

Message #3

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1 Peter

7/14/2019

POWER FOR PERSEVERING IN PROBLEMS

1 PETER 1:3-12

INTRO

John was a Christian, but his relationship with God did not keep him from experiencing more than his fair share of trials. When he was only nine years old, his mother died. Then a year later his father died. John was sent to be raised by an older brother who resented having another mouth to feed.

When he was 22, John married his second cousin Maria. The two of them brought seven children into the world. Four of them died in childhood. The oldest son was a gifted child, but he never applied himself. His life was devoted to alcohol and wild living. After 13 years of marriage, John's wife Maria died.

A year later he remarried and proceeded to have 13 more children. His encounters with death and tragedy continued. Seven of those children died prematurely. One of the children who survived was mentally retarded.

John was good at his chosen career. But his work was not much recognized and appreciated during his lifetime. In his fifties he experienced serious eye trouble that eventually left him blind. When he was 65, he died from a stroke. John encountered difficult circumstances in life. But he didn't lose his sticktuitiveness. He persevered in the face of problems. He maintained his faith in the God of the Bible. He was a witness for Jesus.

We have an older congregation. Most of us have encountered our share of problems in life. We are dealing with some serious health challenges in our midst. We have had a couple of recent deaths. The challenge always is: How will we respond to such problems.

Our identity as followers of Jesus does not immunize us to the problems of life. In addition to that, Fleming Rutledge points out in her recent book *The Crucifixion*, **“The Christian life involves suffering--- not the ordinary suffering that comes to everyone, but the particular affliction that must come to those who bear witness to the Lord’s death.”** (p. 566-567) Our God has promised us power to persevere in the face of these problems. What we need is access to power to overcome them.

The Apostle Peter in his first epistle was writing to Christians living in northern Asia Minor in the first century who were also faced with trials. At the end of v. 6 of #1 he writes, **“...you have been grieved by various trials.”**

In the first message in this sermon series on 1 Peter we looked at Peter himself and saw how he had experienced failure when he encountered a difficult trial in his own life. Last time we looked at vv. 1 & 2. One authority says that Peter’s immediate audience in northern Asia Minor was primarily Christians who had been expelled from Rome. If that is the case, they were immigrants living in a strange land. We also saw that part of their challenge and our challenge comes from the fact that our identity as followers of Christ and citizens of a heavenly kingdom makes us strangers in this present world. Now in vv. 3-12 we are going to find three elements that will help us to persevere in the midst of problems.

I.

The first thing that we need to do, according to vv. 3-5 of #1, is to keep before us THE PROSPECT OF A FUTURE INHERITANCE. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE PROSPECT OF...) We Christians need to remember that there is an inheritance waiting for us in heaven. Peter writes, **“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.”**

There are certain subjects that seem to pop up again and again in the Bible. One of them is God’s sovereignty. Another is salvation. Another is the theme of heaven as a motivation for godly living. Mercy and hope and Jesus and the resurrection are other subjects that frequently appear in God’s Word. Verses 3-5 interweave all of these subjects.

Peter seems to relate these different subjects to the matter of salvation. He speaks of being born again and of receiving an inheritance and of experiencing a salvation at the last time. Peter alludes to the fact

that this salvation relates to the death and resurrection of Jesus. The New Testament tells us that Jesus was both God and man, that He lived a sinless life, that He died on the cross to pay the penalty for man's sin, and that He rose again from the dead. When we acknowledge our status as sinners and place our trust in Jesus for eternal life, we receive this thing called "salvation."

But the New Testament teaches that this salvation has past, present and future aspects. Last week we talked about salvation in relationship to the Trinity. We found out that in relationship to the Father, salvation was accomplished in eternity past. For it was then that the Father chose us. In relationship to the Son, it was accomplished on the cross. For it was at that time in history when Jesus died to pay the penalty for the sins of the world. In relationship to the Holy Spirit, it was accomplished at the moment that we believed in Jesus. For it was then that the Holy Spirit came to live within us.

The future aspect of salvation relates to the time when we receive our heavenly inheritance. A time is coming when we Christians will be delivered out of this world and out of this earthly body and out of our sin natures. We will be brought to heaven. It is this future aspect of salvation that Peter has in mind in v. 5 when he speaks of **"a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."**

In vv. 3-5 the author stresses God's involvement in this salvation deal. He says that God the Father has caused us to be born again. This rebirth, Peter says, is **"to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead..."**

Peter knew from personal experience what this resurrection of Jesus meant. When he saw Jesus die on the cross, his hopes died. But when Jesus rose from the dead, his hopes came to life again. Likewise, our coming into relationship with Jesus gives us a hope that is living.

We Nevadans need hope. We have a suicide rate almost twice the national average. The leading cause of death among teenagers in our state is suicide. We also have the second highest rate in the country of suicide among the elderly. (Nevada Coalition for Suicide Prevention, 2017)

The cause of this living hope is spiritual rebirth and a realization of the inheritance that awaits us in heaven. This is the focus of attention in this part of our passage. The prospect of a future inheritance that awaits us is intended to give us strength to endure the trials that we encounter now.

