



ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

# Bible Study

FEBRUARY

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MORNING & EVENING SERMONS

## STRANGERS IN THE WORLD

Times such as Lunar New Year remind us that Christian people are part of the surrounding world. That's where our family roots are, it's where we go to work and where we live. Yet, there is also a sense in which we are strangers here. Ultimately, we live and move and have our being in God (Acts 17:26-28) and have a heavenly citizenship that is more important than our earthly ties (Eph 2:19-22). Thus we are people who are meant to stay 'in' the world yet who are not 'of' it (John 17:15-17). 1 Peter is written to people such as this. The language of the Babylonian exile is used to capture the deep sense in which we are all exiles since Eden and until the new heavens and the new earth are a reality. In this series of four sermons and small group studies we will follow the threads of this life in exile and consider its meaning today.

6 FEB 2011	PETER 1:13-25 SET YOUR HOPE
13 FEB 2011	1 PETER 2:13-25 BEING SUBJECT
20 FEB 2011	1 PETER 3:8-22; 4:12-19 SUFFERING WELL
27 FEB 2011	1 PETER 4:7-11 BE SELF-CONTROLLED AND SOBER-MINDED

# 1 PETER 1:13-25: SET YOUR HOPE

## GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

## Introduction

Times such as Chinese New Year remind us that Christian people are part of the surrounding world. That's where our family roots are, it's where we go to work and where we live. Yet, there is also a sense in which we are strangers here. Ultimately, we live and move and have our being in God (Acts 17:26-28) and have a heavenly citizenship that is much more important than our earthly ties (Eph 2:19-22). Thus, we are people that are meant to stay 'in' the world, yet not 'of' the world (Jn 17:15-17). Using the language of the Babylonian exile, 1 Peter was written to encourage Christians who were likely to face persecution under Emperor Nero (A.D..54-68). It captures the deep sense in which we are exiles from the time of the Fall until the New Heaven and New Earth become reality.

Our sense of how we should live is shaped by who we see ourselves to be and that, in turn, arises largely from our past. Peter's concern here is to focus his readers' attention on their future destiny (the hope to be revealed in Jesus), their past (ransomed by God in Christ) and their present status (belonging to God the Father who is holy). The purpose of these reminders is a call to action which has negative and positive aspects. God's people are not to conform to their old ways of thinking and living. Instead, they are to reflect God's holiness in all they do that will especially mean a dedication to earnest brotherly love... all reflecting the 'new birth' as the seed of God's word bears fruit. This passage (1 Pet 1:13-25) is an opportunity for us to re-examine and re-shape our fundamental sense of identity and values; thus preparing us for the challenge of living as Christians in the rough and tumble of life.

## For Study and Discussion

After praising God and reminding his readers of the great salvation He has brought about, culminating in the 'grand finale' of Christ's return (1:2-12), Peter now exhorts them on how they are to conduct their lives in the light of these truths. He points us to the nature of God, the Lamb of God and the word of God to motivate obedience to Christ in our lives – the purpose for which we are chosen by the Father through the Spirit's sanctifying work (1:2).

A. 1st exhortation: Set your hope fully, actively, soberly (v13).

1. v13a. Therefore. Peter's exhortations for Christian conduct are rooted in what God has done for us and what blessings we have as His people both in the present and in the future (1:3-12).

a. What are some of these blessings (vv3-5, 8-9)?

b. What is God's attitude and response toward us in giving us these blessings (v3b, cf. Rom 12:1)?

