

Prayer

Inspire us, Lord Jesus, by the simple beauty of your life; lived so long ago but so powerfully close to us now, by grace. Lift our spirits to fly higher than they have flown before, so that on eagle's wings we catch a vision of our world from Your eyes and live inspired by that sight. Then in all we do, may we be faithful, kind, confident and strong in our witness to the Gospel by which we were saved. We pray this in Your name, Lord Jesus; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Justice

Pray for regions of the world where there is a lack of confidence in justice, and crime grows, creating a society of fear and violence. Pray for the victims of such violence.

On-going prayers

- *Pray for the people who live near you or in your street*
- *Pray for local shops & businesses*
- *Thank God for the good work done by Christian children's workers*

Meditation

Lord Jesus Christ, You are love ...
and our hearts are fed by Your compassion:

Lord Jesus Christ, You are peace ...
and we rest in the intimacy of Your care:

Lord Jesus Christ, You are joy ...
and our spirits are enthralled by Your presence:

Lord Jesus Christ, You are power ...
and we are privileged to serve in Your strength:

Lord Jesus Christ, You are wisdom ...
and our minds are thrilled by Your knowledge:

Lord Jesus Christ, You are God
And we are blessed to be called Your servants.

Bible Study - 1 Peter 1:1-5

¹ *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ:*

To the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, chosen ² by the prior intention of God the Father, by the consecration of the Spirit, by obedience to Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of His blood:

May grace and peace increase amongst you.

³ *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in His great mercy has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an imperishable, pure and unfading inheritance, which is kept in heaven for you ⁵ who through faith are protected by God's power, for a salvation waiting to be revealed in the End Time.*

Review

The beginning of Peter's first letter is typical of many letters in the New Testament, but there is no doubt about the sense of joy and excitement with which it begins. Peter addresses a wide range of churches across the Roman provinces of Asia (what is now Turkey), and speaks expansively about the great salvation plan of God which has become real in their midst. In his introduction, he speaks about God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit (1:2) all in one sentence, which is something of a rarity in scripture, and he pours out praises to God for the great blessings of new birth found through the death and resurrection of Jesus (1:3) and anticipates the future glory of our complete salvation (1:4,5) when all things come to their timely end. This is a passage of scripture which can be read in church to lift the hearts of a congregation, and perhaps bring from them a shout of 'Amen'!

Without taking anything away from this sense of wonder at God's mercies, there is a great deal more within this text which is not simply interesting, but also very important. We will discuss who wrote the letter later on, but we will come to the conclusion that there is no strong reason to doubt that Peter's hand wrote the letter. Why should a poor fisherman from Galilee not grow through the astounding life-changing experiences of being with Jesus throughout His ministry, and eventually be capable of writing good quality Greek about the Lord and God who had saved him? I write this because some have doubted this could be possible, but such a suggestion shows an unworthily superior attitude. Peter had a special commission to proclaim the Gospel from Jesus Himself (Matt 28:19), and this is why he began the letter; 'Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ' (1:1).

The letter of 1 Peter has an interesting structure. Peter begins with an introduction (1:1,2), but then launches into a long sermon-like explanation of the Gospel together with advice for general Christian living. However, you will discover that the sermon-like part of the letter continues only to 4:11, where Peter concludes; 'may God be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ, To Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.' (4:11). But after this, Peter adds further personal comments and advice, ending with this explanation; 'I have written this short letter to encourage you and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.' (5:12). This is an extremely helpful summary, because it tells us that Peter's intention was to encourage the churches to remain faithful to 'the true grace of God'; which for him meant the gift of salvation in Jesus Christ. One interesting theory about the whole letter however, is that 1:3 to 4:11 is in fact a sermon by Peter preached on the occasion of conducting baptisms. When we get to the relevant passages, we will look at this theory further, including the possibility that the candidate was baptised after 1:21 and before 1:22, in the middle of the sermon!

Peter's letter begins formally and correctly, addressing its recipients, giving glory to God, and offering greetings (incidentally the same greeting as used by Paul in almost all his letters; 'grace and peace', see Phil 1:1; Col 1:1 etc). It is nevertheless the energy of verses 3,4 and 5 which catch our eye, because they are solidly consistent with the whole New Testament teaching of the saving power of God at work in Jesus Christ and let loose within the world through the church. It is an '*imperishable, pure and unfading inheritance*' (1:4) which is therefore no different for us now. Such words are a strong reminder of the glorious privilege we have in passing on the faith we have received. We have an 'apostolic faith' which means that our faith is consistent with what the first disciples found in the person of Jesus Christ. It can and must be nothing less.

