



BETHEL  
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## **MINISTRY OF THE WORD**

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### **Practical Faith Part 2**

At the beginning of Christ's third year of ministry, the Lord took Peter, James, and John up what most likely was Mount Hermon. There Christ manifested His true identity to them. This is known as the *Mount of Transfiguration*. Now just like Moses when he came down from Mount Sinai to discover the people of God in sin, so it was with Christ and the disciples. When they returned to the nine, Christ and the three were confronted with their faithlessness! It seems as though the nine were unable to cast a demon out of a young boy- even though less than a year earlier, Christ had given them the power to do just that (cf. Mark 6:7, 13).

Christ's response was to rebuke the nine saying, "O unbelieving generation [that is the key word here], how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" (Mark 9:19b) The boy was then brought to Christ as the Lord entered into a conversation with the father all the while the boy was thrown into convulsions.

During the conversation, the father said to Christ, "...IF You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" (Mark 9:22b) What a statement, "If"! In light of His widespread ministry of healing the sick and casting out demons, how could Jesus' ability to cast this demon out be in question? The answer is found in Christ's response:

Mark 9:23: "If You can! All things are possible to him who believes."

The need for God's people to trust/rely upon Christ is the focus of this section which climaxes with:

Mark 9:24, "Immediately the boy's father cried out and *began* saying, 'I do believe; help my unbelief.'"

When it comes to the Kingdom of God, that is the question of the hour, century, millennium: Is it possible to strengthen or encourage one's faith? Thankfully the answer is, "Yes!"

With the possibility of death laying around every corner on account of the empire-wide persecution directed at the people of God at this time, Peter took up quill and parchment and penned 1 Peter to encourage the people of God. His first topic was the New Birth (1 Peter 1:3-5) in which he discussed the Identity of God's people, an identity which has a future that goes beyond this world! He then turned to 1 Peter 1:6-9 in which he gives a "Seminar" on Practical Faith.

We have defined what we mean by "practical faith" and how it is fueled. We pick up our discussion with our acquisition and the question: "When God strengthens the believer's faith, how does He do it?"

1 Peter 1:6b, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various [lit., 'many colored'<sup>1</sup>] trails."

We've talked about the "trials" which God's people were undergoing at this time. They were anything but "momentary and light!" Nero outlawed Christianity which meant it was "Open Season" throughout the Roman Empire when it came to hunting down and killing Christians. I can't imagine during this time that there wasn't a Christian household untouched by the carnage. Accordingly, the people of God at this time most certainly were "distressed by various trials."

Consider the words used here by Peter. "Distressed." The word for "distressed" is λυπέω

(*lypeō*) comes from the Greek λύπη (*lypē*) referencing deep and intense grief. For example, it was used in the Old Testament of the “toil” under which man would labor on account of the Fall (Genesis 3:17). It also was used of the “suffering/pain” which accompanies childbirth — also on account of the Fall (Genesis 3:16). Accordingly, “distress” speaks of the pain that accompanies life in a state of sin and misery — which would include physical illness, sickness, or torture, as well as mental anguish, including sadness, sorrow, disappointment, and anxiety.

Now you and I know that the “pain” that accompanies sin and misery oft-times is light. In this regard, “distressed” could refer to the child who doesn’t get his way. Yet the word brings with it a capacity of suffering that defies imagination. That is what God’s people were going through as they endured “various trials.” The word for “trials” is πειρασμός (*peirasmos*) which refers to a test which determines the substance or quality of something. And that, brothers and sisters, is the focus here.

1 Peter 1:7a, “That the proof of your faith...”

The word for “proof” is δοκίμιον (*dokimion*) which references a test which has two purposes in mind. First it is a test which ascertain what something is. For example, God told Jeremiah:

Jeremiah 6:27, “I have made you an assayer *and* a tester among My people, that you may know and assay their way.”

God chose to use Jeremiah to test the mettle of the people of Israel. How they would respond would indicate what they truly were before the Lord. Listen to the cry of the Psalmist:

Psalms 139:23-24a, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me...”

Speaking of the final judgment, Paul wrote this:

1 Corinthians 3:13, “Each man’s work will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is *to be* revealed with fire; and the fire itself will test the quality of each man’s work.”

