

Unlocking Freedom: “1 Peter: Hope in a Foreign Land”

Sermon preached by Chris Lofquist

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Introduction

From birth until now I have always had the spirit of an **adventurer**. I've been on the golden gate bridge and overlooked the giant Sequoias of Sonoma county. I have overlooked the powerful rapids of Niagara Falls, and gazed upon the fields of the Civil War. I have experienced the heat of Arizona and the Humidity of Florida. I have swum in the Great Lakes and have eaten steaks as big as my head in Texas. I have looked down upon the Grand Canyon and looked up at the majesty of a million stars upon the top of the Rocky Mountains. The Lord has also blessed me in my international travelling. In my passport you would find stamps to Canada, Germany, Austria, Israel, Jordan, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, the Cayman Islands, and Haiti. In my 38 years of life, the Lord has blessed my adventurer's spirit with some great opportunities to visit people around the world and see sites of great wonder and amazement. But the greatest adventure I have ever been on began at the moment of Salvation, when the Lord graciously choose me from among this world as His own and set me aside as a child of God. From there my perspectives changed, my experiences gained Biblical insight, and a love for the Word of God developed.

And so with that being said, let us this morning begin on another adventure through the Word of God. Over the next few months, taking a break for Christmas, we will engage upon the words of our God in the first letter Peter wrote. So if you have your Bibles, please open them to 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 1. **1 Peter 1:1-2.**

Open in Prayer.

Like we always do when start another adventure in the Word of God, let us begin with an introduction. And like most introductions, we must begin with the author and the recipient to this Biblical masterpiece.

1. **The Author**

The Author: Peter. “*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.*” (v. 1a)

To some, this would just be a name of some person who wrote a letter a long time ago. But to fully understand the wonderful depth and intention of this letter we must remember who Peter was. The Apostle Peter was one of the 12 main disciples of Jesus, and along with James and John, he was one of the Jesus' closest friends. After Jesus' death and resurrection, and at the beginning of the Church age, Peter became one of the most influential Christian leaders in the world. Whenever the Apostles are listed, Peter is the first name atop of the list – this leads me to believe that Peter was the leader of the Church and confirms Jesus' prophecy that Peter would be the ‘*rock on which I will build My church.*’ (John 1:42).

But before all of this prominence and leadership, we read that Peter was a humble fisherman. He and his brother Andrew made their living on a boat catching fish with a net. He was not educated in the greatest of seminaries like Paul. And he didn't have a high standing in society like Matthew. He was merely a simple fisherman trying to provide for his family.

However, upon following Jesus we begin to notice his boldness and passion. He was the disciple who left his family behind in order to follow Jesus. He was the only one who walked out upon the water toward Jesus, and for *just a moment* showed tremendous faith walking upon that water as if it were dry land. He was also the first to acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God. And like many of us he leaped whole heartedly into that which he was passionate about, leading him to do some pretty crazy things – such as cut the ear off of a guard who sought to arrest Jesus the night He was betrayed.

And yet with that passion and boldness came a “speak before thinking” mentality. Peter was the one whom Jesus had to say, ‘get behind Me Satan’. He was the one who in a moment of fear denied even knowing Jesus, his best friend, three times bringing such shame to his heart. Within his life on the pages of Scripture, we see a man who showed the highest of highs and tremendous potential as he lived his faith out loudly, and we see a man who experienced the lowest of lows as he sunk into the water and shame of anger and denial. This is why we relate to Peter so much, because he exemplifies the struggles of humanity seeking to follow Christ. Yes, Peter was the one who denied knowing Jesus, but he was also the one who would lead thousands upon thousands of souls to salvation in Christ. And I believe this is why he is known as the Apostle of Hope. Paul the Apostle of Faith. John the Apostle of Love. And Peter the Apostle of Hope. Within the very moments of his life we see the hope that Jesus gives, shining light upon the moments of darkness within our lives. And in such a time as this, our world needs the hope that the Gospel brings more than ever. Peter knew this and with great boldness he led the Church in Jerusalem in evangelizing both Jew and Gentile for roughly 30 years.

Around 64 AD Church tradition tells us that Peter died at the hands of Emperor Nero, who would become one of the greatest persecutors of the Church in history. Church tradition also tells us that Peter, so passionately in love with Christ and the Church, requested that he be crucified upside down, because he was not worthy to die in the same way that his Savior did. For the purposes of God there have not been many men greater than Peter. And so, with this short biography of the Apostle of Hope, let us continue on in our introduction of his first letter.

