letter is written to an audience spread throughout the Greek-speaking world.

Does it make a difference to you if this letter was written by Peter, or through a scribe, or by someone claiming to be Peter?

Audience

In 1:1, Peter writes to "those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." These could be ethnic foreigners who lack Roman citizenship due to Roman Colonization, and they are likely not Jews. But it's also possible that they are Greeks who now realize they are foreigners on this earth (see Heb 11:9-10 of Abraham doing so), for whom their Roman identity has been subsumed in their new citizenship of Heaven. Their Christian faith has brought suffering on them. They are chosen, have the Spirit of God making them holy for the purpose of obedience.

To what degree do you identify this description of Peter’s audience with your own experience on earth?

A Blessing of New Hope

1 Peter 1:3-5 – This passage is filled with ideas, but central among them is hope. In 1 John 3 Jesus speaks to Nicodemus of the new birth in Christ required for entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven. Peter builds on this and shows how the future is bright for Christians because the object of their hope isn’t dead, but alive! Jesus’ resurrection has brought to view an entirely new attitude toward life and death. Just as Jesus inherited the kingdom from His father, we also in Christ are co-inheritors of the blessings promised him. This inheritance isn’t made of gold, silver or objects that will decay, but of eternal life which cannot be stolen or will rot.

How does an earthly inheritance of property or money compare in your mind to that laid up for you in heaven through Christ?

Protection is afforded the hearers of this message. Remember, Peter’s audience are “aliens” and “strangers” who may lack the government’s interest in their well-being.

For Peter’s audience, why might this promise give them more hope or courage?

Suffering

1 Peter 1:6-9 – Peter’s audience has suffered greatly, and as the rest of this letter will attest, even for their goodness. He tells them that they can rejoice in their salvation while going through trials of many kinds.

According to these verses, what blessings come through suffering? What is the result?

Prophets Pointed to Christ

1 Peter 1:10-12 – These verses suggest that the O.T. Prophets were interested in and writing about the salvation in Christ being experienced by Peter’s audience. For instance, Isaiah 53 speaks of the suffering servant who would bear the iniquity, stripes, and blows destined for me. But the prophets had a limited view, not fully understanding how salvation history would play out.

What other Old Testament passages or stories do you suppose Peter may have had in mind here?

A Holy Life

1 Peter 1:13-25 – in light of our salvation, what manner of people ought we to be? This section argues from cause to effect: because Christ has died, because we are imperishable children, called by God, having been purified, and experience salvation, a new motivation for action has come.

What are the moral imperatives given in this section? How are believers in Jesus to live?

Closing Comments

In this life, we may have hope for success, for financial security, for pleasure or leisure, or to leave a legacy. But these things are fleeting. 1 Peter reminds us that Christians, though strangers on earth, are to live here as representatives of our Father, who has promised us an inheritance of inestimable value in Christ that won't fade away. Our hope is in something better.

Opening Question

Have you ever wondered why Christians do not build temples?

Introduction

Peter's 2nd chapter reminds his hearers of their value and status because of who they are in relation to Jesus. This lesson studies 1 Peter 2:1-12.

Nourishment from the Word

1 Peter 2:1-3 – Peter begins this section as a conclusion of the imperatives (commands) from chapter 1 concerning holy living. In order to come to the word of God, we must leave duplicity and falsehood behind in all of its forms. This is part of the new birth from 1:3. His hearers were to long for pure milk of the word. This suggests his hearers are young in the faith (as opposed to the audience of Hebrews; see Hebrews 5:11-14), and that their new birth (see 1:3) was fairly recent.

Do I create a longing within myself for the Word of God? If I don't crave it, how might such a longing come about?

The Cornerstone

1 Peter 2:4-8 – The imagery here is drawn from the building of the sanctuary. It was built of stones quarried some distance away and brought to the temple mount for assembly. Paul in Romans 9:32-33, and Ephesians 2:19-22 share similar imagery of the body of Christ—the assembly or “church”—being a new temple built on a foundation of the apostles (teachings) with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone. The cornerstone had to be solid, perfectly square, and was the standard from which all the dimensions were measured and the walls and foundation arranged. Peter quotes from Isaiah 28:16 (see also Psalm 118:22, 23), but vs. 17 adds the importance of justice and righteousness to God's ideal temple standard of measurement (judgment).

What kind of relationship do Christians share with each other, with the apostles, and with Jesus, as suggested by this temple analogy?