From these passages we discern that “proving” is a term used in the Bible with the goal of ascertaining the substance of a thing. As the Persian Proverb goes, “Night hides the world, but reveals a universe.” That is the idea behind this word!

Yet there is another use — which is the one utilized by Peter. Trial NOT ONLY ascertains what something is, it also can be a test which determines what something will be!

James 1:2-3, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”

Samuel Rutherford wrote this: “Why should I tremble at the plough of my Lord that makes deep furrows on my soul? For He is no idle husbandman, He purposes a crop.”

That is what is behind God’s testings! See as we have yet to enter glory, there is much in us to mold and shape. If we were for the slaughter, God would fatten us. But as we are His servants, God by tempering us is making us into “...a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work” (2 Timothy 2:21)!

Romans 5:3-4: “And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.”

Again, a major purpose of the trials and difficulties of this life is producing in us growth, maturation, and so faith! That is the thinking of Peter in the text before us. The “trial/test” here is that which NOT only ascertains what we are about, BUT determines what we will be! We see it in the metaphor Peter uses here.

1 Peter 1:7b, “That the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

A jewelry maker often invited friends to see his shop. After showing them all his tools as well as his work, he would have his friend sweep the floor which was his daily ritual at the close of the work day. In the process of making gold rings and the like, gold flakes would fall to the ground unnoticed, and obviously he didn’t want to lose these. As his friends would sweep the shop he would verbally instruct them to miss no crevice in the leg of a machine or corner of the wall. He would then gather the dirt and would then place it in a crucible and put in the flame.

In short order the dirt in the crucible caught fire. Soon there was a dark, “liquidous” mass in the crucible which, as the temperature rose would periodically catch fire as more and more of the dross was burnt away. And after a good ten minutes or so, what remained was pure gold!

The fire did NOT simply ascertain/reveal that there was gold in the sweepings, BUT it also determined that the mass in the crucible would be pure gold!

That is the point Peter is making here, “That the proof of your faith... may be found to result in...” God had a design behind the griefs and miseries which His people were suffering at this time. In fact, they were what was “necessary” for them to be that which God called them to be.

Notice the expression, “if necessary” εἰ δέον (*ei deon*). This is a beautiful qualification, for it indicates that any and every trial we undergo is NOT excessive or thoughtless on the part of God, NOR is it a permanent situation for the believer (they are temporary;<sup>2</sup> in the words of Paul they are “momentary [and] light” [2 Corinthians 4:17]). Truly they are “what is

necessary” to make us the men and women God wants us to be! Thomas Schreiner wrote:

The idea is that the sufferings believers experience are not the result of fate or impersonal forces of nature. They are the will of God for believers (cf. 1 Peter 4:19). (Schreiner, 2003, p. 67)

Calvin put it this way:

His purpose was to show that God does not thus try His people without reason, for if God afflicted us without a cause, it would be grievous to bear. Hence Peter has taken an argument for consolation from the design of God, not because the purpose always appears to us, but because we ought to be fully persuaded that it ought to be so... (John Calvin, 2009, p. 33)

Now it’s possible that this was true only of the believers at this time. Yet the rest of Scripture will not let us say that. Consider, the maturing of God’s people through trial is seen in in the Old Testament.

Genesis 22:1-2a, “Now it came about after these things, that God tested Abraham, and said to him, ‘Abraham!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ And He said, ‘Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah...”

This was but one of many tests God brought Abraham through in order to make him “the Father of all who believe” (Romans 4:11)!<sup>3</sup> We see it in the Nation as well. Speaking of the people of God in the Exodus Moses wrote:

Exodus 16:4, “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Behold, I will rain bread from heaven for you; and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether or not they will walk in My instruction.”

Forty plus years later, after the wilderness wanderings, God told Moses:

Deuteronomy 8:2, “And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God has led you in the wilderness these forty years, that He might humble you, testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.”

God told His people during the Kingdom years:

Isaiah 48:10, “Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.”

Throughout the entire Old Testament era, God was ever and always about PROVING His people—testing them in order to establish them and so to cultivate in them a godly character! And we see it in Christ — in fact, it was a major component of His ministry.