What is this inheritance? The passage does not tell us. It does tell us that whatever it is it will not perish, cannot be defiled, and will never fade away as may the inheritance that children receive from their earthly parents. Other passages in the New Testament tell us that the inheritance that Christians will one day receive includes heaven, a resurrection body, and possession of eternal life.

In the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus (MATTHEW 5:3) told His listeners that the poor in spirit will inherit the kingdom of heaven. In v. 10 in the same chapter (MATTHEW 5:10) Jesus said, **“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”** In v. 5 (MATTHEW 5:5) Jesus says that the meek, or gentle, will inherit the earth.

In the 21st chapter of Revelation the Apostle John sees the coming of a new heaven and a new earth and a new Jerusalem. This is after Jesus has led an earthly kingdom for a thousand years. John foresees that in this coming realm there will be no more sorrow and no more death. There will be life. God will be visibly present. In v. 7 (REVELATION 21:7) he writes, **“The one who conquers will have this heritage...”** So our inheritance includes ruling with Christ in the millennial kingdom upon the earth and, after that, experiencing the joy of life in the new heaven and new earth.

An inheritance is not something that we normally think of as being earned. Rather it is determined primarily by our membership in a family. The security of that inheritance depends upon the reliability of the head of the estate.

Lee Radziwill died earlier this year. She was the socialite sister of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis. (ONASSIS RADZIWILL) The two of them often did not get along. They competed for some of the same men. Lee Radziwill dated Aristotle Onassis before Jacqueline showed up on the scene. Lee also had financial difficulties at some points. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis died in 1994. She was a wealthy woman. Her will stipulated that the bulk of her estate should go to her two children. She did leave \$500,000 to each of Radziwill’s two children, but she left nothing for her sister. Lee Radziwill was disappointed and angry that she had been cut out of her sister’s inheritance. (*People*, 2/18/2019) (PROJECTOR OFF)

Christians don’t need to worry about being cut out of an inheritance. Peter says that God has set aside our inheritance in heaven. Verse 5 says that it has already been reserved. Meanwhile, God is in the process of reserving us for that inheritance.

When we Christians find ourselves in the midst of trials, the prospect of a future inheritance should motivate us to hang in there. In 1984 Tony Curtis (PROJECTOR ON--- TONY CURTIS) was released from treatment at the Betty Ford Alcoholism and Drug Center in California. He promptly married an actress who was 37 years his junior. In an interview shortly after that, he said, **“I recently learned that there’s no such thing as a future and no such thing as a past. There’s only the present, and I’m very pleased with the present.”** (*Miami News*, 5/2/1984) (PROJECTOR OFF)

There may be something to be said for the need that people with addictions have to live one day at a time. But to make as an operating principle of life the notion that there is no past and no future but only today is foolish. There are many people, however, who operate on that principle. The present is all that there is. We live only for today. When those people then encounter suffering, the response often is: Get a new mate. Go out and hang one on. Run away from home. Blow up at somebody. Kill yourself. Put me out of my misery.

A medical doctor by the name of Richard Eyer (Leadership, Spring, 1986) says, **“I am always amazed at how easily some people, when they hear someone has to suffer greatly, tend to sympathize with those who would solve the problem by ‘putting them out of their misery.’ The church’s message used to be ‘bear one another’s burdens.’ It is rapidly becoming ‘no one should have to bear a burden.’ ...No one wants to live with discomfort, inconvenience, or suffering in an age of instant gratification.”**

The future holds in store the prospect for us of an inheritance. When we encounter trials, the realization that God through Christ has already set aside an incredible inheritance for us out of the riches of His grace and love and mercy should motivate us to persevere.

II.

The second thing that should sustain us in the midst of trials is the REALIZATION OF A PRESENT PURPOSE. (PROJECTOR ON--- II. THE REALIZATION OF A PRESENT PURPOSE) God has a purpose for the trials in our lives. Notice v. 6: **“In this--- this salvation with its resulting inheritance reserved for us--- you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.”**

Peter is realistic. He recognizes that trials produce stress and anxiety. Yet still we are to rejoice. Psychiatrist Scott Peck says in his book (SCOTT PECK QUOTATION) *The Road Less Traveled*, **“One measure--- and perhaps the best measure--- of a person’s greatness is the capacity for suffering. Yet the great are also joyful.”**

Peter himself developed this ability to rejoice in the midst of trials. In Acts #5 he and his fellow apostles were hauled before the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. They were beaten and commanded to stop preaching. This must have produced considerable stress as well as physical pain. (ACTS 5:41) Yet we also read, **“Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.”**

We are not only to endure our trials, but we are also to learn to rejoice in them. James says in the first chapter of his epistle (JAMES 1:2-3), **“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.”** In order to do that, we have to keep our future inheritance in mind and, as v. 7 in our passage stresses, we have to understand that God has a purpose for those trials. That purpose is to strengthen our faith so that God will be praised, honored, and glorified. Peter compares that process to the smelting of gold.

