

# HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?



## WEEK ONE: LIVING OUR LIVES BEFORE GOD

### *Read 1 Peter 1*

We have talked about how we should live on many occasions, but 1 Peter is one of the clearest of the epistles on this issue. The background here, is the suffering of Christians, who are living across the five regions of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), who were in the main, converted Gentiles. Before we look at this in more detail, we should remind ourselves about the background of the writer.

Peter, or Simon Peter as he is often referred to in the Gospels, was a fisherman along with his brother Andrew. (*Read Matthew 4:18-20*), and they were the first two disciples whom Jesus called. Peter is a fascinating character, an impulsive man both in speech and action whilst a disciple. He was never afraid to jump in with his opinions and, as we remember in the Garden of Gethsemane, quick to draw his sword and cut off the ear of one of the high priest's servants. He was the first to say he would never betray Jesus but as we know, just as Jesus had said, Peter denied him three times. Peter went out and wept bitterly.

We also remember a quite different Peter on the Day of Pentecost, having been filled with the Holy Spirit. No longer afraid to stand up and be counted, he preached to the crowds gathered in Jerusalem and over three thousand people were added to the church that day.

- Have we ever felt that we have let God down by what we have said or done? How did that make us feel?
- We can take heart from Peter. The Holy Spirit was sent to give power to the believers, power being '*the ability to do*'.
- It is highly likely that Peter had help in writing the epistles by his secretary, Silvanus. Another lesson for us: we do not have to do everything by ourselves.

This letter was written at a time of growth for the Church but also a time of growing persecution. Based on the numerous references to suffering and persecution in this

letter, Peter wrote in AD 64, just as the persecution of Christians under Nero was ramping up.

The website *Got Questions* says: *"If anyone understood persecution, it was Peter. He was beaten, threatened, punished, and jailed for preaching the word of God. He knew what it took to endure without bitterness, without losing hope and in great faith living an obedient, victorious life. This knowledge of living hope in Jesus was the message, and Christ's example was the one to follow."*

- *"Without losing hope and in great faith living an obedient victorious life."* Could that be said of us? Or have we struggled with our faith and hope in challenging times?

What struck me on reading this epistle again, was its incredible positivity. Upbeat, we would say nowadays. Verse five is most probably the key to this: *"And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see."*

The *History Skills* website tells us:

*"The persecution of Christians by Nero began in the year 64 CE, after a great fire swept through Rome, destroying much of the city.*

*According to the Roman historian Tacitus, Nero himself may have been responsible for starting the fire, although this claim is disputed by some scholars.*

*In any case, Nero was eager to deflect blame for the disaster, and he seized upon the growing Christian community as a convenient scapegoat.*

*The persecution of Christians under Nero was marked by extreme brutality and cruelty, and some of the most horrific methods of execution were reserved for those who refused to renounce their faith."*

Christianity at this time was not for the faint-hearted. Nor of course, is it in many parts of the world today. How many times do we hear about Christian churches, often with the congregation inside, being burnt down, as well as other atrocities?

*Read verse 7:*

- Do you think it is necessary to go through persecution to prove your faith?
- How do we make our faith strong?

*Read verses 8-12*

- Peter engenders a sense of excitement in these verses. It reminds me of children waiting to start a race. They can hardly keep still, so keen are they to run.
- Do we feel excited by our salvation? If we have lost the joy of our salvation, how do we find it again?

*Read verses 13-20*

One senses Peter wants his readers to understand the need for a different way of living for those who have received God's salvation, saying there should be no slipping back

into the old ways before we became Christians. There is so much joy in following Jesus, but the way in which we live should be honouring to God. Verses 15 and 16 talking about being 'holy', just as God is holy.

- How does God demonstrate his holiness?
- What does it mean for us to be holy?

We often sing the words of the hymn: "*Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven, who like we His praise should sing?*" Peter emphasises that we are not ransomed by 'mere' money, but by the precious blood of Jesus who was: *the sinless, spotless Lamb of God*. Those who are not Christians often deride this emphasis on a blood sacrifice, but of course we know that life is in the blood. If someone has a tragic accident and 'bleeds out', their life has gone, so the fact that Jesus was willing to shed his blood for us means he died that we might live.

### *Read verses 21-25*

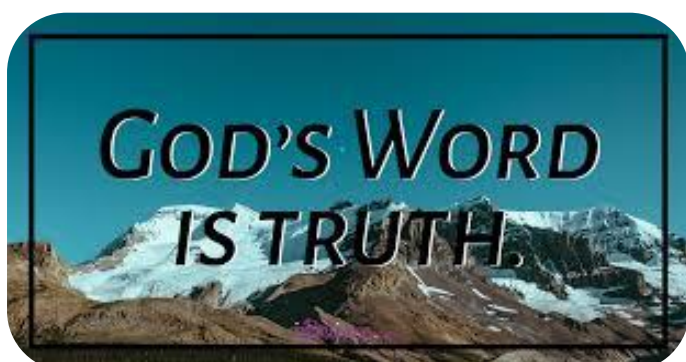
When Pilate faced Jesus in front of the crowds baying for his life, he posed the question: *WHAT IS TRUTH? (John 18:38)* Pilate is questioning the claim of Jesus that he is "witness to the truth" (John 18:37). He was most likely being facetious. However, we remember in John 14, Jesus tells his disciples "*I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, except through me.*"

These last verses emphasise that we come to trust God through Jesus and we were cleansed from our sins because we obeyed the truth. However, verse 22 says we must show sincere love to our fellow Christians and love each other deeply with all our heart.

We would do well to learn verse 25: ***"BUT THE WORD OF THE LORD REMAINS FOREVER. AND THAT WORD IS THE GOOD NEWS THAT WAS PREACHED TO YOU."***

Whatever the Christians in those days, and us of today, have been, or are going through, there is no excuse for turning away. It is important **HOW WE LIVE**.

I would encourage us all to read this chapter again and ask God to give us the faith, confidence and belief that Peter demonstrates to those Christians suffering persecution. Also, remember to pray for those Christians across the world who are suffering for their faith.



### **PRAYER:**

**Father thank you because your word is truth. Help us to live our lives according to your word.**

**Amen**