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Session 31 – 1 Peter

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We're going to dive into an ancient letter that honestly feels like it could have been written for today. It's basically a survival guide drafted nearly 2,000 years ago, and it offers real hope for anyone who's ever felt like an outsider. So let's get into it and unpack the New Testament letter of 1st Peter.

So let's just kick things off with a question that, you know, we've all probably asked ourselves at some point. How do you hold on to hope? How do you keep your integrity when it feels like the world is just constantly pushing back against you? How do you keep going when you feel like a total outsider? Yeah, it's a timeless problem, right? And what's wild is that this ancient letter, it offers this surprisingly counterintuitive strategy. It's not just about surviving.

It's about actually thriving in that kind of hostile environment. So let's see what it has to say. OK, so first things first, who was this letter actually written for? Well, the author, Peter, he addresses it to the exiles of the dispersion.

I know it sounds a little dramatic, but basically he's writing to these small communities of Christians who are scattered all over five different Roman provinces. An area that's now modern day Turkey. Now, you really got to pay attention to the language he's using here.

He calls them exiles. And that wasn't just, you know, a geographical thing. It was a social reality.

Think about it. They were this tiny minority in a pagan society facing constant hostility, and they just felt like they didn't belong. This feeling, this feeling of being an outsider, it's absolutely the key to unlocking this entire letter.

So what did this hostility, this suffering actually look like on a day-to-day basis? Because when we hear a word like persecution, we tend to get a very specific picture in our heads. And honestly, it's often not the right one. You know, the common myth is the sort of epic movie scene, right? Roman legions marching down the street, dragging Christians off to the Colosseum.

But the reality for the people reading First Peter was, well, it was different. It was much more local, and it was unofficial. We're talking about social pressure, public ridicule, being totally ostracized by your own neighbors just because you were different.

It was this constant low-grade pressure to just conform and to really drive home just how central this theme of suffering was for them. Check this out. The Greek verb for to suffer shows up 41 times in the entire New Testament.

OK, but a staggering 12 of those- that's nearly a third- are right here in this one short letter. So, yeah, this wasn't just a minor issue for them. It was the defining reality of their lives.

So you're facing this constant hostility. What's the game plan? What advice does Peter give? I mean, you'd probably expect him to say something like fight back or maybe lay low, go into hiding. But his strategy is, well, it's completely counterintuitive.

He gives them this one core command, and he's actually quoting from the Old Testament. He says, be holy because I am holy. So think about that.

The primary response to all this social hostility isn't aggression, and it's not retreat. It's this call to a totally distinct kind of moral integrity. You know, our gut instinct is usually one of two things.

Fight fire with fire or just run away and hide. But Peter's advice is to do neither of those. He tells them live such exemplary, holy lives that your conduct becomes your witness.

And this is the tough part. He says to absolutely refuse to retaliate even when you're treated unjustly. But he doesn't just throw that out there and say, good luck.

He knows that's a huge ask. So he gives them this powerful new identity, a whole new way to see themselves and their community. And this is the real key to actually being able to live this way.

He tells them, even though you feel like exiles, you have a home. He uses this amazing metaphor of a spiritual temple. Okay, so in the ancient world, the temple was everything.

It was the physical building where everyone believed God's presence literally dwelled. But Peter completely redefines this. He says the new temple isn't a building made of dead stones.

It's a community of people of living stones. And that's where God's presence is now. And this metaphor did two absolutely crucial things for his readers.

First, it was a huge motivation for purity. I mean, if you really believe that you and your community are the place where a holy God lives, you're going to live differently. Right.

And second, it gave them an identity for people who felt like homeless exiles. This idea gave them this profound sense of belonging. They weren't just scattered, lonely individuals anymore.

They were stones being built together into one single sacred home. Okay. Now, right in the middle of all this practical advice, Peter drops in one of the most mysterious and honestly most debated passages in the entire New Testament.

It's like this cosmic puzzle that seems to come out of nowhere, but stick with me because it's actually the key to their courage. Here it is. Peter's talking about Christ, and he says that after being made alive in the spirit, he went and proclaimed a message to the spirits in prison.

I know it's a strange, super cryptic verse that has had people scratching their heads for centuries. So what on earth is he talking about here? Did Jesus literally take a trip to hell in

the three days between his death and resurrection? Was this some kind of second chance for salvation for ancient souls? What's going on? Let's break down the clues and see if we can figure this out. Okay.

Let's try to decode this mystery. Clue number one is the timing. Peter says this happened as part of Christ's resurrection, not while he was dead.

That's a huge detail. Clue number two: the spirits. In the Jewish way of thinking at that time, this phrase referred to rebellious spiritual beings, these ancient enemies of God from the book of Genesis who were believed to be imprisoned.

And clue number three is the message itself. The Greek word he uses doesn't mean share the good news. It means to proclaim or to announce.

This wasn't an offer of salvation. It was an announcement of victory and their final judgment. So you might be wondering, what is this strange cosmic story about a victorious Christ proclaiming judgment on fallen angels to do with some Christians getting made fun of by their neighbors in Galatia? The answer is everything.

This wasn't some abstract theology lesson. It was intensely, intensely practical. Here's Peter's logic of courage, and it's pretty amazing.

Step one: Jesus, through his resurrection, has already won the ultimate victory over the highest, most powerful cosmic forces of evil. Step two. So the local bullies and the neighbors who are making your life miserable, they are nothing compared to those powers that Christ already defeated.

And that leads to step three. Therefore, you have absolutely nothing to fear from them. And that right there is the heart of this entire letter.

Peter tells them this wild cosmic story to ground their everyday courage in a cosmic reality. He's saying the main event, the decisive battle, is already over. It's been won.

Your daily struggles are real. They're painful for sure, but they are not the end of the story. So when you boil it all down, the first Peter isn't just some ancient letter.

It's a timeless strategy for finding hope. Peter's core message was that if you understand the big story, it gives you the strength you need to face your small one. And that kind of leaves us with a question for today, doesn't it? If this ancient message about a cosmic victory gave them the courage to face their world, what's the story that gives us courage to face ours?