Hebrews 5:8-9, "Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. [The trials Christ underwent were NOT ordained to determine if He was the Son of God (that is what His miracles were all about, right?). Rather, the sufferings of Christ were ordained by God to establish His character as a man! Notice the result...] 9 And having been made perfect [mature], He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation."-

God molded, shaped, and so established His Son — Jesus Christ — by bringing Him through severe testing. In fact, it began the moment Christ was ordained unto the work of the Messiah. Following His baptism where God said this:

Matthew 4:1, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well- pleased."

At Christ's ordination we read,

Matthew 3:17, "Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil."

The temptations of Christ again were NOT to determine His identity, BUT to begin the slow and grueling process of establishing THE Servant of God who was promised from of old (cf. Isaiah 49)!

In the upper room right before the Passover meal began, Christ looked at His disciples and said this:

Luke 22:28, "...you are those who have stood by Me in My trials."

Don't miss it! Christ's entire ministry was characterized by God tempering Him — pushing Him, molding Him, and making Him "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29)! The following are referenced as "tests"/"trials" which Christ underwent as the Messiah:

- Peter's wanting Christ to turn away from the cross, Matthew 16:23; Mark 8:33.
- The Pharisees constantly asking from Him a sign, Matthew 12:38; 16:1; Mark 8:11; Luke 11:16.
- That time when the religious leaders asked Christ about divorce and remarriage, Matthew 19:3; Mark 10:2
- The question of paying taxes, Matthew 22:18; Mark 12:15
- The masses ridiculing Christ as He hung on the cross, calling Him to "Come down" if He truly was the Messiah (Matthew 27:40)!

All of these were in mind when Christ said to the disciples, "[you] have stood by Me in My trials" — trials ordained by God unto His maturation and growth! In this regard, notice the glorious results:

Hebrews 2:8, “For since He Himself [Christ] was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted.”

Hebrews 4:15, “For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as *we are, yet* without sin.”

Christ’s entire life was one of testing that He might be THE Servant that God promised His people from the beginning! And yet, here is where it gets personal! For this trying/tempering/forging is reserved NOT simply for our Lord, BUT for EVERY servant of God.

We see it in the life of the child of God!<sup>4</sup> As a maxim, Christ promised His people:

John 16:33b, “...in the world you have tribulation...”

You can’t be a Christian without being tried! Just as Christ before us, we too will live a life of testing, tempering, and so trial!<sup>5</sup> Why? That we might be established in our faith (Colossians 2:7)! William Secker wrote:

To be impatient with our affliction and patient with our corruption is to be angry with the medicine which heals us and in love with the poison which kills us! Beloved, it is sometimes a mercy to us that God removes outward mercies from us! He never wounds a saint to kill him but to heal him! (Secker, 2012 (1660 Facsimile))

Peter would pick up on this toward the end of this epistle:

1 Peter 4:12, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.”

Truly, as the Master was tried, so also will be His servants! Testing/Trial is given to strengthen and encourage us in the Lord! This is where Peter’s words are so helpful here. We tend to look upon trial “as though some strange thing were happening” to us! And so when hardship comes upon us.

Initially we examine our lives looking for “the sin” that angered God. But as this is subjective, it is always futile. For how can we ever know the mind of God and so the particular sin God is after in smiting us (if that is what we truly believe)? And so we give us this or that sin hoping that our circumstances might improve. And when they don’t, we then indict God for being ungracious, peevish, and capricious- *after all we’ve done for Him!*

All of this occurs because we think that trial in the life of the Christian is an abnormality- “...a strange thing that is happening to us!” In this regard, I love the words of Newman Hall:

There are many variations in the Christian’s path. Sometimes it is smooth and flowery, with sunny slopes, and sylvan shades, and prospects which entrance the soul with

loveliness... But this is the exception. ¶ Often the road is steep, craggy, and beset with foes! Sometimes it is a 'Hill Difficulty' throughout, and Apollyon stretches himself across the way aiming his fiery darts at the pilgrim. Then some bypath attracts us by its pleasantness, while Satan whispers that a thorny and painful road cannot be the true one. (Hall, 2018)