Going Deeper

There is much for us to value in this brief passage, and we will look at the introduction now in more detail (1:1,2) and then the opening of the 'sermon' (1:3-5). However, as with many passages of scripture, some interesting issues can be unearthed simply by looking closely at the words of the text and its translation. You should find the notes on the translation spiritually helpful and not merely a linguistic exercise.

Notes on the text and translation

AMEN!

- V1 *'To the exiles of the Dispersion ... chosen'. You will find a wide variety of translations of the three Greek words *eklektoij* *parepidhmoij* *diasporaj* which make up this phrase in different versions of the Bible. The first word *'electois'* means *'elect'* or *'chosen'*, referring normally God's chosen people the Church. The second word *'parepidemois'* means *'temporary resident'* or *'exile'* and is a word used a great deal in the Old Testament to refer to *'resident aliens'* or *'sojourners'* who lived in Israel. The third word *'diasporas'* means *'dispersion'* and is a technical word used to refer to Jews or Christians *'dispersed'* throughout the known world.*
- V2 *Apart from the very last phrase (may grace and peace be yours in abundance), everything in this verse describes what it means to be 'chosen'. Many translations begin the verse 'according to the foreknowledge of God ...', but the Greek word here is 'prognosis' and it means 'known beforehand' and I prefer the translation 'prior intention' because it really refers to God's prior plan of salvation for the world.*
- V2 *'the sprinkling of His blood' This is a difficult to phrase to translate because it is possible that in the Greek text, this 'sprinkling' may be connected grammatically to the previous phrase about 'obedience', and it is difficult to work out what this might mean. For an explanation, see below.*
- V2 *'may grace and peace increase amongst you' This is a fairly literal translation of the Greek. Many versions say 'grace and peace be yours in abundance', but this leaves out the essential meaning of the Greek word *'plethuno'* which is *'ever-increasing'*. Peter wants the churches to have more and more, not just a large amount of these gifts!*
- V5 *'a salvation waiting to be revealed in the End Time.' This phrase sounds a little strange. Peter does not suggest that the salvation we receive at the End Time is different from what we have now, rather, there is more of it to come! Some translations end the sentence with *'... the last time.'* But in Peter's day, the *'End Time'* was a specific term referring to Jesus' coming again on glory; hence my translation.*

Going Deeper

The introduction (1:1,2)

To begin with, we must decide whether the Peter who wrote this letter was indeed the Apostle Peter. Certainly this letter was included in the Bible because those who first compiled the list of letters believed this to be the case. Scholars have long debated this, focussing on the possible dating of the letter and whether it was possible for Peter to have written it. The dating has been done by working out when the serious 'persecutions' referred to in the letter (1:6, 3:13, 4:12 etc) took place. No real conclusions can be drawn, however, because our knowledge of persecutions in the first century is very incomplete, and whilst one scholar will suggest the persecutions by Nero (64AD), another will suggest those under Trajan (97-117AD), for example. Knowing that from the earliest days of the church (as in Acts 17:1f., 18:12f. etc.), strong persecutions could arise anywhere, this is the best background to assume for this letter, and with it, the authorship of Peter.

It is interesting that Peter called his churches 'the exiles of the Dispersion'. Both these words have great significance (see notes above). Behind the word 'exiles' is the Old Testament word for 'sojourners' used of Abraham, and by the prophets when speaking of God's people (Is 14:1; Ez 47:22 etc). In addition, the word 'Dispersion' was first used by Jewish people about those who were spread around the known world and unable to live in Israel or Jerusalem, and is still used in this way today. However, Peter was a Jew who had broken out of his exclusivity (with some help from the Apostle Paul – see Acts 15) and here is evidence that he applied these Jewish terms to the church of God. They were sojourners living in this world but not 'of' it (see Phil 2:15, 1 Cor 7:31 etc), and as our text later explains, their hope was eternal (1:4,5), not earthly. They were also dispersed throughout

the world not simply because of persecution, as with the Jewish people, but because the Gospel commission called on the Word to be spread or 'dispersed' throughout the world (Matt 28:19). The area of 'Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia' (1:2) was not the whole world, but it was a large region. Within decades of the death of Christ, it was remarkable that the Gospel had reached this far.

Peter also describes the church as 'chosen' by God for a purpose, (in Greek, 'elect'), in the same way that Abraham was chosen. He describes this purpose as 'by the prior intention of God the Father, by the consecration of the Spirit, by obedience to Jesus Christ and the sprinkling of His blood'. This highly condensed sentence is one of only a few places in the New Testament where God is described as 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit' (along with Matthew 28:19 and possibly Galatians 4:6). As such, this is an important text which confirms that the 'Trinity' is a way of understanding God as 'three in one' which goes back to the Apostles themselves. The importance of this cannot be overestimated. The Father is described as having a pre-determined plan of salvation which involves a choice of people, the Spirit does God's work in the world by making things holy, and there is a powerful link made between Jesus, 'obedience' and the 'sprinkling of His blood' (1:2). All of this represents a clear theological stance. Peter says that God's purpose is the salvation of humanity; that Jesus achieves this through his death (the sprinkling of His blood) and that the Holy Spirit makes all this to happen.

