

A Letter to Aliens, part 1

1 Peter 1:1-2

(preached Pine Grove 7/7/19 Sun PM)

Introduction

I want to assure you that I am not smart enough to make it happen, but this morning's message in John 15 is a perfect lead in for tonight.

Because tonight, we begin a study of 1 Peter.

And 1 Peter was written in the context of how believers are to deal with a hateful culture around them.

You see, 1 Peter was written in 64 AD, and 64 AD was the height of Christian hatred in and around Rome, which served as the capital of the world.

Rome was the center of the Roman Empire.

It was the home of Nero, the Roman emperor, who was by most accounts a mad man.

Here is a picture of Nero, and look, I would be angry if I had a haircut like that too..

Nero was obsessed with building things.

Those around him claimed that Nero liked building so that he could leave visible reminders of his brilliance all over the Roman Empire.

Ever since he rose to the position of emperor at 16, Nero built and built, but eventually he ran out of room to build.

So in 64, he decided to burn Rome and re-build it.

Tragically, the fire wiped out the entire city, killed many people and left the rest homeless.

When word got out that Nero may have been responsible for it, the people began to turn on him.

Sensing that they may revolt, Nero looked for someone to blame the fire upon.

And he found that group in this new collection of people calling themselves Christians.

In fact, the most trusted source of historical information about the fire is a man named Tacitus.

Tacitus was no Christian but he wrote in his account of the fire that Nero “accused Christians of starting the fire to remove suspicion about himself.”

Well, the tactic worked, and the Romans began intense persecution of Christians.

To further strengthen his claims, Nero joined in the persecution.

One account says that Nero would hold lavish parties at the palace that would go well into the night.

In order to keep the event lit, he would capture Christians, tie them to the top of high poles and set them on fire so that party attenders could socialize way past dark.

Needless to say, the Romans began to hate Christians with a vile passion.

And it is under that intense persecution that Peter writes this book under the inspiration of God in 64 AD probably months after the burning of Rome on July 19, 64 AD.

Now the point of the book was to help believers cope with the persecution.

There was no central church that could serve as a rallying point or place of shelter.

Christians were scattered all over the Roman Empire, so Peter simply wrote a letter that could be passed from church to church.

So the aim of the letter was to help Christians respond to the enemy in a God-honoring way.

And if you are wondering what that response should be?

I will offer a key verse from 1 Peter 2:12..

12 Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may [n]because of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of [o]visitation.

Long story short, Peter writes a letter to encourage Christians to act like Christians even when the whole world is attacking them..

And for the next few months, we will be listening to Peter's encouragement, which is also very appropriate for our day.

Now clearly, we don't live in the midst of a culture that is physically attacking us as believers.

That day may not be far away.

But we do live in the midst of a culture that wants to silence our voice.

We live in a culture that wants us pushed to the sidelines.

We live in a culture that doesn't care for our God, our Bible, our truth, or our morality.

So how do we respond?

How do we live effectively in that kind of environment?

Well, 1 Peter is going to give us an answer, and I think the church would do good to listen.

I see so many Christians today not living by the principles of this letter.

I see Christians acting just as ugly as their unbelieving neighbor.

I see Christians returning evil for evil.

I see Christians more concerned with winning arguments and elections than winning souls..

1 Peter is not going to tell us to pursue any of that.

1 Peter is going to direct us to live rightly in the midst of a culture that is living wrongly.

1 Peter is going to tell us to submit to government, regardless of how evil that government is.

1 Peter is going to tell us that how we treat our family is going to be a great witness to an evil culture.

1 Peter is going to tell us that our suffering is nothing compared to Christ's suffering.

1 Peter is going to remind us that having our focus on our salvation will get our focus off our persecution.

In sum, it is going to be an incredibly helpful book for us as we live in a culture that is decidedly opposed to all things Christian.

So, let's jump into tonight in the first 2 verses..

Not sure how far we will make it, but let's break the ice.

We are going to look at these 2 verses in 3 parts..

We will see the author, the aliens, and the affection..

Let's begin by reading the first 2 verses...

*1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To those who reside as aliens, scattered
throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia,
and Bithynia, who are chosen ² according to the
foreknowledge of God the Father, by the
sanctifying work of the Spirit, [a]to obey Jesus
Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace
and peace [b]be yours in the fullest measure.*

To get us started, let's simply begin with the author
of the book..

I. The Author (1a)

Verse 1..

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

Those 6 words in themselves are a mouthful, so let's take a minute to look at Peter.

When the average thinks of Peter, their mind usually goes to one of two places..

Peter, the one who walked on water.

Peter, the one who denied Jesus 3 times.

And that is probably to be expected.

Peter was at times an incredible man of faith, but Peter was also at times a man of incredible failure.

Jesus would tell Peter that he would build the church on the rock of Peter's profession that he was the Christ.

And Jesus would also tell Peter, "get behind me Satan" when Peter tried to stop Jesus from going to the cross.

I think what we love most about Peter is his passion.

Sometimes that passion caused him to open his mouth and say some brilliant things.