To this notion Peter essentially says in our passage this morning, *"Christians! Don't go there! Trial and difficulty in the life of the believer is NOT a strange happening, BUT ought to be the expectation of all of us!"*

And so, "I believe, but help Thou my unbelief"? We have learned that God does this through the fire of affliction by a Lord who has our best in mind (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:13; Luke 22:32)!<sup>6</sup>

So if you and I this day should say, "Lord, I believe! But help Thou my unbelief!" understand the path God will use to answer this prayer: The schoolhouse of affliction!<sup>7</sup> Dr. John MacArthur wrote this:

God uses troubles to humble believers (Deuteronomy 8:3; 2 Corinthians 12:7–10), wean them away from worldly things and point them toward heaven (John 16:33; Rev. 14:13; cf. Job 19:25–26), teach them to value God's blessing as opposed to life's pain (4:13; Romans 8:17–18), enable them to help others (2 Corinthians 1:3–7; Hebrews 13:3), chasten them for their sins (1 Corinthians 11:30; cf. Job 5:17; Luke 15:16–18; Hebrews 12:5–12), and to help strengthen spiritual character (Romans 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:4–6; James 1:2–4; 5:11). (MacArthur, 2004, pp. 42-43)

I dare say that the above "ends"/"virtues" are the longing and desire of every one of us in Christ. Yet how is it forged within us? These qualities become a fundamental part of our character when we are placed in the crucible!

Does this mean we ought to walk around heavy with burdens — knowing that if we aren't suffering now, it simply is a matter of time? Absolutely not, for we must NOT forget the beginning of Peter's exhortation here, "In this [the person, work, and will of Christ] you greatly rejoice!" From this we conclude that if *temporal* peace and well-being is our longing, than Peter's words here most certainly will be a burden. But if *eternal* peace and well-being is our longing (knowing Christ and walking with Him), then Peter's words here will NOT burden us, BUT serve to instruct us on how to process the bitter things of this life!<sup>8</sup>

This brings us to the value of the tempered faith.

1 Peter 1:7b, "That the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable<sup>9</sup>..."

Perhaps this morning you have thought, *"If a 'Practical' Faith is forged in the fire of affliction, then Lord I don't want it!"* Though understandable, that nevertheless is speaking from the flesh.



For notice how valuable a tempered faith is in the kingdom of God: it is “more precious than gold”! In any and every society you can think of, gold has always been highly valued. In ancient times it was the basis for most monetary transactions!<sup>10</sup> Whether it be in the ancient world or today, gold has and continues to be a standard against which wealth is measured. The Psalmist speaking of the inestimable value of God’s word:

Psalms 19:10a, “[It is] more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold...”

Notice how the wealth of Abraham was determined (the list is progressive):

Genesis 13:2, “Now Abram was very rich in livestock, in silver and in gold.”

Though gold was utilized in the making of the temple, notice how the most important article was to be made:

Exodus 25:17, “And you shall make a mercy seat of PURE gold, two and a half cubits long and one and a half cubits wide.”

In Bible times, gold was one of the most highly valued commodities!<sup>11</sup> That is why when Peter says that a tested faith is “more precious than gold”, we understand the value associated with the believer’s maturation. It clearly is more important than our convenience, comfort, security, personal agenda, and wealth. Co-opting an expression of Paul here, practical faith “holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come!”

So, while we might like to shrink back and so take ourselves out of the crucible, God won’t let us. He loves us too much to allow us to remain as we are. For truly, God’s program is NOT our happiness, BUT our health and maturation in Him! J. C. Philpot put it this way:

The very storms through which the believer passes, will only strengthen him to take a firmer hold of Christ. As the same wind that blows down the poplar tree, only establishes the oak tree; so the very storms which uproot the shallow professor, only root the child of God more firmly in Christ. Though these storms may shake off some of his leaves, or break off some of the rotten boughs, they do not uproot his faith, but rather strengthen it. (Philpor, 1860)

Our response to the trials and difficulties of life is as Rutherford’s when he wrote, “Welcome, welcome cross of Christ, if Christ be with it!” (Rutherford, 1997, p. 49)

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## End Note(s)

<sup>1</sup> ποικίλος (*poikilos*).