The beginning of a message

Peter begins his message with a word of greeting; 'may grace and peace increase amongst you' (1:2). As we saw in the notes, Peter took this greeting made known by Paul and added to it, emphasising that God's purposes were that His grace and peace should increase over and over again amongst His people. What a wonderful thought! This is an amazing picture of the improvement of both quality and quantity in the church, and reminds us that it is God's intention that we grow in both these ways today.

The praises of God which begin in verse 3 are 'Trinitarian', just as the previous statement was in verse 2. Note that God the Father and Jesus Christ appear in verse 3, but in verse 5 which is still part of the same Greek sentence, the Holy Spirit is strongly implied where Peter talks of God's 'power', which is a normal way of describing the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. Verse 3 itself contains a wonderfully concise description of salvation which combines both the words of Jesus and also phrases from the best of Paul's writing. When Peter describes salvation as 'a new birth into a living hope' (1:3) we are reminded of John's report of Jesus' great words to Nicodemus; 'truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God without being born again!' (John 3:3). Then, Peter speaks about the living hope of the 'resurrection from the dead', and although this is of course at the heart of Christian faith, most of what we learn about this in the New Testament is written by Paul (Rom 1:4, 1 Cor 15:12f.; Phil 3:11 etc.). The fact that Peter's words are consistent in this way with the rest of the New Testament evidence from Jesus and Paul is a very powerful testimony.

Peter clearly believed that God's plan for the world was set out for us in the life, death and resurrection of His Son Jesus, and that in addition, Jesus would come again at the 'End Time' (1:5). The importance of this testimony in God's Word is crucial, and as far as Peter was concerned, this Gospel was the inheritance of God's people and was to be maintained and passed on through the ages until God should bring all things to an end. This message continues in verses 4 and 5, where Peter says that salvation is 'imperishable' because it 'has been given to us by God (1:3), 'pure' because it is made holy by God's Spirit (1:2), and 'unfading' because it is protected by God until the End (1:5).

Application

It is interesting that Peter describes the heritage of salvation as maintained through 'faith' and 'protected by God's power' at the end of this great introduction to his letter. We can justly conclude therefore that our role in this great divine drama is to 'maintain the faith' and to do so conscious of God's protective power by the Holy Spirit. Almost every part of this

passage is one which reminds a Christian of one or other great aspect of faith, but the message that we are to maintain the faith and be dependent upon God's Spirit is not casual, it is powerful advice. I do not understand why Christians find it so hard to agree on much today, and I fail to see why many who teach theology can still be highly disparaging of what many ordinary Christians would call the 'evangelical faith'. You may say that I should not be too concerned about this, because God will sort out all such matters. However, the reason why I insist on making this point is because as Peter says here, there is a central 'truth' about our faith which is not negotiable. Jesus died to gain our salvation, He rose again to prove to us that he both meant this and could deliver it, and He has given us His Spirit as His presence and His helper on our own journey of faith in this world. There may be many ways to express this, but here it is in God's Word and without it, the Christian Church has no heart or purpose.

This heritage of evangelical and Trinitarian faith is far too precious to be lost to academia, the generalisations of philosophy or the plain sinfulness of people whether in the church or out of it. God guards His message of salvation and those who proclaim it (1:5), and whatever happens in this world, it will prevail together with those God has 'chosen'. Peter knew all this, and he asked the churches of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia to ensure that they stood fast to this 'true grace of God (5:12); so should we.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. If you were to make a list of aspects of Christian belief, how would you describe the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit?
2. What do you think of 'predestination'? Does this scripture in your opinion teach us that people are predestined to have faith?
3. How easy do you find it to talk of the 'blood of Christ' and what does it mean to you?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Some in the church will not see the way in which the heritage of faith which we have received has been systematically attacked from both within the church as well as outside of it in recent times, but it is vital that we accept the true nature of our problems as God's people and address them directly and prayerfully. God's justice requires no less. This passage suggests to me that we should all remain vigilant about our heritage of faith.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- Discuss with a close friend what you believe to be at the heart of your faith, and compare this with what Peter says here, or similar scriptures.
- Try to find a way of describing your faith which you could use at work or in a non-church environment. You may not know when this will be needed!

Final Prayer

Come to us now, O God;
Receive our praise,
Hear our confessions,
Forgive us our sins,
Raise us up in faith
Strengthen us in hope
Re-make us in holiness
Set us on Your pathway
So we will see You again in glory!