

1 & 2 Peter: Faith Under Fire

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!
According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the
resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and
unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith
for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.
(1 Peter 1:3-5 ESV)*

Rejoicing In The Christ Of Scripture

September 16th, 2018

1 Peter 1:6-12

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Introduction:

Good morning. I want to invite you to open your Bibles this morning to 1 Peter 1:6; that on page 1014 in your pew Bibles. We are carrying on today in our new series “Faith Under Fire” as we read together this letter written by the Apostle Peter to Christians living in Pontus Bithynia in the very early days of Roman persecution.

Last week we talked about the 6 foundational truths that Peter wanted these believers to anchor into in advance of the coming storm. “It’s going to get rough out there, friends, and if you don’t tie down – if you don’t anchor in to this firm foundation – then you are going to be blown away.” So he reminds them of what they have and who they are and who God is and what God has done to secure their salvation. All of that content is assumed in the opening four words of this next passage. Peter says: “In this you rejoice” – you are locked into those things – you are **LOVING THOSE THINGS** – even as the winds begin to blow and the storm begins to build around you.

That’s where we are in the text.

We’ll pick up at verse 6 and we’ll read all the way through to verse 12. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. 12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look. (1 Peter 1:6–12 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

This morning I'd like to do something a little bit different. Because this text has a couple of subtle twists and turns and connections I think it might be more useful if we walked through it at ground level in order to make sure that we are seeing exactly what Peter is saying. And then, having done that – having walked through the forest at ground level – we'll get on board our hermeneutical hot air balloon so to speak and try to understand the text again from the 10,000 foot level. Basically we'll try to see what's there and then we'll try to figure out why it matters – does that make sense?

Alright then let's get started.

Ground Level Observations:

I mentioned already that our text begins in a way that serves to connect it to the text we looked at last week. Verse 6 has Peter saying:

In this you rejoice (1 Peter 1:6 ESV)

Obviously that is a connector statement – Peter is referring back to their great salvation. He's talking about the grace that they have received and the inheritance that is being kept for them in heaven and he says: IN THIS YOU REJOICE.

But notice the next thing he says:

though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials (1 Peter 1:6 ESV)

That brings us to our first ground level observation:

1. Christians are characterized by qualified rejoicing

We are JOYFUL people – and yet we are grieved. Our joy is not unqualified. But also, our grief is not unqualified – the Apostle Paul says that in 1 Thessalonians 4:13. He says:

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. (1 Thessalonians 4:13 ESV)

So if you are living an authentic Christian life in a legitimately broken world then you are going to grieve with hope and you are going to rejoice with grief. All our emotions are going to be qualified because we live, as it were in two different worlds simultaneously.

The Bible says that we are citizens of a coming Kingdom – Philippians 3:20; it says that we are God’s children NOW – 1 John 3:2 – and YET – it also says that we are in the world but not of the world – John 17:15 – and we are groaning along with the rest of a bruised and broken creation – Romans 8:23 – so we are a complicated group of people. We have our heads in the clouds and our feet in the gutter. We are beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and we are living day to day in a broken and dilapidated world.

And that leads us to our second ground level observation:

2. It is the will of God for us to drag our feet through the fire

You might say: why doesn’t God pull me up into heaven? And the answer is because he has purpose for you down in the fire. You see that at the start of verse 7:

so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:7 ESV)

“So that” indicates purpose. The storm that is brewing outside is not an accident – rather it serves the purpose of Almighty God. Now, that isn’t to say that there aren’t some evil people behind it – both of those things can be true at the same time. Remember back in Genesis 50 – near the

conclusion of the Joseph narrative – when the older brothers were worried that Joseph would try to get back at them now that their father Jacob had passed and they went to him with a made up story about how Jacob wanted them to always get along? Do you remember how Joseph answered them? He said:

As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. (Genesis 50:20 ESV)

You had evil purposes – YES! But God had purposes for good.

Are you hearing that?

Theologians call that “compatibilism”. It’s the idea that there can be two very different but ultimately compatible reasons for everything that happens.