2. v13b. God's mercy demands our response. Peter uses two images (addressing the Christian's mind) to stir us into action. Firstly, prepare your minds for action. We are as Israel during the first Exodus, to eat the Passover meal in haste "with your cloak tucked into your belt", as they prepare to leave Egypt (cf. Exo 12:11). There is no time for lazing around or pursuing less important matters. We are to set our hope on God's imminent deliverance and be ready for action. Nothing is to impede us as we mentally prepare to focus on God's coming kingdom. Secondly, be self-controlled. We are not to be intoxicated and indulgent such that we lack understanding, alertness and clarity of judgement. Rather we are to be disciplined, sober, discerning. (Peter repeats the vital need for this

attitude again in 4:7, 5:8 cf. Rom 13:13, Eph 5:18). Such images of total, clear-minded and unwavering focus lead us to set our hope decisively and firmly upon the objective grace (which is a shorthand consolidation of all the blessings spoken of in 1:3-90), that is coming.

- a. What is the characteristic of this hope in contrast to the way 'hope' is used typically (e.g. "I hope the weather will turn out fine." Cf. Heb 6:11, 19; Heb 11:1)?
- b. Hope focuses on the future dimension of God's coming kingdom and on our eternal inheritance in Christ. But how does it impact our present lives? (e.g. Rom 8:24-25; 1 Jn 3:3; vv14-16 below).

## II. 2nd exhortation: Be holy (vv14-16).

1. Setting our hope has both negative and positive implications for our conduct:
  - a. What are some of these sinful desires that Peter wants us not to be conformed to (e.g. 2:1, 11, cf. Rom 12:2 where Paul refers to the world and its values and pursuits as the form or fashion Christians should not model)?
  - b. Peter quotes from Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26 to highlight the holiness of God as the standard and pattern for our conduct. Briefly survey these above passages to get a sense of the comprehensiveness that is called for. To be holy is to be set apart. What are we set apart from? What are we set apart for?
  - c. What is our relationship to God that should spur our desire and responsibility for holiness (v14; Eph 5:1)?

## III. 3rd exhortation: Fear the Lord reverently (vv17-21).

1. v17. God's holiness and righteousness as the Judge means that the way we live our lives matter to Him. Our intimacy with God should not foster a careless, wilful lifestyle nor an attitude that expects God to be a pampering and indulgent Father. If we have a special relationship with God as His children, then all the more we must consider what God is like, take Him seriously, and show Him reverence by the way we live. (The fear of God has always characterised His people in both OT (e.g. Dt 10:12; Ps 111:10; Pro 1:7) and NT (Acts 9:31; 2 Cor 7:1)).
  - a. In our personal conduct, speech, ministry, worship, or circumstances of prosperity or adversity, what can we do to foster an attitude or atmosphere of reverence towards our holy Father?
  - b. We live out our reverence and holiness as strangers in the world. (See also 1:2; 2:11. The term aliens and strangers implies that Christians are only temporary [time] and foreign [status] residents in this world. Our native home and citizenship are in heaven [Phil 3:20; Heb 13:14] and we are neither citizens nor permanent residents in this present world). Is this identity indicative of who we ought to please, and where our values, interests, priorities and longing ought to lie? Is it possible for Christians to be so at home in this world – its fashions, pursuits, practices, traditions and comforts – that such an identity looks totally out of place?

2. vv18-21. We are led to consider that the Father is holy and righteous even as He redeems us. He had demanded a ransom for our sins and He Himself paid the costly price with the precious blood of the spotless Lamb of God.

a. What kind of life and from whose influence were we ransomed? (v18)

b. By implication, what is the purpose for God to pay such a price “for our sake” (v21)?

IV. 4th exhortation: Love one another deeply (vv22-25).

1. Peter links our obedience to the truth (i.e. the gospel preached, v25b) with our purification by the sprinkling of Christ’s blood that now makes us holy (1:2, 19). The outflow of this cleansing is a heart that has genuine love for others in Christ’s body. While not necessarily doubting that his readers already show forth sincere love, he urges them to do so more earnestly and fervently (cf. 1 Thess 4:9-10). The source of this love is the new birth (v23). We are born into a new likeness of the Father who is love and we are enabled and filled by His love to love His children.

a. What are the characteristics of the word of God which Peter appeals to? In exhorting us to love, why does he link our new birth to these characteristics? (vv23b-25a)

b. The early church consisted of people from diverse social and religious backgrounds (think of the Jews and the Gentiles). We should not be surprised if there is potential for conflict, misunderstanding and insensitivity. Have we also allowed these differences (and also those of education, vocation, personality etc.) to keep us from loving one another fervently?