Sometimes that passion caused him to open his mouth and say some incredibly dumb things.

But that is Peter.

I often call him the redneck disciple.

If it came into Peter's mind, it often came out of Peter's mouth.

Now, the story of Peter began way back in the gospels.

He was known as Simon and Jesus came to him and his brother Andrew in Matthew 4..

18 Now as Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. 19 And He *said to them, “[h]Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” 20 Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

Jesus called to Peter to follow him, and Peter immediately left his net and followed Him.

You have to love that impulsiveness of Peter.

See, hear, leave, follow.

Now that passion would serve Peter well.

In fact, he is the leader of the 12 Apostles, and we know that because he is first every time these men are listed in Scripture...

In fact, all 4 listings have Peter first and Judas Iscariot last, which lets us know that Peter was the head of these 12 men.

But we also know that because Peter spent so much time with Jesus.

If you take the 4 gospels, Jesus' name is mentioned most, but second on that list is Peter.

In fact, he is center stage in so many scenes with Jesus.

Peter is the one who is asking the questions for the other men.

Peter is the one affirming his faith and the faith of the others.

Peter is the one pledging his allegiance to Jesus with the rest of the men agreeing with him.

In other words, Peter is central to the gospel accounts of Jesus' life.

As I said before, Peter is the first out of the boat walking on the water as Jesus came to the other disciples on the sea of Galilee.

Peter is the one who stayed with Jesus the longest after his arrest.

Yes, we focus on his detail of Jesus, but at least was there at the trial while all the other disciples were nowhere to be found.

Peter is the one at the transfiguration to see the glory of Christ.

Peter is the one at the tomb with John to testify of Jesus' resurrection.

However, I don't think people love Peter because of his popularity.

I think people love Peter because of his humanity.

Let me show you something that is really interesting to take note of..

You may have heard this or had a pastor point this out to you before, but let's take a minute to look at the significance of Peter's name..

As we saw, Peter was originally Simon.

And frequently the Bible calls him Simon to identify his humanness.

Simon was just a regular blue collar fisherman with a wife.

And we know he had a wife because she is mentioned in Luke 4 and 1 Corinthians 9...

So Simon was just your ordinary man..

But then he follows Jesus, and Jesus gives him a new name..

John 1:42

40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother.

41 He *found first his own brother Simon and *said to him, "We have found the

Messiah" (which translated means [ab]Christ).

42 He brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon the son of [ac]John; you shall be called Cephas" (which is translated [ad]Peter).

Cephas would be the Jewish name, and Peter would be the Greek or Gentile name.

Both simply mean rock.

Now important note here.

The Catholic Church has always claimed that Peter was the first pope.

They say that is why Jesus gave him the name rock, but that is reading way too much into this.

First of all, the Bible never identifies the office of pope in the church and certainly never identifies Peter as the 1st pope.

Peter was simply named the rock because of his rock solid confession Jesus as the Messiah.

Matthew 16:13-18

13 Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" 14 And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, [h]Elijah; but still others, [i]Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." 15 He *said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" 16 Simon Peter answered, "You are [j]the Christ, the Son of the

living God.” 17 And Jesus said to him, “Blessed are you, Simon [k]Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. 18 I also say to you that you are [l]Peter, and upon this [m]rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it.

Jesus didn't call Peter the rock because he was the foundation of the church as the first pope.

In fact if Peter was the first pope, he got off to a rough start with his 3-time denial of Jesus..

Besides that, Peter was not always a rock.

As I have said before, Jesus referred to him as doing the work of Satan at times...

Peter sank in the water when he took his eyes off Christ..

The only thing rock solid about Peter was his belief and his confession that Jesus was the Christ, the son of God.

And that profession of belief in Christ is the foundation of the church.

Jesus has built the church not on a man but on the belief that He is the Messiah, and Peter was the first to see that...

So Peter is the rock in that way..

But we should also note that Jesus didn't always call him Peter..

Let me take you to Mark 14..

It is the final night of Jesus' life.

He know what is coming so he needs help from the Father and decides to pray..

You know what happens but let me read it to you anyway..

Mark 14:32..

32 They *came to a place named Gethsemane; and He *said to His disciples, "Sit here until I have prayed." 33 And He *took with Him Peter and [n]James and John, and began to be very distressed and troubled. 34 And He *said to them, "My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch." 35 And He went a little beyond them, and fell to the ground and began to pray that if it were possible, the hour might [o]pass Him by. 36 And He was saying,

“Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.” 37 And He *came and *found them sleeping, and *said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep watch for one hour?

When Peter fell asleep, Jesus came to him calling him Simon because Peter was acting like his old self.

He was giving in to his sinful nature.

When Peter was arguing with the rest of the disciples about who was the greatest in the kingdom in Luke 22, Jesus came to him and said,...

31 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has [d]demanded permission to sift you like wheat;

Long story short, Jesus called him Simon when he was acting like his former self..

There are also times when Peter is referred to as Simon Peter..

John 13 comes to mind..

Jesus is preparing to wash the disciples feet and he comes to Peter, and ***John 13:6*** read like this..