So Peter reminds them of that because as Christians – as human beings – we tend to operate entirely at the first level – the bottom level – of causality. We obsess over whose fault something is or what human beings are causing our particular troubles. We attempt political solutions – we might even make dangerous and costly compromises to try and manage human hostility – when in fact there are larger and more eternal purposes at work that we can’t do anything to influence in any way.

That’s what Peter is saying here.

He is saying that there is a reason for these trials. A good reason. A God reason. A “works out really well for you in the end” reason. He talks about precious things being purified and refined in the fire – commentators think that he is making reference here to Isaiah 48:10 where God says:

Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tried you in the furnace of affliction. (Isaiah 48:10 ESV)

That sounds exactly like what Peter is saying here. He seems to be saying that God ordains for us to have our feet in the fire from time to time because it tests and improves the quality of our faith. Suffering tends to burn away the silliness. It tends to prune away the false and the unfruitful branches.

You know there is a lot of talk right now about the silliness and sickness of 21st century North American evangelicalism. The wise, old senior saints are saying that we have never looked worse as a church than we do today. I wonder what the cure for that might be? According to this passage – and according to Isaiah 48:10 – it might be some time in the fire.

God doesn't send us suffering for no reason. John Calvin says very tenderly here:

God does not, without reason, thus try his people; for, if God afflicted us without a cause, to bear it would be grievous.¹

If were no good purpose – no GOD purpose in our trials – then suffering would be impossible to bear. But that isn't the case Calvin says – more importantly, that isn't the case PETER says. These sufferings are ordained to purify and strengthen our faith AND to increase our JOY on the day of final judgment. That's what he says at the end of verse 7 – listen again; he says that God ordains a little fire for us:

so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—**may be found to result in praise and glory and honor** at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:7 ESV)

This is for you friends! This is a good thing! Because a little refining here, a little fire now, will result in more praise, more glory, more honour for you at the Final Judgment. That's what the text says. Wayne Grudem says here that the praise being spoken of is the:

praise which God gives to his people, since in this context Peter is encouraging his readers to hope in their heavenly reward²

So it's a good thing when God puts us in the fire. He does it to save his church – not destroy it. He does it to refine our faith – not to grind us into the dust. This is supervised suffering. Suffering with a point and with an end – and knowing that, friends, makes all the difference in the world.

¹John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 97012.

²Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 69.

Our third ground level observation comes to us out of verses 8-9; there Peter is saying that:

3. The source of our joy and the object of our faith is the person of Jesus Christ

He says:

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:8-9 ESV)

Isn't that a beautiful picture? I know that my job as a pastor is to explain and apply the text but sometimes I just want to enjoy the text and this is a beautiful passage of Scripture. Peter is speaking here to people who have never seen Jesus. They live in Pontus Bithynia – that's way far north of where Jesus lived, walked, taught and died. They live a thousand km away and yet Peter is left marveling over their faith.

Peter rode in the boat with Jesus – but they didn't ride in the boat. Peter walked on the road with Jesus – but they didn't walk on the road. Peter ate a meal with the resurrected Jesus – but they didn't eat a meal with the resurrected Jesus.

And yet – they love him.

Even though the Romans hate them – they love Jesus.

That is something to be celebrated and that's what Peter does. Peter isn't giving commands here – he isn't saying: You need to LOVE JESUS MORE to make it through the days ahead. No, he is saying “the days are getting hard, the winds are starting to blow – but you love the Lord, you have taken hold of Christ. You have closed with him through faith. You are seeing the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ so you are already right where you need to be to survive the storm. Just STAY THERE. Don't look away for an instant.

Peter knew something about the importance of keeping your eye on Jesus in the storm, didn't he?

Do you remember when Peter tried to walk on the water with Jesus? Peter saw Jesus walking

towards the boat during a storm and Peter called out to him:

“Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.” 29 He said, “Come.” So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. 30 **But when he saw the wind, he was afraid**, and beginning to sink he cried out, “Lord, save me.” (Matthew 14:28–30 ESV)

Do you remember that story? Peter remembered that story and so he gave his people some very good advice. Don’t look at the wind and the waves! Only look at Jesus! Concentrate always on Jesus and you will be safe in the storm.