A Royal Priesthood

1 Peter 2:9-10 – Because we are part of a new temple, there must naturally be a new priesthood. Who are its priests? All believers, according to Peter. He alludes to or cites from a number of O.T. sources here, especially Exodus 19:5, 6 (see also Isa 43:20f; Deu 10:15, Isa 61:6; Isa 66:21, Deu 7:6, Exo 19:5; Deu 4:20; Deu 14:2; Isa 9:2; Isa 42:16).

How does the Old Testament temple prefigure the New Testament people of God? What value does it give to all believers?

A Royal Witness

1 Peter 2:11-12 – Because Peter’s dispersed audience are aliens, they are to live in a way unique among their Greco-Roman neighbors. First, they are to abstain from “fleshly lusts.” Paul’s letter to Romans speaks much about the flesh, that is, the natural inclinations toward sin, and Peter seems to use the phrase in a similar way. Acting on these passions makes life a living war. In fact, a chaste life in the face of opposition will result in enemies eventually glorifying God.

Have you ever been falsely accused of wrongdoing? How did you react? How does Peter’s advice fit those situations?

Closing Comments

Christians have great value in Christ; we are chosen by Him as His very own royal priesthood. Our life is a living witness to the world around us. And as these verses show, believers in Jesus do not need physical temples; we are now a living temple with Jesus as the primary foundation stone.

Opening Question

What comes to mind when you hear the word “submission”?

Introduction

In the last lesson, Peter told his hearers to keep their behavior excellent among their Greco-Roman neighbors. He now spells out how to do so in several specific social situations. Key to living in harmony with others is the need for compromise, and for someone to give in to someone else’s plans or will. Today, the word submission is frequently tied to loss of identity, of independence, and of “self.” Few people delight in submitting their own desires to someone else. But Peter reminds believers that submission is not only a negative idea, it was modeled by Christ, and forms a foundation for healthy relationships.

As Citizens

1 Peter 2:13-17 – Regardless of the type of civil authority, we are to submit as citizens of earthly government: to kings, governors, presidents or mayors. The lower strata are delegated powers from those higher for the purpose of good and right. We’re also told how to treat the King: he deserves honor, just as all other people. Only God deserves “fear”. Such advice would vary significantly from the emperor worship common in the first century.

What principles from Peter should guide us when the government doesn’t follow God’s purpose of distinguishing good and bad, of punishment of evil and praise of good?

As Servants (Employees?)

1 Peter 2:18-20 – This advice is primarily for those who function as household servants, and tells us about some of Peter’s audience: they were poorer class, without autonomy in a world where slaves made up nearly 30% of the population. How should slaves or servants live? They should always be submissive, even, or especially, when the expectations were unreasonable and hard. To do so makes God proud of them for their willingness to follow the example of Jesus. Rather than stand up and fight for their own rights, they willingly act graciously and with submission.

How does the American view of freedom color the way we read these verses? How would popular psychology address Peter’s advice? Can we draw any conclusions about how we should act as employees who deal with a difficult boss or work environment?

Christ’s Example

1 Peter 2:21-25 – Jesus’ example of suffering is ours to follow. Identifying with Christ at baptism not only initiates us into fellowship with His death, it invites resurrection power to a new covenant life. This life is at odds with the world and its values. As John says, the world hates us because it hated Jesus first. He suffered and left us an example in that as well. When faced with insults, Spirit-led hearts love the person offending enough to ask their forgiveness, and asks God

to be the ultimate judge. We cannot know someone's history or background as to why they might mistreat us, but God does. Submission to mistreatment runs counter to our desire to fight for our own rights, but Jesus left us this example, difficult as it may be.

To what degree would you agree with this statement: “our actions during times of suffering reveal our true character”?

Marriage Relationships

1 Peter 3:1-7 – This passage has often been viewed in today's western, egalitarian culture with suspicion, condescension, or outright detest. Peter's original audience were not so different from us today, and being told to “submit” to someone else would go against human nature. The question is, why would Peter issue such a seemingly unequal imperative? It appears that the most valuable evidence of Jesus in the world might just be through a spousal relationship that seeks for peace and good will. Physical adornment isn't the goal, but being clothed with the character of Jesus. The example of Christ's suffering applies to every area, including (unfortunately) a spouse who may not be a follower of Jesus. But patience and endurance might just win the unbelieving spouse to God's side!

