

SESSION 4: NOTHING IS WASTED

FROM THE LAST SESSION:

Peter probably wrote his first letter in the years 60- 63 AD. By then he was probably living in Rome. Paul had also been living in Rome, but he may well have left again, at least for a short time, to preach the Gospel in Spain. Either way, Paul was soon to be executed as part of the emperor Nero's sustained persecution of Christians. So, Paul probably never learnt about the short term impact of his obedience to the Holy Spirit's leading. He certainly never knew about the impact of Peter's letters on subsequent generations, including our own!

Nevertheless, one day he will! How do we discipline ourselves and help one another to take a heavenly perspective on the sacrifices we make for the Gospel here on earth?



READ

The Writer

We know more about Peter than any of the other disciples. We can read about his experiences following the Lord in the Gospels. We can also read about his leadership of the first Christians in the early chapters of the Acts.

Discussion: It can be very inspiring to trace Peter's teaching in his letters back to his own experiences. For example, can you see a connection between 1 Peter 4:8 and John 18:15-27 and 21: 15-19. Btw, did you notice the two charcoal fires? How often the Lord uses our physical experiences to draw us to the truth!

However, we mustn't get carried away: whilst some of these connections seem obvious, we cannot say for certain that any of Peter's experiences led directly to particular teachings in his letters. Nevertheless, just like Peter, it is undoubtedly the case that the Lord will use our experiences and the lessons we learn from them to help us serve and guide others in the future.

Discussion: Can you think of any examples of this in your own life or the life of your community or church?

READ:

So, Peter is drawing on his own experiences in order to encourage, train and equip his readers. One of his main concerns is that they are not being led astray by false teachers.

These would follow the apostles on their journeys and then seek to 'correct' what the apostles had taught the believers. The apostles' task was made even harder by other letters that were circulating. Some of these were forgeries, sent in the apostles' names but also containing false teaching. Of course, forgeries were very hard to detect. This is why Peter reassures his readers in 1 Peter 5:12 that his letter is genuine. He even makes sure they can recognise the handwriting!

Discussion: These false teachers must have been exceedingly annoying for the apostles and caused them many a sleepless night. Read Romans 8: 28 -31. How can we see these spiritual principles working here?



READ:

So, Peter is concerned that his readers continue to follow the true faith, but he is also concerned about the trials they are now facing and are about to face. He is determined to equip and prepare them for the approaching storm.

By the time Peter was writing, the Emperor Nero's persecution of Christians in Rome had probably begun. After the Great Fire of AD 64, it was to become far worse and led to both Paul and Peter's martyrdom. Elsewhere in the Roman Empire, there were no actual laws against Christianity, but persecution was still widespread.

Much of this came from other religious groups, especially orthodox Jews, or those whose personal interests were harmed by the spread of Christianity. Sometimes, this would lead to direct action against Christians, at others, accusers would take their case to the Roman authorities and demand 'justice'. This is, of course, what happened to the Lord Himself. So, being a Christian was already hard and becoming much harder. As most Christians came from the lower orders of society, they could expect little protection from the state. Knowing all this, Peter sets out to teach his readers how to 'stand firm in the faith', and keeping this in mind will help us to better understand the letter, which in turn will help us to become healthier disciples.

New Testament letters, like most ancient documents, were intended to be read out loud (e.g. Acts 8:30). The arrival of a letter from an apostle would create great excitement in a local congregation. Its members would gather together and then the letter would be read out loud in one reading. Thereafter, the details of the letter would be discussed. Letters would also be copied and shared with other congregations and would be written with this in mind.

Discussion: Now read the entire letter out loud together. Taking turns might help. As you read, try to focus on Peter's determination to ensure that his readers keep the true faith in spite of false teaching and increased hardship and persecution.

Having read the letter, which themes stand out as the most important?



For the next session:

Before the next study, take time to read the entire letter again. Read it in one sitting. It will take between ten and fifteen minutes. As you read it, keep in mind Peter's reasons for writing the letter and the situation in which his readers found themselves.

What are the similarities and differences between the readers' experience and ours? If Peter were to write a letter to us, which aspects of our context might he focus on? Which specific instructions in his letter appear most relevant to us?