6 So He *came to Simon Peter. He *said to Him, "Lord, do You wash my feet?"

Clearly, Peter knows that Jesus is Lord, but the Simon in him still wants to tell Jesus what to do..

However, the impression that the Bible wants to leave on us is that Peter was a Simon who became Simon Peter who eventually became Peter the Rock.

In fact, I want to take you to a passage that really shows us the progression of Peter...

In John 21, Peter and the disciples had been told by the resurrected Jesus to meet him in Galilee.

Take your Bibles and go to John 21..

So they go up to Galilee and begin to wait for Jesus, but the old impulsive Peter can't just stand around and wait..

So let's pick it up in verse 3...

3 Simon Peter *said to them, "I am going fishing." They *said to him, "We will also come with you." They went out and got into the boat; and that night they caught nothing.

This is an incredible verse when you consider all that Peter had witnessed.

He had seen the 3 year ministry of Jesus.

He had seen Jesus being brutalized and crucified.

He had seen Jesus resurrected.

Yet, his mind is still on his profession.

Maybe this is an attempt to go back to his old way of life.

Maybe he thinks that his details of Jesus have sealed his fate..

Regardless of the reason, Peter is acting like his old self.

No patience.

Ready to go fish.

And all the disciples fall right under his leadership..

So they all go get in the boat, fish all night, and don't get a bite, which is proof that fishermen who disobey Jesus go hungry.

Verse 4..

4 But when the day was now breaking, Jesus stood on the beach; yet the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5 So Jesus *said to them, “Children, you do not have [c]any fish, do you?” They answered Him, “No.” 6 And He said to them, “Cast the net on the right-hand side of the boat and you will find a catch.” So they cast, and then they were not able to haul it in because of the great number of fish. 7 Therefore that disciple whom Jesus loved *said to Peter, “It is the Lord.” So when Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put his outer garment on (for he was stripped for work), and threw himself into the sea.

There's good ol impulsive Peter again.

Can't wait on Jesus.

Can't wait for the boat to get to land.

Into the water he goes clothes and all..

They get on the beach.

Jesus erases his 3 details by asking Peter 3 questions that affirm his love for Christ.

Peter is restored and essentially told that his days of fishing in the water are over.

He will now fish for men and tend to their souls..

Now flip one page over to Acts 1..

Jesus ascends to heaven in the first 11 verses...

In verse 12, the disciples get together and need to find a replacement for Judas.

Peter leads that meeting...

Verse 15..

5 [q]At this time Peter stood up in the midst of the brethren (a gathering of about one hundred and twenty [r]persons was there together), and said,

Then flip over one more chapter to Acts 2...

In the first 13 verses, the promised Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples..

And then look at verse 14..

14 But Peter, [o]taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them:

That is essentially the first preaching in the church age, and it is none other than Peter..

Two chapters ago in John, he is ready to go back to his old way of life..

And now, just two chapters later, he is ready to declare the gospel to the world..

The rest of the next few chapters of Acts is centered on Peter and his leadership and preaching...

Those 3 chapters in a nutshell are really the picture of Peter's life...

From pulling nets to the PULpit....

Peter was a force for Christ..

Now, that is just some background on the first word of the first verse of his letter to the church..

And yet, there is much more that could be said about him..

But I think all that is important to keep in mind as we read his letter.

We know that God inspired every word but he used Peter to record these particular words in his two letters to the church..

And so that must be important as we read his letter to the church and us one the next few months..

So that is the author.

Now let me just introduce point 2, and we will get more in depth next week...

Who are the aliens of verse 2?

Well, they are the audience to whom Peter is writing.

And let's meet them before we head home...

II. The Aliens (1b-2a)

***1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,
To those who reside as aliens, scattered
throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia,
and Bithynia, who are chosen 2 according to the
foreknowledge of God the Father, by the
sanctifying work of the Spirit, [a]to obey Jesus
Christ and be sprinkled with His blood:***

Peter is clearly writing to believers who he describes in a couple different ways...

The first way to describe them is aliens..

Not aliens in the sense of being from outer space..

Not aliens in the sense of being illegally in a non-native country.

Believers are simply aliens in the sense that are not part of this worldly system.

We are set apart.

We have a citizenship in heaven.

We have a different King.

We are part of a different kingdom.

We are on earth but our heart is in heaven.

You could translate this as strangers or exiles or even foreigners..

But however you translate it, the point is that believers are in the world but not of the world.

WE are simply passing through on our way to our true land.

We will save some of that for next week..

Conclusion

Let me end with this accurate description of 1 Peter from David Thompson, who put together a commentary on 1 Peter...

“1 Peter is no psychobabble counseling book, it is a book of deep theology that will bring believers strength, courage, encouragement and hope. In fact, it will bring believers to the place where suffering makes some sense and to the place where there actually can be joy in it.

Howard Marshall said he could build a case that if one were to be shipwrecked on a desert island and allowed to have only one of the New Testament letters, then 1 Peter would be the ideal choice. It is rich, it is warm, it is comforting in hostile environments.”

I pray that will be the case for us as we make our way through it on Sunday nights...

Let us pray.