

1 Peter - Aliens In Exile ::

The first article (in Vol1 No 2 1993) looking at practical preaching issues was this one. CRAIG TUCKER started the ball rolling with an overview of his series on 1 Peter...

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They've nearly finished the new McDonalds just across the road from my back door. And I can hardly wait. Because I'm a product of the instant generation – I like my fast food fast, and that's what they do best at McDonalds.

Christian discipleship, on the other hand, is not something that happens in a hurry. It's a slow process of growing and learning. And most particularly, it's about the long term perspective of setting our eyes upon the hope that's waiting for us in heaven.

That's what makes 1 Peter such a great book to preach on. Because 1 Peter is all about our heavenly hope, and how that hope for the future must change the way we see ourselves now – we're aliens here, and that should affect the way we live from day to day.

If you're planning to preach through 1 Peter, you might find it helpful to use the following ideas as a starting point. But sadly, if you're looking for an "instant sermon", this isn't it. Even so, isolating the key points should get you off on the right foot.

So What's The Big Idea?

The "big idea" in 1 Peter is that Christians are "aliens in a foreign land". This idea is the key to each talk in the sermon series, and is reflected in the titles you'll see at the end of the next page. Peter introduces the "alien" theme in the very first verse of his letter:—"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ: To God's elect, strangers in the world..." The verse functions in three key ways:

- * It taps into his readers' situation. He writes to small Christian communities in a big pagan empire – a persecuted minority.
- * It's a link to a rich vein of imagery about God's Old Testament people, who were once aliens but now belong to God (2:1-10). In fact, Peter is big on his readers' continuity with the Old Testament. They have the privilege of receiving what the prophets spoke about and longed to see (1:10-12). In fact you can see 1 Peter as a set of exhortations, each based upon an Old Testament quotation. (1:16, 1:24-25, 2:6-8, 2:22, 3:10, 4:18, 5:5)
- * Because Christians are aliens here, and because heaven is their home, hope is the key to their identity. Hope is the great motivation in the Christian life; hope is the reason Christians endure suffering – their suffering is only for "a little while" until God takes them to heaven. "It's worth it," says Peter. Hope motivates our evangelism – there will be more people to honour God when we all get to heaven (2:11). And hope is the motivation for elders they will on that day stand before the "Chief Shepherd" and receive the "crown of glory". Hope is everywhere in 1 Peter.

Background

Peter is writing against a backdrop of looming persecution. His stated purpose in 5:12 is that his readers “stand fast”. But more broadly, he calls his readers to live wisely as Christians, as they rub shoulders each day with non-Christians in a variety of contexts.

The key verse in 1 Peter is 2:11:-

“Dear friends, I urge you as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires that war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us” (see also 2:14-16).

From 2:11 onwards, Peter gives instructions for a series of Christian/non-Christian interfaces – the State, Slaves and Masters, and Wives and Husbands. The key is to see that Peter focuses on the specific situation of the Christian relating to a non-Christian. If you read Peter’s household table without seeing this specific purpose it gets confusing. For example, his instructions to wives are in the context of tactics for “winning over” a non-Christian husband rather than setting up God’s paradigm for the marriage relationship. (The verse about husbands is almost like an afterthought.) Likewise, what Peter has to say about the state may not be a comprehensive treatment of Christians and the state (is there not a place for opposing injustice?), but a specific word for Christians in a society always looking for a reason to condemn them. Perhaps this even explains why he addresses slaves and not masters?

In short, 1 Peter is an immensely practical book, and a great encouragement to 20th Century Christians like us. Hopefully these notes will help you get Peter’s message across to your congregation.

Preaching Program

All the sermons in the series focussed on the “Aliens” theme.

- 1 Peter 1:1-16 Called to Be Aliens
- 1 Peter 1:17-2:10 A Race of Aliens
- 1 Peter 2:11-25 Alien Submission
- 1 Peter 3:1-12 Married to an Alien
- 1 Peter 3:13-4:19 Living with the Aliens
- 1 Peter 5:1-11 The Leader of the Aliens

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