Christian husbands have a duty to their wives, to care for them. The lesson suggests the term “weaker” does not mean physical or emotional weakness, but the Greek term (*asthen*) usually infers physical weakness, sometimes through an illness. But the author's conclusion is sound: men are to treat their wives as special, delicate, worthy of careful and sensitive attention much like a porcelain vase that is treasured and can be damaged through rough behavior.

Peter cites Abraham and Sarah's example as a model for Christian relationships. How does their example compare or contrast with our modern view of marriage? How might it be helpful advice and where can it be problematic?

Closing Comments

Submission today can imply giving up all rights to my own will, ideas, or behavior in favor of someone else's. This goes against human nature, but also reveals our desire for self-determination, and often our bent toward selfishness. Jesus' example of suffering unjustly with patient endurance shows God's favor toward those willing to suspend personal rights in favor of forgiveness. It's a difficult lesson for us.

Opening Question

Why is it so difficult to respond with kindness to someone who speaks evil of you?

Introduction

The advice given in the previous lesson about suffering has broad consequences. Peter now moves to a broader discussion of suffering for Christ and how to live in face of constant slander and mistreatment. His commands or imperatives speak to our natural inclinations and tendencies.

Response to Evil

1 Peter 3:8-12 – Mirroring the message of the Sermon on the Mount to love our enemies, Peter turns to Psalms 34 and its lofty ethics. God sees those who do evil. A commonly used weapon in our self-defense against evil is the tongue, but it must not be allowed to speak evil. (see James 3:1-13 for similar advice).

What makes the tongue so hard to tame?

Suffering For Doing Good

1 Peter 3:13-17 – Retuning good for evil make the offender appear even more vile. Suffering when doing good will be more effective in drawing attention and glory to God than suffering for misbehavior which may appear as a justified punishment to some observers.

Kindness offered in return for abuse will often elicit a response or inquiry, as it did in the penitent thief crucified beside the Savior. Peter also urges in vs. 15 to be ready to give a defense of our faith (this field is called apologetics in Biblical studies, and many books and YouTube lectures are available on the subject). Sadly, many Christians cannot explain why their faith is based on evidence rather than blindness, why it is philosophically reasonable and soundly based on the reliability of Scripture's history of God's actions in world history. The Gospels are rooted in time and place; God has intersected our world, and Christians should be able to offer an explanation when asked. Too often we don't wait to be asked, and this drives many away.

What can you do to be better prepared to give a defense of your faith?

The Gospel and the Flood

1 Peter 3:18-22 – Verse 18 is not difficult to comprehend: Jesus died for everyone, even those opposed to him. But verses 19 and 20 are certainly a challenge. The most natural way to understand vs. 19 is that the same Spirit that gave life to Jesus also delivered, through Noah's righteous behavior, ark-building, and perhaps preaching, the good news to the antediluvian humans. These died in the flood and are now awaiting judgment.

Just as the flood waters washed away sin and sinners to a new world, so Christians experience new life through Baptism and cleansing by water. Baptism initiates us into identity

with Jesus, a new “ark” of safety. His resurrection power now lives in us to create new life from the old. This Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God, the side of favor.

Baptism is equated with the flood, with the exodus through the Red Sea, ritual bathing, cleansing water, and with burial/resurrection. What other metaphors might it relate to?

Judgment of the Past Life

1 Peter 4:1-6 – Peter offers a vice-list of Gentile behavior in vs. 3. But the Christian who has suffered for doing good has left this behind. In the process, previous friends find the new way of life perplexing and surprising. Peter in vs. 5 agrees with Paul in Romans 1 that all people have enough knowledge of God and the gospel to be held accountable in the judgment.

Can you see evidence of the new life in Christ compared to your old life? If so, have you shared your testimony of the Holy Spirit’s power at work in you, not to brag, but to bring glory to God?

Christian Life

1 Peter 4:7-11 – Because these are the “last days,” Peter provides an action list for Christians that contrasts with the vice-list in 4:3. Make a list of the various actions Peter wishes you to carry out. Peter also lists several spiritual gifts (see also Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, and Ephesians 4 for more gifts).

How can you carry out Peter’s advice regarding Spiritual gifts?

Vs. 11 ends with a song of praise to Jesus. Maybe you’ve had moments when some thought brings a song to your heart, a whistle to your lips, or a simple “praise God!” This is Peter’s experience here!

Closing Comments

If there was ever a time for a generation of people to exemplify the Spirit of Christ in the western world, today is that day. Political volatility, unbridled social media commentary, bullying, and unrighteousness abound. Our response to those who disagree with us can do much in the spread of the Gospel.