2. The Setting

“To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Capadocia, Asia, Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: may grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.” (vv. 2-3)

From these verses we gather that the recipients of this letter were believers and aliens scattered throughout the region. The word ‘aliens’ means ‘strangers or foreigners’. And

I believe it can be correctly assumed that they no longer had a home because of the early persecution of the Church. It was their steadfastness in their belief of Jesus Christ that cost them their homes and put them in a place of danger and uncertainty. Due to this context clue, and many others throughout the 5 chapters of this letter pointing to a Persecuted Church (that we will get to in a few moments), scholars believe that this letter was written some time around 62-64 AD. That would mean that this was one of Peter's final actions as Apostle and Church Leader prior to his death. This would also put us less than a decade away from the destruction of the Temple and right in the middle of the horrific reign of Emperor Nero. So this letter is written to encourage a scattered group of believers living in a world they no longer recognized, ducking people and guards in fear for their lives.

Although the world in America is not as violent toward followers of Jesus Christ, it is still hostile and growing more and more antagonistic toward the Church and those who have committed their lives to the Lord. Persecution of the Church in the US is growing as schools remove God from the textbooks, and Colleges seek to remove God from their campuses. As the voice of atheists and agnostics grow within the walls of Congress and the halls of towns, Christians are becoming more targeted than ever – and the message that Peter gives, through inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to continue to live faithful lives within the grip of suffering and persecution, is a timely message.

And for this reason we are going to pour into and across every word that this Apostle of Hope brings to our hearts. So the setting has been set, the author has been introduced, now let's finish our time this morning looking into a few of the themes of this letter.

3. The Theme and Purpose

All throughout the pages of this letter, from sentence to sentence and in nearly every paragraph we come across two prominent themes. The first being that there is great hope to be had and offered to believers within a hostile world. And the second theme being instructions on how are we to act as Christians testifying to the Love and Hope of our Savior while we live as foreigners in this world.

So let me take a few moments to look at a few of these verses that speak of these two major themes of the letter. And if you are one to mark up your Bibles, these are some great verses to underline or highlight.

A. There is Hope within a Hostile World.

1 Peter 1:3-7 – *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”*

Even in the midst of suffering and various trials, we are reminded of the living hope found in Christ, and of the imperishable (or eternal) purpose for our scars.

1 Peter 2:4-5 – *“And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”* Like Jesus Christ, we can expect to be rejected by men, but know that our lives in obedience through suffering is precious in the sight of God and is an offering of worship acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 3:14-15 – *“But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”* Let your hope shine through in the midst of difficult times, and when asked how this is possible, point them to your faith in Christ in a serious yet gentle way.

1 Peter 4:12-13 – *“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.”* It is possible to rejoice in the midst of suffering and difficulty, because you know that your suffering is due to the fact that you are faithful to Christ.

1 Peter 5:6-7 – *“Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time; casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”* You are not alone when you suffer difficult times and are overwhelmed with anxiousness, rest in His presence and His provision.

a. Christian Living as Foreigners in this World

1 Peter 1:22 – *“Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart.”* May our love for one another be genuine.

1 Peter 2:11 – *“Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul.”* As foreigners in this world remain faithful to purity and stay far away from the lusts the world offers and the flesh wants.

1 Peter 3:1-8 – *“In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior... You husbands, in the same way, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with someone weaker, since she is a woman; and show her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers will not be hindered.”*

Your marriage relationship with one another will either testify to God's grace and goodness or do a great disservice to the message of the Gospel. Also your relationship with one another as husband and wife will impact your relationship with God.

1 Peter 4:10 – *“As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”* You each have been giving so much from God to be thankful for, use that which the Lord has blessed you with, to serve one another as good stewards.

1 Peter 5:8 – *“Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.”* Don't take light the plans of the Devil, but be under control and alert for his attacks.

Conclusion

There is so much truth wrapped up in these 105 verses that Peter wrote to the persecuted Church, and I am excited to embark on this adventure, knowing that it will speak to our hearts as we too are foreigners in a hostile land. May we be encouraged in this study to be messengers of hope within a difficult time.

Throughout this week, I challenge you to take the time to read through 1 Peter and be encouraged and motivated with the content of this letter.

Let's pray.