<sup>2</sup> MacArthur wrote of this, “They are transitory (cf. Psalms 30:5; Isa. 54:7–8; Romans 8:18), literally ‘for a season,’ which means they will pass quickly, as does one’s time on earth.” (*1 Peter*, MNTC, p. 42)

<sup>3</sup> “Had Abraham stopped in Ur of the Chaldees with his friends and rested there and enjoyed himself, where would his faith have been? He had God’s command to leave his country to go to a land that he had never seen, to sojourn there with God as a stranger, dwelling in tents, and in his obedience to that call his faith began to be illustrious. Where would the glory of his faith have been if it had not been called to brave and self-denying deeds? Would he ever have risen to that supreme height to be “the father of the faithful” if he had not grown old, and his body dead, and yet he had believed that God would give him seed of his aged wife Sarah, according to the promise? It was blessed faith that made him feel that nothing was impossible to God. ¶ If God, then, has given to any one of us a faith that is honorable and precious, it has full surely been submitted to its own due measure of trial. And if it is to be still more precious, it has yet more trials to endure.” (Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon Commentary: 1 Peter*)

<sup>4</sup> Notice the roll that trial and testing played in the lives of the Macedonians, “In a great ordeal of affliction their abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.” (2 Corinthians 8:2)

<sup>5</sup> Do you remember the Servant of Is. 49? This text firstly is in reference to Christ, but by application it is descriptive of you and me! Accordingly, what did God do in Christ’s life and what is He doing in ours? “...And He has also made Me a select arrow...” (Is. 49:2c) The language references that which is necessary in forging a sharp arrow. And what is that? The slow and grueling process of chiseling away of any and all excess!

<sup>6</sup> It reminds me of the words of the anonymously written poem, “When God wants to drill a man, and thrill a man, and skill a man, when God wants to mold a man o play the noblest part; when He yearns with all His heart to create so great and bold a man that all the world shall be amazed, watch His methods, watch His ways! ¶ How He ruthlessly perfects whom He royally elects! How He hammers him and hurts him, and with mighty blows converts him into trial shapes of clay which only God understands; while his tortured heart is crying and he lifts beseeching hands! ¶ How He bends but never breaks when his good He undertakes; how He uses whom He chooses, and with every purpose fuses him; by every act induces him to try His splendor out- God knows what He’s about.”

<sup>7</sup> Just as in the life of Christ, affliction matures us as ministers in God’s Kingdom. Paul wrote of them in 2 Corinthians 1:3-5, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction SO THAT we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, SO ALSO our comfort is abundant through Christ.” Truly, this is how God prepares Kingdom servants! He rains upon them trial and difficulty that the adverse whether might strengthen and establish him in Christ unto His glory and the benefit of the body

of Christ!

<sup>8</sup> “Mariners tell us that there are some parts of the sea where there is a strong current upon the surface going one way, but that down in the depths there is a strong current running the other way. Two seas do not meet and interfere with one another, but one stream of water on the surface is running in one direction and another below in an opposite direction. ¶ Now, the Christian is like that. On the surface there is a stream of heaviness rolling with dark waves. But down in the depths there is a strong undercurrent of great rejoicing that is always flowing there.” (Charles Spurgeon, *Spurgeon Commentary: 1 Peter*).

<sup>9</sup> On the last day, this entire world is going to burn... including gold whose primary attribute today is that it is imperishable (Matthew 6:19; 16:25–26; Luke 12:20; 1 Timothy 6:7–10; Jas. 5:1–3; 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 21:1)! From this, what do we conclude about a Tempered Faith? It is imperishable and therefore something that will impact the life we live in eternity!

<sup>10</sup> cf. Ezk. 27:22; Matthew 10:9.

<sup>11</sup> In the Bible, gold is associated with riches and power (Is. 60:17). It marked the royal authority of Joseph, Xerxes, and Mordecai (Genesis 41:42; Esther 4:11; 8:15). Gold was one of the three gifts presented to the infant Jesus by the wise men (Matthew 2:11). And King Solomon’s greatness is underlined by the fact that he “made silver and gold as common in Jerusalem as stones” (2 Chron. 1:15).