Opening Question

How would your life be different if you could face difficult times with rejoicing?

Introduction

Peter's discussion on suffering now takes center stage. His hearers are experiencing a very real trial—"fiery"—and they aren't sure why they suffer for it. How should his hearers face such challenges? After all, the covenant blessings of Deuteronomy seem to suggest that good things come to those who place their trust in God and honor him. Can suffering be a good thing?

Continuing Christ's Afflictions with Rejoicing

1 Peter 4:12-13 – Trials aren't unexpected. These come in order to test our character. But more than that, we have the privilege of following in Jesus' footsteps. Read Colossians 1:24 and see Paul's attitude in similar circumstances. He believed he was "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions," insinuating that Jesus' didn't suffer enough. If the church is the body of Christ in this world, it will face the same opposition that crucified the Son of God. His holiness and perfection brings conviction of heart or rejection of goodness.

We are encouraged to "continue rejoicing." This imperative in the Greek is a "present tense" which implies ongoing act of rejoicing, not a momentary thought.

Must we be "happy" in order to rejoice? Does the act of rejoicing require positive emotions to accompany it?

Suffering for Christ a Sign of Blessing

1 Peter 4:14-16 – Suffering because of illegal activity, while uncomfortable and maybe even a trial, doesn't mark anyone in a special way. Such punishment is simply deserved. But if I suffer as Jesus did and for His cause, then it's a sign that the Holy Spirit is working in me. This is no cause for shame or disgrace, but rather of honor. God is glorified through it.

How can I know if I'm suffering for the right reasons or causes? Is it possible that suffering persecution or backlash for a political/social cause can be confused with a spiritual one?

Judgement of God's House

1 Peter 4:17-19 – The Judgment isn't always a happy topic, but Peter goes further and suggests that those closest to God—His household—are judged first. As the lesson pointed out, Ezekiel 8 and 9 speaks of the abominations of Israel. Israel's sins bring God's judgment on those professing to be His followers. Verse 18 quotes from the Greek Old Testament of Proverbs 11:31 suggesting difficulty for righteous to be saved. This gives a slightly different emphasis than the Hebrew text which says that if the righteous are rewarded on earth, how much more the wicked. Peter's point seems to be that judgement comes on all, and that both receive their reward. If this

is the case, then God's people can trust their final state (their "souls") to God who is a faithful judge, a loving creator.

What is your hope if you are to stand before the judgment bar of God? How does knowing Jesus and His love make a difference?

Closing Comments

No trial is truly a joyful experience, as we tend to shy away from anything that brings pain, whether physical, emotional, mental, or otherwise. But Christians can face all trials with a sense of excitement knowing that good can come of it.

Opening Question

What is the best way to stand against the power of evil in your life?

Introduction

Peter closes this epistle with advice to elders, young men, and all those in the congregation, and some final words about standing firm in Christ against Satan.

Duties of Elders and Young Men

1 Peter 5:1-4 – The Greek term for elders here, *presbuteros*, is one to two terms used somewhat interchangeably for those who lead the flock, the other being *episkipos*. We get Presbyterian and Episcopalian church names from them based on congregational organization and hierarchical leadership principles. The elder was to lead like Peter did: voluntary service—not coerced—but Spirit-led. This alone can give Godly direction. One shouldn't be an elder for the money (yes, elders in the New Testament appear to be paid by the gospel). Peter's own experience with Jesus' teaching on leadership is evident in vs. 3 (see Mark 10:35-45, specifically verses 43-45). Christian leadership isn't a position of authority, but of service and shepherd-like guidance leading sheep to feed safely and to multiply. Discipleship and growth are the primary goals an elder should have for his flock. The word "pastor" (related to "pasture") fits well here.

How does selfish leadership affect those who follow?

1 Peter 5:5 – Young men are to be submissive to the elders. An old song by Cat Stephens titled Father and Son speaks to the conflict young men have with their fathers. Youth speaks from idealism and energy, age from the wisdom born of experience. Peter offers advice that will lead to peace.

What role should older men have in the congregation mentoring younger men? How can we help train the next generation for Christ?

Attitude of Believers

1 Peter 5:6-7 – As young men were to be submissive to elders, so the encouragement for all the flock is to be humble. This likewise echoes the teaching of Christ: The exalted would be humbled, and vice versa. It's far better to assume a position of humility than to be forced into one. Any concern one may have about such low estate is safe in the hands of a loving God. There is no need to worry about self-esteem: the Creator cares for me!