## Discipleship Pointers

1. Summary: In grateful and obedient response to God’s mercy in saving us, let us conduct our lives in hope, holiness, reverence and Christian love – the marks of our new birth and alienation from the world.
2. Our conduct must never be divorced from the gospel of Christ. This gospel of grace is what feeds our hope, holiness, reverence and love. We need the gospel so much more now than when we were first converted. May God awaken us to His mercy, and nourish us from new birth to full maturity, through His word and Spirit.
3. Peter’s readers needed these exhortations. They had left their former idolatry and had to learn how to live acceptably to God. Faced with persecution and unjust suffering, they needed to be encouraged with hope that their faith and perseverance will not be in vain. In a community made up of Christians from all walks of life, they needed to stretch themselves to love each other in God’s family. What circumstances or pressures do we face in our own lives, the church and the world that make it needful for us to act on these exhortations?
4. The coming of Christ and our eternal inheritance may appear a bit too abstract and distant to impact us in the rough and tumble of life. Yet the Christian hope is what keeps us going, trusting in God’s promises, especially in times of adversity. Let us ask God to strengthen that hope, so that neither prosperity nor adversity may distract or draw us away from waiting upon His coming.
5. Let us follow Christ, our Master and Model. His hope was laid in the coming “joy set before Him” (Heb 12:2) while He willingly endured the pain and shame of the cross. He set Himself apart (sanctified) entirely to serve His holy Father’s will by going to the cross, so that we may be set apart (sanctified) in the truth (Jn 17:17, 19). In His act of self-sacrifice, Christ showed the fullest extent of His love for us (Jn 13:1; 15:13) which must now constrain us to do likewise for our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Jn 3:16).

# 1 PETER 2:13-25: BEING SUBJECT

## GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

## Introduction

Submission to Jesus as our saving Lord is at the heart of the Christian faith. However, we soon find that there are others who call us to submit to them. In this passage, we will consider just where we find two of these: civil government and employment.

The early Christians faced a hostile civil environment – just as many believers do today. How should we ‘frame’ and respond to civil government, especially if it is neutral or hostile to the gospel? Similar questions arise with respect to employment. Unless we are a business owner or an independent professional, we are likely to have a boss whose agenda and values may be very different from ours and also from God’s. How do we deal with this, as people under the authority of our employment contract? Does the word and example of Jesus, from far-off times, have anything to say to us here?

## For Study and Discussion

### Establishing the Principle

1. In this passage the Apostle Peter gives us a clear guiding principle about how we should respond to authority. What is that principle (v13)?

2. What types of authority should we submit to? (vv13, 14, 18)

3. When we are obedient to human authority, to whom are we submitting? (Rom 13:1, 2)

### Applying the Principle

4. In Peter’s time, if a Christian were to obey the law carefully, and was respectful of authority, what would the consequences have been (vv12, 15, 16, 20b)? Would that be any different today?

5. However, the obvious counter-question is what do we do when the law contradicts God’s law? Have a look at Peter’s example when faced with a direct earthly command to disobey God in Acts 4:19 and 5:29. How should we deal with such a situation?

Jesus as our example and our source of freedom to submit:

6. (i) What examples of Christ are we to follow?

V22:

V23:

(ii) Can we follow this example on our own? What has Christ done to enable us to follow His example?

V24:

V25:

Conclusion:

7. In reality, what is our daily challenge? Being obedient to authority or having to deal with orders and laws that contradict God's laws? What areas of our behaviour do we need to modify? What attitudes do we need to modify? Whose glory are we seeking?