And that takes us to our fourth ground level observation – taken from verses 8-9 but also from the text that follows in verses 10-12. Peter explains to them that:

4. We know Jesus not by “sight” but by faith in the Word of God

In verse 8 Peter says that you don’t “see” Jesus now according to the flesh – you can’t! Jesus ascended into heaven and we are all still here on earth, so you don’t “see” him in that sense – but you believe in him. More than that, you love him. So where are you seeing him? Where are you finding him? How are you connecting with him? Well of course, Peter says, you are “seeing him” in the Scriptures. You are being helped and guided and served by the Old Testament prophets. That’s what he says. Look at verse 12. Speaking about the Old Testament prophets, he says:

“It was revealed to them that **they were serving not themselves but you**, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven...” (1 Peter 1:12 ESV)

Are you hearing that? That is an absolutely incredible statement! Peter says that the Old Testament prophets were writing things with the help of the Holy Spirit that ultimately were not for their benefit but for yours. Meaning that the Old Testament is actually more useful to YOU than it was to the original recipients. That’s incredible! Thomas Schreiner for example says here:

“Their ministry was not ultimately directed to themselves or their own generation but to Petrine readers and all those who live on the other side of the death and resurrection of Christ.”³

³ Thomas R. Schreiner, *1,2 Peter, Jude* in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2003), 74.

See, the Old Testament is your book friends. It was written for you. It was intended to serve you which means of course that the Old Testament has never been more useful than it is today. This is not the time to “unhitch” from the Old Testament – on the contrary – this is the time to DIG DEEPER INTO the Old Testament because it points us so wonderfully and so helpfully to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

See, that’s the Jesus that we have! Luther said that the Scriptures are the cradle wherein Christ is laid. We love the Jesus anticipated by the Old Testament and explicated in the New Testament. We love the Christ of Scripture and that is the Christ that we will need to know and love and serve and be served by through the Spirit if we are to survive and thrive through the storm ahead.

We aren’t going to be helped by the Jesus of our imagination, we aren’t going to be saved by the Jesus of contemporary culture – we’re going to need to CLOSE with the CHRIST OF SCRIPTURE and thanks be to God, Peter says, that is the Jesus that you have found. That is the Jesus that has found YOU, and that is the Jesus that you SEE and ADORE as a people.

That’s the message – that’s the end of the indicative section in Peter’s epistle. From here on in Peter is giving them instructions and marching orders in advance of the coming storm.

But before we get into that – which we will next week – I want to pause and reflect upon what we’ve seen. Remember I told you this last week, we want to do more here than understand what Peter is saying – we want to go up a level now and ask WHY this particular teaching would be helpful to people about to experience formal persecution. That’s the question I’m asking here.

Why Are These Truths Precious To People About To Experience Persecution?

And I think the first answer is this:

1. Because suffering always comes as a surprise

Right? We know that Jesus said:

In the world you will have tribulation. (John 16:33 ESV)

We know that's in the Bible but the tendency of human beings is to assume that those words were written for other people. Maybe for people in India, Iran or China – but surely they don't apply to us. We are the beloved of God. Surely everything will continue on for us just as it always has been.

Hmm.

Peter knows about such people. In his second letter he says about them:

They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, **all things are continuing as they were from the beginning**" (2 Peter 3:4 ESV)

See there will always be people, Peter says, who think that these things are impossibly far off or perhaps even that these predictions have been misunderstood. Maybe there was a scribal error in John 16:33 – maybe Jesus never even said that. Maybe he said that in this world we will have transliteration or triangulation or tubal ligation – it could mean anything and so there is no need for us to assume the worst. Things may go on exactly as they have done since the beginning.

Mhhmm.

There have always been and there will always be people like that – so Peter writes to prepare us for the suffering THAT IN FACT DOES lie ahead.

Peter is like an airline stewardess telling people to put their seat belts on because we are about to go through some serious turbulence. And if you aren't prepared for that turbulence it may be spiritually and psychologically destabilizing.

