

### ***Bible Byte - #3***

**Read:** 1 Peter 2

*Pray for God's wisdom as we seek understanding.*

*Spend a few minutes reviewing what you have discovered so far.*

The lectionary breaks 1 Peter 2 into two parts, and then reverses the order!

This week, Easter 4 (3 May), the set reading is 1 Peter 2:19-25 and next week (Easter 5, 10 May), the reading is 1 Peter 2:2-10. And I think it is worth paying attention to the parts the lectionary leaves out in between. So this study will tackle all of 1 Peter 2. You might want to take it in two parts or look at it now and then again next week.

#### **Easter 5 – 1 Peter 2:2-10**

In Chapter 1, the writer has described who Jesus Christ is and what he has done, calling his followers to be holy (1:15). Chapter 2 alternates between affirmation and exhortation. It begins with exhortation, picking up the theme of calling Jesus' followers, in the light of the good news they have heard, to turn away from behaviour that does not reflect the character of Jesus – malice, guile, insincerity, envy, slander (2:1). These are all the kinds of behaviour that break down the mutual love and respect ("honour") that the people of God are called to (2:17).

- *How do you do with these behaviours? Maybe not malice and guile but what about insincerity, envy or even slander?*
- *How do we hold each other accountable for trying to eliminate these things from our life together and striving towards showing mutual love?*

The writer reminds the new followers that they are living a new life ("like newborn infants, 2:2) and then invites them to "long for the pure, spiritual milk" so that you may "grow into salvation" (2:2), with the comment "if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good" (2:3), a reference to Psalm 34:8.

- *What is "pure spiritual milk" and do you long for it? Do you ever seek it out for yourself? Where do you look?*

This is a reminder that there is always room to grow – we both receive nourishment from God as a gift and we seek to grow ever more fully into the people God has created us to be.

The next few verses are all about affirmation. They contain a range of imagery, drawn largely from imagery in the Hebrew Scriptures, with the theme of being rejected by the world yet chosen by God.

The first picks up the stone imagery from Psalm 118:22 – "a living stone" rejected by people but "chosen and precious in God's sight" (2:4)

Then, "let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (2:5)

Verses 6-8 are quotes from various parts of the Hebrew Scriptures: Isaiah 28:16, Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14-15. And then verses 9-10 reinforce the affirmation, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people" (2:9) and that you "have received mercy" (2:10).

Remember, this letter is written to people who have come to follow Jesus from the far reaches of the world. This community is a collection of people from all over Roman Empire, most of whom are non-Jews (Gentiles). So this statement that "once you were no people but now you are God's people" is drawing them into the fellowship of the followers of Jesus Christ and into the idea of God calling all people into the mystery of God's kingdom. The references to "a spiritual household", "a holy priesthood" and offering "spiritual sacrifices" implies the supplanting of the Hebrew law and its system of priestly sacrifice with the followers of Jesus. This community, Jews and non-Jews, the followers of Jesus have been chosen by God, are precious to God, are all people of God.

- *What does it mean to you to be chosen by God?*
- *What does it mean to you to be part of a royal priesthood, a holy nation?*
- *How does our Christian community reflect this description of who we are called to be? Are we living as a "holy nation"? If so, how? If not, why not?*

### **The part the lectionary skips...**

In verses 11-18, the writer returns to the admonitions about behaviour beginning with an encouragement to abstain from desires of the flesh, and to conduct yourselves honourably "among the Gentiles", even though they malign you (2:11-12).

Remember again this letter is written to people who are foreigners ("aliens") in the land they live in. The reference to "Gentiles" here seems to have been extended to be a broad description of anyone who is not part of the *Christian* community.

- *How hard is it to behave honourably even when people are giving you a hard time? Can you remember a time when you have had to choose to behave differently when someone is treating you badly?*

As we read the next few verses, remember again that the people to whom this letter is written are not only foreigners in the land, but are likely to be slaves or at least indentured labourers.

The instruction here is to accept the authority of the emperor, the governor and those who make the rules (2:13-14). By doing the right thing, we silence the foolish and ignorant (2:15). Then, again to the slaves and servants, "as servants of God", not just servants to your masters, "live as free people". Yet freedom is not to be used for evil (2:16).

- *How do you find the balance between living freely in the love and grace of God and yet sometimes having to honour leaders or people in authority in the world?*

Then the writer tries to draw it all together: "Honour everyone, Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the Emperor." (2:17) And adds again the instruction to slaves to honour their masters whether they are kind or harsh (2:18).

It is thought this letter was written at a time before the Roman Empire started persecuting Christians in particular. In several of the early letters, the followers of Jesus are instructed to live "peaceably" or "quietly" in their communities (eg, 1 Thessalonians 4:10-12). However, there is also a role for Christians to speak out when injustice is seen and sometimes that means speaking against those in authority or power.

- *How does this passage sit with your sense of justice and how Jesus' disciples challenge "powers and principalities" and/or seek justice in the world?*

#### **Easter 4 – 1 Peter 2:19-25**

In the last few verses of chapter 2, the writer turns to the reality of suffering, often unjustly, and points to the example of Christ's suffering. Again, remember to whom this letter is written – to people who are subservient to others, slaves and labourers, who were often treated badly by their overseers. The example is Christ himself. Christ did not return abuse nor threaten anyone, he entrusted himself to God (2:23).

- *Have you ever suffered unjustly? How does it feel to hold that suffering alongside the suffering Christ, knowing that the Christ knows what it feels like to suffer unjust abuse?*

The writer reminds us that Christ "bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (2:24). And in v.25, "For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls." This echoes the language of Isaiah 53:5-6 and claims Jesus as the fulfilment of the prophecy, not just for the Jewish nation, but for all peoples.

- *As you release yourself into the heart of God, into the Christ who has suffered, how do you experience healing?*
- *What does it mean for you to "live for righteousness"?*
- *Does the imagery of sheep and shepherd work for you? Perhaps you could take some time to read again and pray through Psalm 23.*