## Discipleship Pointers

1. We are always under God's authority and He has told us to submit to human authority – His appointed method for human governance.
2. Submitting means obeying and honouring those in authority.
3. If a law and/or order from our employer would cause us to break one of God's laws, we are obliged to refuse to obey in a way which does not dishonour Christ, but we must be ready to suffer the earthly consequences.
4. Our ultimate example is Christ.
  - i. Christ committed no sin – we should avoid sin
  - ii. Christ submitted to authority (being prepared to be killed, without retaliating) – we should be prepared to suffer, even unto death.
  - iii. Christ's death freed us from the need to sin and enables us to live for righteousness.
  - iv. Instead of being like sheep going astray, we follow the Shepherd who cares about our souls. In obedience to Him, we submit to Him as well as the other authorities established by Him.

## Family Moment

Many of us as parents try to give reasons for why we want to be obeyed. "Please tidy your room, you made the mess and you need to put the toys back in the cupboard so they do not get lost!" Maybe less often we are given reasons by our employer – "I need the report by Tuesday 10 am because even though I will not be presenting the information until 4 pm, I only have 45 minutes free time in my schedule that day to read your report, so it must be in on time." Does that mean that we should only obey authority if we have been told the reason? Are we to obey authority only if it is to our benefit? Who is honoured if we obey, us or the authority? Who is our highest authority? What is more important, our present human comfort or the state of our souls for eternity?

## 1 PETER 3:8-22; 4:12-19: SUFFERING WELL

### GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

### Introduction

Christians in today's world suffer because they worship Jesus as their God and follow Him as their Lord. This suffering may occur because of persecution from followers of another faith or from promoters of a political ideology. We know little of this in Singapore. But what of suffering that takes the form of ostracism from family, neighbours or work colleagues? Or again, of the suffering that comes from a work promotion being withheld because an employee is 'too religious' and asserts his loyalty towards God, rather than Mammon? Like many leaders of the very early church, Peter had first-hand experience of suffering. In this passage, he points us to Christ's own example and calls us to a life of non-retaliation and quiet trust in the Lord, based on the consolations of faith.

### For Study and Discussion

1. Doing good in response to evil (3:8-13)

Apart from living lives characterised by submission, consideration, humility, love and respect; how else are we to live in relation to our fellow human beings? Why should we do it? (vv8-13 cf. Ps 34:12-15)

2. If we suffer for doing right (3:14-22):

a. How should we consider ourselves? (v14)

b. What should we not allow to overtake us? (v14; Isa 8: 12-13)

c. Instead, we should.....? (vv15-17)

d. Why is it better to suffer for going good than for doing evil? (vv17-22)

3. Our attitude to suffering (4:12-19)

a. First, we are not to be .....? (v12)

b. Secondly, we are to .....? (v13)

c. Thirdly, we are not to be ..... but instead .....? (v16)

d. We need to note that Peter is not talking about all sufferings. He is talking about a specific type of suffering. What type of suffering is Peter referring to? (v15)

## Discipleship Pointers

Are we currently undergoing suffering? Probably most of us are not. Living in Singapore is generally good. However, even in Singapore, there is a lot of suffering going on.

If we are suffering, what reasons are there for our suffering?

- Is it because we are living in a fallen world? e.g. sickness, natural disasters, etc
- Is it because of the evil/stupid deeds of other human beings?
- Is it because of our Christian deeds?
- Is it because of our own evil/stupid deeds?

If because of our own sinfulness then we deserve it and there is therefore nothing for us to rejoice about.

If on the other hand, we are suffering because we do what is right in God's sight, then let us rejoice because we are blessed (3:14) and because we are participating in the suffering of Christ (4:13).

How is our life? Are we living good, godly lives? Let us have a clear conscience "so that those who speak maliciously against our good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander" (3: 16).

## Family/Group Moment

As members of the Christian family we have a primary responsibility to support other members of the family who are suffering. Our Small Groups and our biological families are good places to start this ministry of support.

