

December 21
1 Peter

In today's Project 4:4 Accelerator we are examining 1 Peter. This letter from one of Jesus' closest friends was written to churches in 5 provinces in Asia Minor. You could say this was Pastor Peter writing to a multi-site church in those territories. One message that was meant to be shared with congregations in multiple locations.

Peter writes at a time just prior to the great persecutions that came under the Emperor Nero, but nonetheless, he is writing to encourage and challenge these faithful disciples while they are suffering for their faith. We are not certain to what extent the suffering they experienced went; whether it was merely verbal abuse or if they were being targeted in the marketplace or if there were actually instances of physical violence toward these Christians because of their faith. Regardless, we know that they were experiencing varying degrees of suffering.

This makes this letter very, very relevant for us today. Depending on where you live in the world, or even where you live in the United States, you may experience varying degrees of suffering because of your faith in Jesus. So, how does Peter address the issue of suffering for our faith? I like to say that in 1 Peter, the Apostle points us to H.I.M throughout the letter. H.I.M. Peter points us to our Hope, our Identity, and our Mission (or purpose) as Christians.

Our Hope is where our ultimate trust rests. Where we get assurances that "everything is going to be o.k." One author posed these questions when considering where our hope lies:

- Anything that is *most* important to you.
- Anything that absorbs your heart & mind.
- Anything you seek or look to, to give your life meaning, value or security.

Peter consistently refocuses our vision and sets our eyes on Jesus as our ultimate hope. A few instances of where Peter points us to our Hope are:

Hope:

- 1 Peter 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
- 1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; **set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.**
- 1 Peter 1:21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so **your faith and hope are in God.**
- 1 Peter 2:6 ...the one who **trusts in him will never be put to shame.**
- 1 Peter 3:5 For this is the way the **holy women of the past who put their hope in God** used to make themselves beautiful.
- 1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. **Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.** But do this with gentleness and respect,

- 1 Peter 5:10 And the God of all grace, **who called you to his eternal glory in Christ**, after you have suffered a little while, **will himself restore you** and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

But I think the key verse is actually 2:23-24, which says:

*When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. **Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.** 24 He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

Jesus' hope was in God the Father. Even in the midst of suffering. And in verse 2:21 it says that Jesus is our **example** and goes on to demonstrate where his hope rested.

Moving on: Peter addresses the issue of Identity

Identity. It's the answer to the question: "Who are you?" We often answer this question in terms of what we do, for a living; or in terms of relationship roles, i.e. "I'm a husband, father"; or even in terms of what we've done or what has been done to us, i.e. "I'm an addict" or "I'm a victim". In some sense these answers come naturally to us because we innately understand that our identity is something that is given to us rather than something that comes from within us. Our identity is given *to* us. It is birthed out of who or what we put our hope and trust *in*.

Peter consistently redefines our identity in terms of who we are in Christ because of what he has done on our behalf. You can see the theme of identity play out verses like:

Identity:

- 1 Peter 1:3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has **given us new birth ...and into an inheritance** ... (a new birth into a family - the word inheritance implying the familial tie).
- 1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a **chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God**, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 **Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God**; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
- 1 Peter 3:7 Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as **heirs** with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers.

(as an aside, this term "weaker" is a very reverential term toward women and not a demeaning one. Think of it this way, Peter is saying "men, your wives are like fine china, don't treat them like Tupperware, but with the dignity they deserve. Men, on the other hand, are a lot like Tupperware.)

And finally, Peter challenges his readers to respond to their hope in Christ appropriately with their very lives. He actually gives them a mission to accomplish, not merely behaviors to check off the to-do list. In addressing the mission he addresses Christians in general,

household leaders (i.e. husbands and wives), and church leaders. How should we respond to Him who gave us a hope we can rely on and gave us a “new birth” or a new identity?

Here a few verses that popped off the page to me concerning Mission (or our appropriate response to our Hope and New Identity). All of this imperatives:

Mission:

- 1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, **prepare your minds** for action; **be self-controlled**; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.
- 1 Peter 2:4 **As you come to him...** (The implication is that you are to come to him.)
- 1 Peter 2:9 **that you may declare** the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
- 1 Peter 2:13 - 17 **Submit yourselves** for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority...**Live as servants of God, show proper respect to everyone...**
- 1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you, **live in harmony** with one another; be **sympathetic, love** as brothers, **be compassionate** and **humble**.
- 1 Peter 3:15 But in your hearts **set apart Christ as Lord**. Always **be prepared to give an answer** to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But **do this with gentleness and respect,**
- 1 Peter 4:11 If anyone speaks...he should do it with the strength God provides¹...(Rely on God).

You see, it all points to H.I.M.

How do we respond to suffering? We look to H.I.M. We look to Him who is our Hope, who gives us a “new birth” and with it a New Identity, and we look to him for direction and purpose so we can live on Mission to make him famous.

There is so much more in this wonderful letter and I hope you take time to study it more deeply in the near future. For now, as you move throughout your day, I hope you look to H.I.M whenever you encounter suffering of any kind. Your Hope, Your Identity, and your Mission.