How do I lay my worries on Christ in practice? Is it as easy as the sermon on the mount says, "don't worry about tomorrow..."? Can we just turn off our anxieties?

Glory After Suffering

1 Peter 5:8-11 – Peter advises his hearers stay awake and sober spiritually. Those fighting wild animals must not let their guard down. Jesus’ teachings in Matthew 24-25 about His coming are in view here, as well. Resistance of the Devil isn’t possible unless we do so through faith in God’s leading and power. Alone, I am helpless against his schemes.

But achieving the crown of suffering will eventually give way to the crown of glory. It is human nature to want glory without suffering, but every athlete, entrepreneur, or academic at the top of their field knows the glory cannot come without pain and sacrifice.

The goal of all of this is found in verse 10: Christ will perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish the believer who has suffered for Christ. These are enviable positions.

Have you ever been tempted to skip the suffering that leads to the glory of success?

Closing Salutation and Benediction

1 Peter 5:12-14 – Peter’s letter is a brief one, apparently. He confirms Silas/Sylvanus as a mediator of this epistle, likely Peter’s scribe.

The greeting from “she who is in Babylon” is probably cryptic language for the church in Rome. This would protect those delivering the letter and those named, especially in the face of persecution of some kind.

We don’t kiss each other in western culture, but this might have been seen with a sideways glance even in Peter’s day. How we show our affection to one another should never bring reproach on Christ, but should be genuine, real and sincere.

Does the fact that Peter may have used a scribe affect your understanding of inspiration? How much of the letter can we say is “Peter” if the scribe had control over the final product?

Closing Comments

Peter closes his gospel where he begins it: with the grace and peace of Christ. His focus on suffering will be explored more in next week’s lesson with Jesus’ experience on the cross and the glory of His resurrection.

Opening Question

Is suffering a part of all human experience?

Introduction

Most of the lesson thus far has focused on the progression of Peter's first letter. This lesson is more topical, reviewing the death, resurrection, and blessed hope of Christians in the return of Jesus.

Suffering and Death of Jesus

1 Peter 1:18, 19; 2:24; 3:18 – This lesson takes us through several verses that speak of Jesus' suffering on the cross. There is no question that crucifixion was one of the harshest forms of torture, usually lasting up to three days as the victim slowly died of asphyxiation. But Jesus wasn't on the cross for 3 days; it was only hours. This doesn't minimize the awfulness of the cross, but rather changes our focus to the suffering of Jesus in relation to bearing sin (see 3:18) where he takes our sin upon Himself and suffers God's wrath—the separation of the sinner from the source of life. Jesus' suffering and death show just how awful sin is, that the author of life would be put to death by his very creation, warped by selfishness. No wonder Jesus suffered as His vital connection with His father was severed, and His beloved people rejected him, again!

If Jesus death was less one of crucifixion than of separation from His father, why do Christians make the cross the symbol of Christianity? What does the fact that Jesus was “crucified” show us?

Resurrection of Jesus

1 Peter 1:3, 21; 3:18, 21 – Without the resurrection of Jesus, there is no hope for Christians (see 1 Corinthians 15), in fact Paul says we are to be pitied beyond all men if we only have this life to live. Jesus' resurrection is the miracle of the New Testament most quickly and vociferously argued against by antagonists of Christian faith because it is so central. Death, the greatest enemy of mankind—of our life, our fellowship, our consciousness, etc.—was overturned. There is hope for life again.

How do you reconcile faith in the resurrection with science that cannot prove a resurrection is possible? What “evidence” might there be that life itself is a miracle to start with, and that resurrection isn't any more implausible than life starting by the hand of a “designer”?

Ascension and Return of Jesus

1 Peter 1:5, 7, 13; 3:22; 5:1, 4 – Peter speaks of the future glory that is revealed when Christ returns. The closing verses of Luke and Acts 1 tells the story of Jesus' ascension, and the promise that He would return in just the same way. Peter no doubt remembers this event in vivid color and a combination of fondness and hope mixed with sorrow as Jesus left His disciples waiting. Christians who continue telling the story and look for His return are “Adventists” in the

truest sense. This return promises a change of nature for believers, and the joy of reunification with their Savior. The “glory” to be revealed isn’t just Jesus in all His brightness, but the glory that comes to each person remade in the image of Christ.

What do you feel when you envision the return of Jesus, when you picture that event in your mind? How can we keep the “blessed hope” alive during times of trial and suffering?

