

Bible Byte - #5

Read: 1 Peter 4

Pray for God's wisdom as we seek understanding.

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

What spoke most deeply to you in 1 Peter 1?

What spoke most deeply to you in 1 Peter 2?

What spoke most deeply to you in 1 Peter 3?

What have you struggled to understand or to take in?

1 Peter 4:1-11

The writer, in chapter 4, focuses in on suffering – but not any suffering, suffering that comes from aligning ourselves with Jesus. We need to remember that this passage is not speaking of suffering that comes from ill-health or natural disaster or when relationships break down because we have behaved badly. This is primarily about suffering that comes because we are followers of Jesus – as followers of Christ, we are aligned with Christ – and generally this suffering comes in the form of persecution or ridicule from others.

- *Have you ever suffered or been reviled because of your faith in Christ? It is sometimes hard for us, in a nominally Christian country, to imagine what it is like to be persecuted. However, there are plenty of stories around the world of people who are isolated, discriminated against or even treated violently because they are followers of Jesus. Pray for them now.*

The choices we make because we are followers of Jesus may indeed bring ridicule, but the writer encourages us not to waste time on the things that don't bring life (4:3). People may be surprised about the choices we make about the way we spend our time or choose to live or even the changes they see in us, but we are not to be concerned as we will all need to account for ourselves (4:5-6). The writer then emphasises again the need to not waste a moment: "The end of all things is near" (4:7) and calls for Jesus' followers to be serious and disciplined. This is not so much a statement about the "end of the world" but that God has already begun, in Jesus, the work of the renewal of all creation and this work begins in the transformation of human lives.

- *How do you make choices about how you spend your time? Is there anything in your life that directs energy away from your life as a follower of Jesus? How might you redirect your time and energy?*

Following the discussion of what not to do, the writer then launches into a description of positive ways to live, starting with love. "Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins" (4:8). It is a reference to Proverbs 10:12. Neither Proverbs, nor the writer here, is saying that love covers up sin in the sense of hiding things we would rather not face. Instead, love *transforms* sin: as we love consistently and continually, there is no space left for sin.

- *Can you think of a time when you have been loved to such an extent that your own brokenness simply has no space left to be? Could you do that for someone else?*

The list continues:

Be hospitable... without complaint (4:9)

Serve each other with the gifts you have received from God (4:10)

Speak as if speaking the very words of God (4:11)

Serve with the strength of God (4:11)

In living this way, "God is glorified in all things through Jesus Christ" (4:11). That is, in living this way, God is seen again and again.

- *How does your life reflect these qualities? Are there any you need to work on?*
- *And so, how is God seen in your life?*

The Lectionary: Easter 7: 1 Peter 4:12-14

The writer then turns once more to the subject of suffering and says that we ought not be surprised that we suffer (4:12). The writer also suggests that this is "to test you". It is easy to think that it is God doing the testing, but the writer does not say that and it could equally be read that it is the community around us that is doing the testing – provoking us to respond, expecting us to respond as they would, with violent retaliation. Rather than being surprised, says the writer, we respond differently and so can rejoice in sharing the same suffering Christ endured "so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed" (4:13). The writer continues, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because... the Spirit of God is resting on you" (4:14).

- *Look up Matthew 5:10-12 – the end of what we call The Beatitudes, part of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Can you hear echoes of this in the writer's words here?*
- *It is hard to imagine being able to rejoice when being persecuted, but the sense here is that even in the persecution, people are considering who God is in Jesus, and perhaps being confronted or threatened by what they discover. It is a hard road, but it nevertheless points people to the Christ.*

1 Peter 4:15-19

Again, the writer emphasises that this is not about suffering that comes when we act in ways that hurt others (murder, stealing, even making mischief!). This is about suffering as a Christian, a follower of Jesus, and in such suffering there is no disgrace. Just as Jesus' death on the cross is not disgrace – despite what the prevailing view was (remember, death on a cross was the most shameful way a criminal could die) – instead, "glorify God because you bear his name" (4:16). This is an important distinction. We all suffer life's hardships from time to time for a whole range of reasons. The writer of 1 Peter really makes no comment about the broader types of suffering.

The writer then concludes this part of the letter. Judgment will come and will come for everyone. However, it starts with the followers of Jesus, and if we are judged firmly, how much harder for those who have not responded to the good news of Christ (4:17-18). "Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God's will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good" (4:19). Again the term "in accordance with God's will" has sometimes been taken to mean that God has intended the suffering, but it can also be understood as responding to suffering in the way God has called us. That is, not that God has "willed" the suffering but that in our suffering, God has called us to respond with grace and peace and to rejoice.

- *Pray now that you can entrust yourself into the care of your "faithful Creator".*