Gold may be obtained either from nuggets or from gold ore. (GOLD ORE) When it is found in ore, it may be almost imperceptible. It has to go through a difficult smelting process to produce gold that is useful. Traditionally gold has been refined from ore by being crushed (GOLD ORE CRUSHED) into the consistency of sand. Cyanide is used to dissolve the sand into a clear solution. Zinc dust is added to separate the gold from the mixture. Eventually the resulting sludge is put under tremendous heat (GOLD ORE REFINED) to get rid of the remaining impurities.

In Peter's day metal workers could only use ore that had a much higher gold content than what is necessary today. They used only fire to get rid of the impurities. (PROJECTOR OFF) Smelters could tell that the gold was ready when they could see the reflection of their faces in the smelted gold. In a similar way God is refining us. He is using trials to get rid of our impurities, because He wants our lives to be able to reflect His face. The product that He wants to produce is a faith that brings praise and honor and glory to Him.

Butterflies are beautiful little creatures. (PROJECTOR ON--- BUTTERFLY) Before they become butterflies, they are caterpillars. (BUTTERFLY CATERPILLAR) In order to become butterflies they undergo a difficult struggle that takes many hours as they seek to emerge from their cocoons, or chrysalises. (COCOON)

A professor that I had years ago told about how he was watching this process take place in his backyard. He saw the butterflies emerge from their cocoons, sit on the edge of them, and then fly away.

(MONARCH EMERGING) He decided to see if he could speed things up a bit. So he cut off the top of one of these cocoons where he could see that a butterfly was in the initial stages of that struggle. This butterfly then just popped out of the cocoon. It seemed like everything was just great. It stood on the edge of the cocoon and began to flex its wings. But then it gave a jerk and fell to the ground. It crawled around for a moment and then stopped moving. The butterfly was dead. The struggle that the butterfly had avoided turned out apparently to be essential to its development of maturity. (PROJECTOR OFF)

The same thing is true in the Christian life. God uses trials and suffering to make us mature, to develop in us a faith that will bring praise and honor and glory to Him at the revelation of Jesus Christ. This revelation of Jesus Christ in v. 7 is apparently referring to the Second Coming. At this revealing God will receive special honor, and in the process we also will be honored.

That principle of double honor is illustrated in the movie *Chariots of Fire*. (PROJECTOR ON--- CHARIOTS OF FIRE) This is the story of the Scottish missionary Eric Lydell, who won the gold medal in the 400 meters race in the 1924 Paris Olympics. On one hand God receives a certain honor and recognition as we see Eric Lydell base all of his life upon serving Him. He says that he runs because he believes that he can glorify God through it. He refuses to run on Sunday because he believes that God would be unhappy with that. Yet at the same time we come away feeling that this instrument of God's praise and honor is himself worthy of recognition. (PROJECTOR OFF)

So it will be at the Second Coming of Christ. God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ will be the recipients of praise. Yet at the same time we Christians, as instruments of that praise, will also receive a certain recognition.

In vv. 8 & 9 Peter reminds his audience that they have not had the privilege he did of seeing the Lord Jesus Christ in person. Yet they still enjoy intimate fellowship with Him. The outcome of that fellowship will ultimately be a future salvation, the future aspect of our eternal salvation.

III.

We can persevere in difficult circumstances when we look at the prospect of a future inheritance, when we have a realization of the divine purpose for them in the present, and thirdly when we consider THE REMINDER OF THE PAST SIGNIFICANCE OF SALVATION. (PROJECTOR ON--- THE REMINDER OF THE...)

Look at vv. 10-12: **“Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them**

was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. 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.”

Notice that Peter uses the pronoun “you” in v. 12 rather than “we.” In doing that I suspect that the Apostle had in mind the largely Gentile character of his audience. He was a Jew. Many of them were not. As Gentiles they had largely been excluded from the community of God’s people. Yet the Old Testament prophets spoke of a salvation that would be made available to Gentiles as well as to Jews.

This salvation would be centered in a Messiah who would Himself suffer and die. But the prophets who said these things did not themselves understand the significance and meaning of much that they prophesied. That is why they made careful search and inquiry to determine who the Messiah was and when He was coming and when these “glories” would take place. The NIV translation may be right in its reading in v. 10 saying that the prophets were trying to determine what circumstances would produce the Messiah, rather than what person would be the Messiah.

John the Baptist, who was imprisoned and then beheaded for his preaching, tried to determine if Jesus was really the Messiah and if the time of glory was about to occur. He sent messengers to Jesus asking, “Are you the One, or should we look for someone else?” Daniel and Ezekiel had visions of the future concerning the coming of the Messiah. They tried to figure out when it was going to happen. There were prophets going all the way back to Moses who sought to determine God’s future salvation program.

Verse 12 says that these prophets learned that they were not serving themselves in these things but “you”--- perhaps “you” