

1 Peter 1:13-24

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[0 : 00] It's been a couple of weeks, hasn't it, since we looked at this letter, the letter from Peter to a group of Christians in 1st century Roman colonies on the edge of the Roman Empire.

If you were here a couple of weeks ago, we said it's the who you are, the how to live and the what to do manual for Christians living in the world.

And if you look at the letter, you can roughly split the letter into three chunks. There's crossover, but it's roughly there. So section one is the who you are from the beginning to chapter two, verse 10.

And then in the second two sections come after those verses. So you see the central verse, the pivot on which the whole letter balances, is those verses in chapter two, verse 11 to 12.

If you look there, you can see that the letter is about how Christians conduct themselves in the world. How other people, he calls them the Gentiles, perceive Christians in the world as they travel as exiles and sojourners.

[1 : 22] So 1 Peter is a travel guide for Christians. And how you travel on the way is being noted. Just have a look at that verse 12 there again in chapter two.

You've got an audience.

Peter's big application in this letter is how will your life change what other people think about God. When Jesus returns, what will people say about you and your life?

And will it make them praise God? That's the number of it. It's a letter about a journey with spectators. The world is watching.

You've got an audience. Will our lives now cause people to praise God then when he returns?

That's the journey we're on. It's God's travel guide with an audience.

[2 : 36] The world is watching. And you know, Peter's thinking about all of this is shaped by the travels of God's people in the Old Testament. The Israelites. Now I don't know if you've noticed it, but what is really strange about this letter is that as Peter writes to his recipients, he refers to them as if they were Jewish.

Now we haven't mentioned this so far. He differentiates them from Gentiles, from non-Jewish people. So in that verse again, verse 12, he says, keep your conduct among the Gentiles.

Holy, they're different from you. But the thing is that it's widely thought that these recipients were from a pagan background. They're not Jewish ethnically.

Now that's not a mistake. Peter is making a point in this letter. He uses terms that are familiar to the Jewish experience of salvation history all through the Bible.

So he calls them exiles. In our passage today that Steve read, he says, you were ransomed from the ways of your forefathers.

[3 : 51] That links, doesn't it, to the ransom out of Egypt in the Exodus story. He calls them in chapter 2 a spiritual house. A priesthood.

God's people. It's very, very Israelite, Jewish kind of language. He talks later in chapter 5, verse 13, about the church who were in Rome.

But he calls them the church in Babylon. You see, it's all language that's borrowed from Jewish travelling salvation history in the Old Testament. Ransomed from Egypt.

Exiles in Babylon. Don't be like the Gentiles. So this letter is the ultimate political and social controversy.

Because it's saying that people who follow Jesus as Saviour and as Lord, Christians, are the new Jews. We're on the new Exodus, he's saying.

[4 : 50] God is leading us through the desert. In exile in the world. But we're moving. We're moving. We're on a journey.

And we've got an audience. We're being watched by the world around us. So how are we going to travel? How are you travelling in the world?

What are people seeing as they watch you? How are we travelling? Well, back to chapter 1. And this is the big theme here. How are we going to travel?

Well, two things. Firstly, focus your mind on the future. Focus your mind on the future. Look down at verse 13 again in chapter 1.

He says, Therefore, prepare your minds for action. Be sober-minded. Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[5 : 46] I don't know if you've ever had that feeling of lying awake at night and just not being able to get to sleep.

Because you're focusing your mind on the future. An interview. An appointment. A due date.

A deadline. You've been planning it. Or maybe it's something that isn't a plan for you. It's something that's come as a surprise. But it is coming. And you can't get it out of your mind, can you?

It's an impending event. Sometimes those kind of things have physical effects, don't they? That you get butterflies in the tummy. You get insomnia. You get a headache. You're so worried.

And excited. That when you put your head on the pillow, it keeps you awake at night. You're focusing your mind on something in the future. You're always thinking about that event coming up.

[6 : 49] I wonder if you've felt like that. Well, it's the kind of thing that Peter has in mind when he thinks about the future of the Christian life.

If you look at verse 13, Christians are to be people obsessed with the future. With the return of Jesus. We should always be looking ahead.

Now, if you were around a couple of weeks ago, you would have seen that through the first 12 verses of the letter, Peter is literally breathless about the grace of God.

Literally, verses 2 to 3 to 13, that massive chunk there is one big breath. There is no full stops there in the original Greek. There are no pauses.

It's one long, heart-thumping breath of praise. It's a bit like one of those salesman pitches on the phone. You just can't shut them up, can you? His declaration about what is coming in the future for Christians.

[7 : 53] This is what keeps him up at night. Verse 13, The grace that will be revealed to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

That is the impending destiny of all Christians on the planet. That is what is coming. The revelation of Jesus Christ.

And the full revelation of the grace that that will bring. So when you're travelling in the world and people are watching, the savvy traveller fixes their eyes on what is ahead.

They plot the course. Look at the language he uses there in verse 13. Prepare your minds, being sober-minded. Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you.

Fill your mind with it. Be obsessed about it. Lose sleep over it, if necessary. Don't have any other backup plans. Don't have any other insurances for your life in case the journey doesn't work out.

[8 : 57] Throw all of your eggs in one basket. Set your hope fully. Put all of your hope in what you'll receive when Jesus returns.

Now the language he uses there, prepare your minds, it's a slightly odd phrase. It roughly translates as gird up the loins of your mind.

It is to literally roll up your trousers or your gown so that you can run. You can run fast. You're not held back by anything.

It's the same kind of thing actually that we saw in the Exodus account just before Christmas if you were here. The Israelites on the night of the Passover have to eat the Passover lamb with their belts fastened, with their sandals on their feet, and their staffs in their hand, eating it with haste, girding up the loins, ready to leave Egypt, ready to run.

So you see, it's a life of momentum. We're going somewhere. We're not stood still. We're not stuck in a rut. We're moving together.

[10 : 07] Every day is one step closer. Every day is living out of a suitcase. We're up before everyone else, if you like, to catch the flight. We're wide-eyed.

We're sober-minded. We're setting our hope fully on the return of Jesus. We're focusing on the future. We just can't wait, Peter says. Christianity is a nomadic religion, if I can put it like that.

God's people have no fixed address, always moving, moving, moving, forwards, towards Jesus' return, focusing on that certain future, on the grace that will be revealed on that day.

So we're travelling, we're focusing on the future, but second point today, we're moved on by the past. Focusing on the future, moved on by the past.

You'll see that Peter has us looking ahead, doesn't he? But there are things in the past we're not to forget on the journey. He says, initially, don't forget where you've come from.

[11 : 13] Have a look at verse 14 there. As obedient children, don't be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance. And then verse 18, I think.

knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers. So he's saying, think about the past.

Think about where you've come from. Now Martin Luther was a Christian leader. And he first understood the gospel. And he told a great story.

And I heard a modern version of this story, which I think I told you a couple of years ago. But I'll tell you again because it's a good one. So just imagine that Prince William, before the royal wedding was even on the cards, decides he wants to get himself a wife.

He's had enough of the single life, a bachelorhood. He wants to get married. So, much to the bemusement of the Middleton family, he heads down to the area of Soho.

[12 : 24] And he searches out the most repellent woman he can find. She's there in a room, in a brothel, surrounded in alcohol and cigarette ends.

Her skin is dirty. There's a faint smell of tobacco and of urine in the air. And he says to her, you know, forget all of this around you.

You and I are going right now this afternoon to Westminster Abbey to be married. So, huge, huge scandal in the papers. They head down to the church and after the ceremony, William says, OK, you're going to come and live with me as my wife, the future queen in the palace.

It's a great story, isn't it? And of course, it would never, ever happen. But Peter says that that is exactly what has happened. It is how God has treated the people of his nation, of the people of Christ.

Verse 15, he has called you, sorry, he who has called you is holy, so you also be holy in all your conduct.

[13 : 39] So you've been brought into the palace. Like the woman in the story, you've been called out of the gutter. God who has called you into his family is holy.

He's the king. You've seen the wonder of his character, of his royalty, of his position, of his power, of his lovely holiness, goodness.

He's cleaned you up. from Soho to St James' palace. Healed you, made you his, married you, took you out of the gutter.

Like the woman in the story, Peter is saying Jesus' people are people who've been called from a way of life that they used to have inherited from the world, from their forefathers, which he says is ignorant and foolish and futile.

He calls them, doesn't he, ignorant passions. In other words, the things that you love, the things that you used to love, the things that you thought were valuable may have been seductive but they were futile.

[14 : 52] Like the woman though, it was all you knew before he called you. That's the world. It doesn't know any better.

It settles for too little. actually. Ignorant longings. Preferring the gutter to the great hall. Preferring sinfulness to holiness.

Preferring ignorance to knowledge about God. It's harsh, isn't it? What Peter says about where they've come from. Before you were called, you were ignorant.

I wouldn't say that to your work colleagues. They're not Christians. You love futile things. I don't know if you've met people like that.

They're just in love, obsessed with silly little things. I was trying to think of an example about this.

But Justin Bieber, I don't know if you know about him, he's got 50 million followers on Twitter, hasn't he?

[15 : 54] Probably all of them teenage girls. And this week, they have been let down big style, haven't they? He's now convicted for drug possession and drug driving, isn't it?

And we can see that it was futile. It was futile to obsess about him. It always was. Just silly. Actually, as adults, we're like that as well, aren't we?

We get obsessed, we fall in love with things in the world. Things like Justin Bieber or computers or cars or whatever it is.

Just silly. The passions of ignorance is to be like that. So now you're in the palace. Remember from where you've been called, he says, as you travel in the world.

Be seen to be different about what you love and about what you obsess over. It's a fearful thing, isn't it, actually, to belong to God.

[16:56] Peter says, if you look at verse 17, that you call on him as father but he's also judge who judges impartially.

So conduct yourself with fear through the time of your exile. There is a sense of reverence, isn't there? When you're brought into the palace and you're surrounded by his holiness and his position, there is a sense of fear.

It's a right kind of reverence. Especially when you know what it costs him to get you there. Be moved by the past.

Remember where you've come from but remember the cost as well. And it's with this that we finish. It's back to the reference from the Exodus story. If you have a look at verse 18 and 19, let's read that.

Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers not with perishable things such as silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

[18:05] You know, before the evening of the Passover, if you can think back, if you know the story in the Exodus account, God tells the Israelites to get themselves a lamb, doesn't he?

A perfect, spotless lamb for a sacrifice. But if you read Exodus 12, the odd thing is that they are told to keep that lamb for two weeks before the big night.

It's hard, isn't it? Just imagine that two week period. Just imagine the little lamb in the house. Now there had to be one lamb per family. Now that little lamb grew up, didn't it, for those two weeks in that household.

And I guess they got to know it, didn't they? The lamb. They got to love it, maybe. Maybe the kids would say, mum and dad, next door, they've got a lamb. Have we got a lamb?

And mum and dad would say, yeah, we've got a lamb. Here's our lamb. Here he is. Maybe they gave the lamb names. I don't know. Maybe I'm being too sentimental. But you've got to say, haven't you, that they would have built up some kind of connection to that lamb.

[19:17] It got familiar to them. It got personal. The lamb was precious. A lamb without blemish, of course, would have been valuable, wouldn't it, in those days?

It would have hurt, wouldn't it, to slit that lamb's throat. I don't know if the kids would have watched. It's that kind of thing, is it? He held a specific value for each family, personally.

It was a small taste, wasn't it, of the attachment God the Father has to the Lamb of God, the Lord Jesus, whose blood, whose life, is infinitely more precious to God than any lamb is to one of us.

It's just a taste, though, isn't it? Know that you were ransomed, you were rescued from futile ways with a great cost. God was willing, wasn't he, to sacrifice what was to him infinitely costly to bring you to what is infinitely valuable.

And Peter says, be moved by that. Fear that in reverence. Let your conduct be holy as he has called you at great cost is holy.

[20:45] That is how much you are worth, that he should pay of something of infinite cost to bring you to something of infinite value. So we're journeying with an audience, that is what this letter is about, we're journeying with an audience, people are watching Christians, and so we are to focus on the future and to be moved by the past.

So let me ask you, as we finish, how are you travelling? How are you travelling? I wonder, are you just marking off the time as it goes by, day by day, hour by hour?

Are you maybe just complacently plodding through? I know I've had times like that. Is that maybe what people see when they look at your life?

If you'd have just been released from Egypt at such a cost, where would you be going and how would you be living? How much have you been thinking about the future?

Losing sleep over it? Obsessing about it? Or how much have you been loving silly things? Futile things? Peter says, therefore, prepare your minds for action.
[22 : 11] Be sober minded. Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Let's pray.