**Lesson 17 - 1 PETER**

**Introduction:**

1 Peter was written by the Apostle Peter from Rome. “Babylon” in 5:13 is a synonym all through Revelation for Rome, or the world system. Remember, Babylon was the empire that burned Jerusalem and took the Israelites captive, the power centre of a world hostile to God’s people.

The letter is dated 63-64 A.D. during the time of Nero, who greatly persecuted the Christians. It is rumoured that the great fire of Rome was started by Nero, but blamed on the Christians, setting off a wave of persecution. Whether Nero started the fire, or it was an accident, the historian Tacitus’ account says it became the excuse to persecute large numbers of Christ-followers.

True followers of Jesus have been persecuted throughout the ages, whether by followers of other religions, the dominant culture wherever they live, or even The Church. Followers of Jesus are always counter-cultural and serve as the conscience of society. Tacitus says of the crucifixion of Christ, and resulting growth of Christianity: “…*and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but, even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.”*

Whether 1 Peter was written just before the great persecution of Nero in anticipation of it, or in the midst of it we don't know. It was during this persecution that both Peter and Paul were martyred.

Peter wrote to Christians who were part of several congregations throughout Asia Minor started by Paul, who at this time was either in prison or already martyred. He may have been comforting them over the loss of their spiritual father (5:1-7). He encourages their leaders to take care of the flock, for younger men to submit themselves, humble themselves, to cast all their anxiety on Jesus.

Shortly after this, Peter loses his life. The apocryphal book *Acts of Peter* gives an account of his death: Peter was advised by friends to leave Rome. As he leaves he meets Jesus (2 Peter 1:14), and asks Jesus, "Where are you going?" Jesus tells him He is on his way to Rome to be crucified again in Peter's place. Peter, grieving, returns to Rome to be crucified, upside down, as he says he is not worthy to die as Christ did. Whether true or not, it typifies the situation in Rome at the time (martyred 67/68 AD).

Peter probably dictated this letter to Sylvanus, "Silas," as he probably couldn't write, being an uneducated man.

**Purpose of the letter**: to encourage Christians as they face persecution and suffering.

1. **Prevailing Views Of Suffering**

* **Triumphalism:** Takes the biblical concept that God promises to provide for all of our needs, protect us, come to our aid, and interprets these promises as meaning Christians should never have to suffer, be sick, poor, etc. We should be free from all the problems and burdens of the unbeliever.

A verse like 1 Pet 1:5 *“who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time”* is interpreted to mean that no suffering can touch you. It is the “prosperity gospel” of today. Therefore, if you do suffer it is because of your lack of faith or lack of knowledge of God's promises, therefore you don't receive what he wants to give. Not a biblical interpretation!

* **Suffering is sent by God:** The teaching that all suffering is God's will for our lives. It is sent to test, strengthen, purify our faith; to teach us something; or to punish us for some (often unknown) sin in our lives.

Some proof texts given: James 1:2-3; Heb.12:7, 1 Peter 4:17-19

Because God is sovereign everything that happens must be his will. They forget that Satan is still “the prince/god of this world” (John 12:31; 14:30; 2 Cor 4:4) and trying to destroy the bride of Christ (Rev 12:1-6). If this is position is right, how should we understand Jesus’ instruction to pray *“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven?”*

* **Christians will not escape suffering**: In fact, we will suffer precisely *because* we have chosen to follow Him (Matt. 10:17-39; John 14:18-21). Jesus foretold it, Peter affirms it (1 Pet 4:12-19)

**Question: Is there a difference between the trials of life and suffering for the sake of Christ? What role does each play in our lives? Should we respond differently to each? If yes, how?**

1. **How do Christians suffer?**
2. **Self-denial:** Matt. 16:24f: *"If anyone would come after me he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me."* It is painful to always put God's will before our own. It is not a “once and for all” thing, but a continual denial of self. We become more aware of our personal sin, and are grieved deeply by it.

Self-denial is “suffering” we choose as we put off (“put to death” the old nature (1 Peter 1:14-16; 2:1-2,11; 4:1-3) What is the old nature? (See Bethel notes)

1. **Public witness:** As we become more Christ-like, we will be persecuted (1 Peter 4:12-16). If we are counter-cultural, of course the culture will respond with hostility.
	* **Stages of persecution:**
* **Stigmatizing** the targeted group, usually through misinformation (media accusations of being bigoted, lacking compassion, hate speech, etc.)
* **Marginalizing** its role in society – loss of job, promotion, e.g. TWU – teacher training program – “Teachers will teach anti-gay, hate-mongering…”
* **Vilifying** it for alleged crimes or misconduct (usually untrue) – protection from prosecution has been removed. It can happen when you take unpopular stands. Today in Canada the flashpoint is homosexuality, legalizing marijuana and prostitution.

Previously it has been sexual standards, pornography, divorce/remarriage, abortion (human rights commissions on ‘hate-speech,’ fines for exercising rights – refusing to print materials, offer accommodations in B&B, etc.)

