

Bible Study

Week commencing 4th October 2020

Study Four – 1 and 2 Peter

A calling that is sure

2 Peter 1: 1-21

John Birch

Opening prayer: -

We thank you that we are drawn together by our love of Scripture and our desire to know more of your eternal love for us, expressed through the words of your apostles and handed down faithfully from generation to generation. We thank you for their faithfulness and ask that you will now bless us in our reading and understanding. Through Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen

Comment: -

Whilst the previous letter found a ready audience within the early Church and acceptance as being the authentic voice of Peter, the same can't be said of this one, which struggled to find its way into the New Testament canon of books. There were reasons; differences in style; the Greek is not as refined; it was unknown until after AD 200 and at the time there were many documents circulating purporting to have been written by the apostles and which were exposed as forgeries. It was only in the fourth century that it found its way into the New Testament.

It seems to be a later piece because it mentions Paul's letters being well known and accepted as Scripture within the Church, and these letters were not collected together until the end of the first century. If not the words of Peter, then it may be the work of an unknown teacher and sent out in the name of Peter, which was common practice in those days. A humble teacher inspired to write God's message and put it into the mouth of Peter, whose name he felt was worthier to appear as its author. If it is by Peter, then possibly he wrote this without the help of Silas, which might account for the difference in style and language. For this study, we shall use Peter's name as author.

Whoever wrote the letter, and opinion is split, its importance as part of the history of the early Church is that it was written about people who were undermining the Christian doctrine and needed to be stood up to and resisted.

In the first verse Peter calls himself a servant of Jesus Christ. The word is 'doulos' which more accurately translates as slave. This is not a position of humiliation in this context, but one of honour, as it follows a long line including Moses, Malachi,

Joshua, David, Paul, James and Jude who all claim to be the 'doulos' of God. In the Old Testament, it is the prophets who take this title, but in the New Testament it is Christians who are the 'doulos' of Christ. The difference in the ancient world between servant and slave was that a servant could change his or her master, a slave could not. So, we are taught that Christians belong to, and their lives are spent in service to God, who equips them for the tasks ahead.

Question: -

What are the qualities you admire most in others, and which ones do you dislike?

Key Verse: -

'His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness.' (2 Peter 1:3)

Some questions: -

1. If a Christian is the servant, or more properly the 'slave' of God, that implies (in the context it is written) that they are at the disposal of God, to do with as he wills. Is that how you see the relationship within your own life?
2. How do we obtain that knowledge of God that v. 2 talks about?
3. What are the 'things' you can't do without in your daily life?
4. Look at Peter's list of 'essentials' in vv. 5-7, and compare them to those of Paul in Galatians 5:22,23. Lists such as these were common in the ancient world, because they were committed to memory. What can you recall from your school days of rhymes and phrases repeated daily until remembered?
5. How easy is it to 'practice what we preach' and what are the triggers that are likely to trip you up?
6. Sometimes preachers might worry that the message has been heard many times before, but do believers need, as Peter suggests, constant reminders of the basics of the Christian faith and life?
7. What do you see when you read the Bible's books and letters - teaching that might also speak into today's Church, a picture of the people who wrote the words, or maybe an insight into those who were its first recipients? Does it make a difference?

8. How should we interpret a prophet's words?

9. How easy is it to understand Scripture without knowing the context to which it was written (the people, times and culture)?

10. Read v. 10 again and think about how you might act on Peter's words, to strengthen a call from God that might be recent or from some time in the past.

Something to think about: -

Read again the desirable qualities of a Christian as listed by Peter in 2 Peter 1:5-7, and consider where you personally could strive for a little improvement!

Prayer: -

Pray for Ministers of the Gospel who, it is assumed, possess all of these qualities in abundance, but in reality might be struggling with any of them, that they might grow in grace and be strengthened in their faith.

Some quotes: -

'No one should fear to undertake any task in the name of our Saviour, if it is just and if the intention is purely for His holy service.' (Christopher Columbus)

'I stand here before you not as a prophet, but as a humble servant of you, the people.' (Nelson Mandela)

'I die the king's faithful servant, but God's first.' (Thomas More)

'Faith is the first factor in a life devoted to service. Without it, nothing is possible. With it, nothing is impossible.' (Mary McLeod Bethune)

'The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others'
(Mahatma Gandhi)

'Human life has meaning only to that degree and as long as it is lived in the service of humanity.' (Wole Soyinka)