Closing Comments

The suffering and death of Jesus portend times of difficulty for those who follow in His footsteps and identify with Him. However, the resurrection and ascension promise glory after the suffering. Jesus’ promise is that even through these experiences, He will never leave us or forsake us. Revelation promises that those who overcome will sit on His throne as He overcame and sat with His father on His throne. There is great joy ahead for those who persevere through trial and suffering of all kinds with faithfulness.

Opening Question

What qualities would you most want to be known for after you die?

Introduction

The second epistle bearing Peter’s name is written in a different style of Greek, with differing vocabulary and some themes. This literary difference has been the focus of scholars who have concluded that different authors wrote the two letters. However, the employment of scribes (Silas/Sylvanus as scribe for 1 Peter) would explain this easily. There are a couple strong literary connections between the letters, such as 2 Peter 3:1 where he alludes to previous correspondence, that letter is a follow-up. There is also the need for such scholars to show why someone would use Peter’s name and “position” to push the contents of 2 Peter; almost nothing would be gained personally as the contents of the letter make little use of any authority beyond moral and ethical standards already in place in the early church. But most importantly, Jesus Christ is the central feature of this letter as He was of 1st Peter.

Promises to the Believer

2 Peter 1:1-4 – The first two verses have the similar Greco-Roman letter format, but Peter’s name “Simon” is added to this letter. His audience is “those who have received ta faith of the same kind as ours,” meaning the recipients area a broad group of Christians. Grace and peace come by way of knowledge—not of doctrines, but of Jesus as our Lord.

Christians have some precious promises indeed: true/actual knowledge of God through the person of Jesus, a personal calling, an opportunity to partake of the Divine Nature, and to escape lustful corruption.

What does it mean to “partake of the divine nature”? How does the life of Jesus show us an example of how this is done?

Peter’s Fruit of the Spirit

2 Peter 1:5-9 – As opposed to the “vice lists” common in the N.T. letters, Peter provides a “virtue list” that grows as it builds on previous moral qualities. These might be seen as a “fruit of the Spirit” list (compare them to Galatians 5). Knowledge of purification of sin (vs. 9) seems to be prerequisite to having these.

Are the earlier items in this list prerequisites to the later ones? Can I only develop love and kindness if I have moral excellence and knowledge? What does the fact that these can “increase” tell us about Christian growth and “sanctification”?

Importance of Calling

2 Peter 1:10-11 – Peter asks his hearers to be certain of their calling. Identify today is often couched in the language of race, gender, sexual orientation, language, socioeconomic class, or other distinction. But Peter was most concerned that his hearers—from all backgrounds—

realized that their ultimate identity came from their calling and election in Christ. This trumps all other identities. In fact, it makes these others unimportant as they have no eternal weight or value to save.

What might prevent us from recognizing God's calling and purpose for us?

Peter's Reminder

2 Peter 1:12-15 – Peter seems happy to provide this reminder since he knows his end is near; God has shown him this is the case. After He is gone, he hopes his hearers will continue strong in their faith.

How would the death of Peter, and the other apostles, affect the growing-but-fledgling Christian church? What concerns would the first-century church have had after the disciples were gone? How does Peter's letter address these concerns?

Closing Comments

Peter's second letter continues the theme from his first letter of the centrality of Jesus and the affects our relationship with Him has on ethical living and hope for the future. The church that forgets this relationship will face hardship as Peter will warn his congregations in upcoming verses.

Opening Question

What evidence would convince you that the Bible was inspired by God?

Introduction

For Peter, two strong pieces of evidence convicted him of God's intersection with humanity: first was the Hebrew Prophetic Scriptures, and second was his experience with Jesus. These verses tie these two "proof" together.

The Transfiguration

2 Peter 1:16-18 – Opponents may have suggested Peter was just making up stories about Jesus, much the way some people today make up stories of 9-11. But Peter argues from personal testimony. He was there on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured, He heard the voice from heaven, saw Jesus' visitors, and the transformation and power of the Kingdom of God.

Why would Peter use the transfiguration to argue for the reality of the "power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ"? What made that event so transformational for Peter?

The Prophetic Word

2 Peter 1:19-21 – In verse 19, Peter says that there is an even "more sure" word of prophecy, and he seems to be alluding to the Old Testament Scriptures. These, according to 1st Peter, contain messages about salvation in Christ. But with the coming of Jesus, these texts take on whole new meaning. He says they are like a lamp or light shining in a dark place, reminiscent of Psalm 119:105.