* **Criminalizing** Christian positions, worldview. Quebec: teaching your children one religion is right is child-abuse. Children can be taken away, the right to educate your children even privately is curtailed. You must teach all religions are right and equal.
* Finally, **persecuting** it outright.
	+ When you live as Jesus did (holiness, justice, mercy, judgement) you are bound to come in conflict with the world. These things are not what the world is interested in - you are out of step with what is going on in the world.
	+ Jesus' example: If Jesus had just taught the general principles of God's love and forgiveness, he would not have riled the establishment, or upset the status quo, and he wouldn't have had to go to the cross.

**Share examples**

Instead he attacks their priorities, traditions and values. Think of how he offended in the following:

* Matt 25:41-46 – parable of the sheep and goats
* Lk 12:42-48 – Parable of the watchful servant’s mismanagement when his master returned
* Matt 16:26f - On materialism (Gain the whole world...)
* Matt 6:19-21 - Storing up treasure on earth
* Matt. 8:28-34 - Healing of demon possessed man resulting in loss of herd of pigs (priorities)
* Matt. 7:19-23 - By your fruit you will know them: “Not everyone who says Lord, Lord...”
* Matt. 15:10-20 - Not what goes into a man that makes him unclean (Pharisees specifically offended - read v.12-14)
* Luke 14:7-11 - On guests taking the place of honor
* Luke 14:16-23 - Don't invite friends and relatives, but the poor, lame, blind

(Read Bruxey Cavey’s The End of Religion)

1. **Other types of suffering**
* Attacks of Satan
* Lk. 22:31-32: Peter is to be sifted like wheat
* 1 Pet. 5:8-9: The devil is like a roaring lion
* Eph. 6:11-18: Stand against the devil's schemes

These can take the form of spiritual apathy, pride, lack of discipline, wrong priorities, self-hate, feelings of worthlessness, judgement of others doubts about God's goodness, bizarre thoughts (e.g. suicide, lust, etc.), sometimes subtle, sometimes very direct, seemingly out of nowhere.

* Spiritual conflict – Eph 6: 10-13; 2 Cor. 10:3

We are in a spiritual battle for the souls of loved ones, for healing, deliverance. When we get involved in ministry we are moving in on Satan's territory and he fights back, tries to make us quit. Takes many different forms: I have experienced him sending people to take up all of my time and spiritual energy; attacking through physical, family struggles. There are some who sow dis-chord, disunity in the church, or marriages, or home groups. All are diversionary tactics.

 We need to learn to recognize it and fight against these things.

* Sharing in the suffering of others.
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	+ Both identifying with the persecuted Church, our brothers and sisters in Christ. Persecution is still taking place, and on a massive scale (265,000 Christians will be martyred this year).
	+ Our hearts break when we hear of innocent suffering because of the evil in this world: war, abused children, human trafficking, the starving or AIDS in Africa, killing the unborn.
1. **“Pharisee-ism”** - some suffering comes from Christians who don't agree with each other. In history, some of the greatest persecution of believers has come from inside the Church: Catholics of Protestants, Calvinists of Anabaptists, etc. Often stems from an attempt to preserve “right doctrine.”
* May be subtle undermining, slurs
* How do we treat those who disagree with us when we differ on ‘core issues,’ even defining what ***are*** core issues?
	+ Hunt in Seduction of Christianity named many mainstream Christian leaders with a charismatic bent as heretics
	+ John Wimber, founder of the Vineyard movement, lost his position at Fuller Seminary because of his “Signs and Wonders” workshops in class – too controversial.
* Today accusations are flying about the “Insider Movement” among Muslims coming to Christ. One Presbyterian Church is trying to influence the whole denomination to withdraw support from all missionaries in any mission agency working with MBB Insiders. Rick Warren has been branded as one supporting ‘Chrislam’ because he is building bridges with Muslims, for evangelism not syncretism.
* Denominational stances and behaviours defined by cultural Christianity persecute those who don’t hold the same position or tradition: Pentecostals attack you if you smoke, Reformed if you work on Sunday, Baptist if you baptize your infant, Charismatics if you're not baptised in the Holy Spirit, Brethren if you are, etc.

We do so much fighting amongst ourselves that we don’t have focus, time or energy to fight Satan.

Jesus was almost solely attacked and persecuted by the religious community because he intentionally broke their traditions in the process of trying to help them discover God through relationship rather than tradition/rules, people who fought God doing any new thing - they were satisfied with the old.

1. **The Suffering we *Escape*** through being believers:
* In a pagan society, people are set free from superstition, evil spirits, etc.; modern Western Civilisation from fatalism, humanism - "Is this all there is?"
* Many escape relational problems, addictions, other consequences brought on one-self by living contrary to God's principles.
* Many are set free from spiritual bondage: emptiness, worry, stress, as well as demonic strongholds.
* Fear of death

**Question:** Do these truths give new insight into how we can not simply endure, but actually rejoice in suffering?

We have the assurance that God's Kingdom will actually advance ***because***  we endure faithfully, and continue to testify that **God is worthy of suffering and even our lives**; that God is faithful and able to supply all we need, to protect, to give us strength to endure. As we persevere, God will be glorified (1 Pet 2:12, 2:15, 3:1-2).