Ask each Group Member to tell of any sufferings they are experiencing because of their Christian faith. Is there anything that others can do to provide support through practical actions and/or through prayer?

Is your family supportive of your faith? Are other family members Christians? If so then you should talk together about the sufferings and difficulties you face. Pray together about this and do whatever is possible to support one another in practical ways as well.

# 1 PETER 4:7-11: BE SELF-CONTROLLED AND SOBER-MINDED

## GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

## Introduction

The outside world presents us with a thousand distractions. There is always a party somewhere, an entertainment spectacular, an opportunity to generate wealth and such like. Let's face it: we some-times feel the pull of all these and the lure to live for this moment and for what is right before our eyes. This series of practical exhortations arises from a Christian sense of history. These are the 'last days' and the end is 'near' in the sense that Jesus was crucified, raised and ascended and needs only come again to bring the closure to this present world. When that happens, it is imminent, in the sense that it is the one big future event that should shape our present living. Notice the simple exhortations arising from this: to live as sober, self-controlled, loving hospitable people who serve others according to our gifts. This is a heavenly hope of high earthly impact!

"[The] readers will hear in these verses a call to mutual love and service directed toward the glory of God." – Russell Pregeant, Engaging the New Testament.

## For Study and Discussion

1. Living 'according to God' is not something which should be put off until tomorrow. Why not? What warning are we given (v7)? What does this mean? Did it have any relevance for those Christians who have died during the last two thousand years?
2. What frame of mind must we have to enable us to pray (v7)? How is it possible to be 'clear-minded and self-controlled'?
3. Verse 8 begins 'Above all...'. Does this mean love is the most important of God's gifts? Discuss. How does this relate to what we learn directly from the life and death of Jesus Christ? (for various Biblical aspects of love check some of the following: 1 Cor 13:4-7, Matt 5:43-44, Jn 3:16, 1 Jn 3:16, 1 Jn 4:7, Eph 5:2).
4. What is 'hospitality' (v9)? Check a dictionary definition or see \* below? How hospitable are you to other Christians (not just ORPC members and personal friends)? Do you make it a point of welcoming visitors to ORPC? Do you welcome others into your home? What did Jesus say about hospitality? See Lk 14:12-14 and Matt 22:1-10.

5. We are told not to grumble (v9). What, if any, effect does grumbling have on our relationship with God? How do you think grumbling compares with the sins mentioned in 1 Pet 4:3? (compare with 1 Cor 10:10)
6. Compile a list of 'gifts to serve others' (v10). In what ways has God gifted you?
7. How does God speak? Are there occasions when God has spoken to you? If so, from whose mouth did you hear these words? Do others hear God when you speak (v11)?
8. What is the purpose of 'Godly living' as outlined in these verses? What should our motives be? What does it mean to 'praise God through Jesus Christ' (v11)?

## **Discipleship Pointers**

This passage is basically one big 'Discipleship Pointer'. To what extent are you already living your life according to the 'pointers' contained in this passage?

Are you living in the knowledge that 'the end... is near'? or do you keep putting off discipleship until 'tomorrow'?

In what ways are you (i) showing love in your life, (ii) providing hospitality and (iii) making use of the gifts God has given you?

For reflection: 'if hospitality is what we say it is – that is, welcoming the other- then ought it not to be a matter of welcoming those who are unwelcome? Should it not be extended beyond our neighbours to strangers? Beyond our friends to our enemies? Beyond the invited to the uninvited?' John D. Caputo, *What would Jesus Deconstruct?*

Are you slipping into bad habits? How much do you grumble?

The words we speak should be words from God. What a challenge! What we say matters as much as what we do.

## **Group/Family Moment**

Compile a list of the gifts to serve others which each of you has received. Are you using these gifts at ORPC? Are you using these gifts in the wider world outside church?

\* 'hospitality' is 'the friendly and generous reception and entertainment of guests, visitors, or strangers.' New Oxford Dictionary of English.