If you throw out the Old Testament, what do you lose with respect to Jesus?

Peter helps us understand the "inspiration" process in verses 20-21. The word for "interpretation" means "an explanation" of something. Prophecy then isn't man's own explanation, but God's. However, it is important to note that it isn't God speaking. Instead, the Holy Spirit moves the person, but the prophets speak with their own voices, write in their own words, and retain their person-hood. The idea of verbal dictation of prophecy isn't tenable.

How does Peter's view of inspiration help us see the combination of human and divine in Scripture?

Closing Comments

For Peter, the life of Jesus informs his reading of the Old Testament in new and exciting ways. I encourage you to read the Old Testament again with "Jesus centered" eyes.

Opening Question

How should a church address teachers who present false ideas?

Introduction

In previous verse, Peter spoke of prophets who pointed to Jesus. But there are false prophets as well. The early church was rather fluid and early on grew without much human “control” or regional hierarchy. This had advantages, certainly, but it was thus also susceptible to all kinds of heresy and false teachers. Peter warns his audience of their influence and behavior, their judgment, and their final end.

False Teachers

2 Peter 2:1-3 – The work of these false teachers was worrisome in many ways: they worked secretly not openly; they introduced heresies that destroyed faith; they denied Jesus as Master; they followed their own passions; the reputation of the church and its message would be stained; and they would exploit the congregation. Peter confirms that although their judgment and final end may appear prolonged, it is neither “idle” nor “asleep”.

Do Christian congregations today need to fear such false teachers? How will we know when we are seeing them? How do we test them to know of their faithfulness to Christ and His word?

Tares and Wheat Judgment

2 Peter 2:4-10 – Peter’s examples of the judgment of the wicked show that God recognizes the faithful among them. At the flood, the wicked are “taken” and righteous are saved in the midst of the raging waters. At the fiery destruction of sensual and depraved Sodom and Gomorrah, God saved Lot. Peter’s choosing of these two examples suggests something about the false teachers: the flood came because of violence and corruption, and Sodom was destroyed because of unacceptable sexuality (see Jude 1:7) and injustice (Ezekiel 16:46-49).

Does Peter’s example of salvation from these wicked environments also give hope that God can save us in the midst of trials or temptations?

Characteristics of False Teachers

2 Peter 2:11-19 – Few words are minced in the description of these false teachers; they would be denounced as “hate-speech” in some circles today, no doubt. But Peter isn’t concerned about political correctness, but about the purity of God’s congregation.

What labels does Peter use for these false teachers, and how do these descriptions help his hearers recognize the dangers these teachers represent?

Origins and Condition of False Teachers

2 Peter 2:20-22 – Sadly, these false teachers once knew and experienced a true knowledge of Christ. But they returned to the “defilements of the world” and now are in worse place. And sadly enough for the spiritual condition of the congregation, they are still part of the body. If the congregation is to be a “safe place” for everyone there, some should be recognized as harmers of the flock.

How does this passage compare with Hebrews 6:1-8? Are Peter and Hebrews dealing with the same problems?

What are the dangers of returning to the old way of life after tasting the good word of God?

Closing Comments

Today’s western culture is all about acceptance and tolerance. But tolerating falsehood in the church would destroy the work of Christ in His body. Peter doesn’t give any recommendations on how to deal with false teachers directly, but other letters in the N.T. help us there. Apparently, Peter was more concerned with how his audience was able to identify and live with the presence of such teachers. He assures his hearers that there would also be a final judgment and God was able to save those who were *truly* his.

Opening Question

What leads people to be skeptical of the return of Jesus to this earth?

Introduction

Peter now takes on skepticism about the 2nd Coming. His conviction is rooted in God's activities of the past, and the need for a world-wide re-creation and cleansing.

Skepticism in the Last Days

2 Peter 3:1-7 – This letter is intended to “stir up” his hearer's minds. Once again, Peter turns to the “more sure word” of the O.T. Prophets, but now he adds the apostles who relate Jesus' commandment.

Peter's hearers no doubt faced mockers in their day, as we do today. Proclaiming the return of someone to earth 2,000 years after his death (and resurrection!) sounds unreasonable. It's interesting to note the foundation of this argument, though: naturalism! The world of the future must be gauged and measured by how things have been in the past and how we view it today. Natural explanations must suffice. But Peter argues that such a philosophy ignores history, and especially the flood event. It should come as no surprise, then, that a global flood or multiple large-scale deluge-events are debated among naturalists.

