

SESSION 5: HEAVENLY HOPE

FROM THE LAST SESSION:

What are the similarities and differences between Peter's 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?



The two themes of our 2024/5 vision, multiplying healthy disciples, and transforming communities can both be found throughout Peter's letter. So, let's begin to study it in more detail.

READ

In his letter to the Colossians, Paul instructs his readers to 'Let the word of God dwell in you richly with all wisdom.' For this to happen, both our thinking and our actions should reflect the truth of God's word.

To help his readers achieve this, Peter often (but not always) uses the word 'therefore', which, as has often been said, is there for a reason!

Peter is teaching these early Christians that to become healthy disciples they must not only learn the great truths of their faith but they must also let these truths transform their daily attitudes and actions. Hence, whenever Peter lays down a great spiritual principle, he goes on to explain how this should affect the behaviour of his readers.

LEADERS: THE FOLLOWING EXERCISE MIGHT WELL BENEFIT FROM PREPARATION BEFOREHAND.

Discussion: Look through the letter together. How many 'therefore's can you find? Can you identify the spiritual truth that comes before each one and the subsequent effect it should have on our behaviour? Are there any other sections of the letter where a 'therefore' could easily be included?

READ:

THEREFORE, from Peter's letter it is clear that Christian behaviour must be driven by spiritual truths, whilst learning new spiritual truths should always affect our attitudes and actions. We need both parts if we are going to grow into healthy disciples.

Above all, when discussing the great truths of our faith, Peter's letter encourages his readers to remain hopeful. However, he also reminds them that this hope is a 'heavenly hope'. He is clear that things are hard and may become harder, but our hope is fixed in heaven and cannot be shaken. That is why he refers several times to the day when Jesus Christ will be revealed. This is where our daily attention and focus should also be.

This is the standard view of the New Testament. It was written by men who were 'ready to go but willing to stay'. This is a very different mindset from the one found in many western churches, where the emphasis of our teaching is on the benefits in this life of following Christ.

Discussion: How many times does Peter refer to 'hope' in his letter? How does heavenly hope help us to obey Peter's instructions in Ch3 v13-15?

This presents us with a great challenge. Every day we are told that we should focus on ourselves and our immediate individual happiness and fulfilment. Peter is writing from exactly the *opposite* point of view.

Peter's instructions to fix our hope in heaven seem to contradict our natural inclinations. Even though most of the New Testament writers and their readers came from very humble backgrounds and consequently lived lives much more difficult than our own, they were still aware of the constant need to deny our earthly inclinations, which they often referred to as 'the flesh'. Peter and the other apostles knew this was a great challenge. That's why they wrote about it!

We cannot 'will' ourselves to become more heavenly minded, we will only wear ourselves out in the attempt. However, we can choose to allow the Holy Spirit to transform until we too have the mind of Christ. This is one of the great challenges that faces us in Peter's letter.

For the next session

Jules Mazarin was the first minister of the seventeenth century French king, Louis XIV. In serving the king, he also amassed a huge personal fortune. He lived in a great palace on the banks of the River Seine, across from the Louvre, where the king lived.



Mazarin filled his palace with every imaginable luxury and the most beautiful artworks money could buy. (BTW, Mazarin, as well a politician, had also trained to be a priest!)

On his death bed, surrounded by all his wealth and possessions, he is reputed to have said, “Aah, that I must leave all this.”

What is our ‘all this’? Where might we be guilty of storing up treasure on earth? In contrast, what heavenly treasures are we storing up for ourselves?

We have already said that following Christ is something we can only do together. How can we encourage one another to live in heavenly hope?