So Peter wants them to prepare – he also wants them to understand; that's the second reason I think this teaching is precious.

2. Because we tend to misinterpret suffering, trials and tribulation

When bad things happen – particularly if we are not prepared – we tend to interpret those events as a sign of Divine disfavor. That’s the whole point of the Book of Job isn’t it? When bad things happened to brother Job some very orthodox believers showed up to give him comfort – but they did a terrible job didn’t they? They said that Job’s sufferings must be the result of some bad things that he had done – or perhaps that his kids had done and that he needed to repent of those things and then all the suffering and all the difficulty would go away.

That’s what orthodox people like you and me tend to do when we encounter unanticipated trials and tribulations. We blame ourselves and then if that doesn’t work we blame God.

And Peter would like to avoid that scenario if at all possible. So he tells them: some very bad things are going to happen to you shortly and you mustn’t think that it is because God is angry at you. You mustn’t think that it is because he is punishing you. No! God loves you! You love Jesus – Peter has already said that – and Peter knows very well that if you love Jesus then God loves you.

Jesus said that in John 14:

he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. (John 14:21 ESV)

Jesus said that to Peter – and Peter said to these people that they love Jesus – so Peter wants them to put all that together. If you love Jesus then God loves you and Jesus will be with you in your trial.

It’s so important to understand that.

Trials and tribulations are not proof of God’s anger – very often they are proof of God’s LOVE!

The author of Hebrews is eager to make the same point. He says:

“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.” (Hebrews 12:5–6 ESV)

These are things that God ordains for you to go through for your growth and maturity. He is treating you as a son. He is preparing you to inherit all that he possesses. If anything these trials

are proof of his faith in you. He has chosen you and he is pruning and positioning you for glory.

So don't lose heart, Peter says, and don't turn away.

That's the third value I think in these teachings. Peter knows better than anybody that people tend to look away from Jesus when they find themselves in a storm.

3. Because we tend to look away from Jesus in the storm

We tend to curl in on ourselves – again that's human nature. Duck and cover. Run and hide – that's what people DO when trouble comes. But that's NOT what we do when trouble comes. We keep our eyes fixed on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. That's how we STAND – that's how we SURVIVE – that's how we THRIVE IN MIDST OF THE STORM.

We look at Jesus.

And why would you look anywhere else, Peter asks. The angels in heaven long to see what you are seeing! Jesus said:

blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. (Matthew 13:16 ESV)

You HEAR JESUS! You SEE Jesus! So do not LOOK AWAY! If you look at the wind and the waves you will FALL and you will FAIL! So look at Jesus. When the storm comes. Look at Jesus. And don't wait until that day to find him, friend. If you are hearing this today and you don't have a firm and loving grasp on the Savior – FIND HIM TODAY! Begin that relationship with him today. You can start TODAY – to cultivate an intimate relationship with the Christ of Holy Scripture.

Conclusion:

Now I want to end by taking you back to verse 8 – that's the theological centre of the text as far as I'm concerned. In verse 8 Peter uses a very unusual word – the word translated in your Bibles there as "rejoice" is a word that is never used in secular Greek. It is a uniquely Biblical word. The

Bible writers used this word to describe a special JOY that believers enjoy RIGHT NOW in their relationship with Jesus Christ. Wayne Grudem says here:

“It is the joy of heaven before heaven, experienced now in fellowship with the unseen Christ.”⁴

That is the joy that will see you through the fire. That is the joy that will see you through cancer or the death of a child, the loss of a job or even through a season of formal persecution. It is the joy of heaven before heaven. It is the joy of fellowship NOW with the unseen Christ. This is the fellowship of the prayer closet, this is the fellowship of the Spirit-illuminated quiet time – this is the fellowship of communion with Christ through the ordinary means. Oh brothers and sisters – go there often! Go there DAILY – go there DEEPLY. Meet with Jesus. Close with Jesus. Talk with Jesus. LOVE JESUS. Because He is our hope – He is our joy – and He is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God, let’s pray together.

⁴Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 71.