But in a way, such mockers are correct. God used water in the past. He will not do so in the future. Rather, it is fire God will use as His cleansing brush.

Do a Bible search: what Old Testament passages speak of God using fire to work a purification of earth from sin and/or sinners?

Time in God's Eyes

2 Peter 3:8-10 – God's timing isn't like ours. Some have suggested that God exists outside of earthly time, and thus He doesn't experience it as we do. Peter is less concerned about the nature of God than he is the conclusions to be drawn from the apparent delay of God in sending Jesus back to earth and the final judgment. This must have been a question even in Peter's day. So, why the delay? God is being patient. He is waiting for all to come to repentance who will. God's plan for all is broader than we know. Nevertheless, there will be an eventual end in fire, and the coming of Jesus will be unexpected, like a thief (see Matthew 24-25).

Does verse 9 suggest that everyone *will* come to repentance in God's plan, or is there a difference between God's “purpose” for us and the eventual “result”?

Godly Living

2 Peter 3:11-13 – If the world is going to be destroyed, then what should our conduct be? Peter suggests several behaviors that should mark the last-day people of God: Holy conduct, that is, set apart to and for God; Godliness, where God's people live as He does; expectation, looking

forward to the Day of the Lord with eager expectation; and hastening, doing the work given to us that prepares a world to meet Jesus.

**What would Peter's hearers have done that might hasten the "day of the Lord"?
What might we do today?**

If the timing of final events are up to God and not humans, how can we work to hasten the Second Coming without bearing guilt and responsibility if it doesn't come in our lifetime?

Preparing for Judgment

2 Peter 3:14-18 – The final of this letter is advice is spiritual and ethical: make effort to be spotless and blameless, very high standards indeed, and to realize that the prolonging of the Second Coming is about salvation.

Verses 15-16 admit openly what many Christians feel cannot be said: Paul isn't always easy to understand! But this doesn't mean we have license to misuse his letters. Peter comes near to classifying the writings of Paul with "scripture"; but

The final warning is to be on guard against the false teachers, and instead grow in grace and knowledge. The benediction is appropriate for a letter that has spoken much of the future. The idea, "the day of the eternity" is a delightful one where "day" means "age" or "period of time" no exclusive to 24 hours.

Many people use the excuse that we will not be "perfect" until Jesus comes. How should I reconcile this with Peter's command to be found "spotless" or "blameless" when Christ returns? Why do we fear the language, and maybe even the idea, of God working to perfect our characters?

Closing Comments:

Peter closes this letter much as he began it, with grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. This knowledge quells skepticism, and prepares people for the coming Day of the Lord.

Opening Question

If Peter were alive today, what message might he have for us?

Introduction

After working through 1st and 2nd Peter, this lesson reviews the major themes of the letters. The author of the lesson suggests they are; (1) the centrality of Jesus' substitutionary sacrifice for our salvation, (2) godly conduct as the proper response to coming judgment, (3) the hope of Christ's soon return, (4) God's plan for order in society and the church, and (5) the role of Scripture in our lives.

Study Questions

As this study is more topical in nature, I will simply ask several questions about each topic that you examine from the letters of Peter:

1. Christ's Sacrifice: Why is the death of Jesus so important for the Christian? Is "substitution" the only metaphor for salvation in Peter's epistles?
2. Godly Conduct: What is the relationship between conduct/behavior and eternal life? Why does Peter spend so much time on Godly living and ethics if Salvation is by God's gift and Christ's substitution for me? In other words, why give the imperatives at all if salvation isn't dependent on how I've lived?
3. Hope of Christ's Return: Many Christians have turned their attention from the second coming of Jesus to earthly matters of justice and care for humanity and the earth. Others have ignored these and simply preach the coming judgment. Should these two philosophies be combined, and if so, how might that happen? See Matthew 24 and 25 for ways to "be ready".
4. Order in Society and Church: Again, ethical injunctions govern this section. Does the non-Christian world have an expectation of how Christians should act? How does this coincide to Peter's advice for Christian standards and behavior? Should such expectations exist?
5. Role of Scripture: What happens to me spiritually if I neglect study of Scripture? Are there ways of "studying" that can lead to loss of faith or conviction? What advice would Peter have for us regarding our approach to the Bible? How did he read it and what did it convict him of?

Closing Comments

It is my prayer with Peter that you continue growing in your knowledge of Jesu as your Lord and Savior, and that you experience Him more and more as the Day of the Lord draws nearer!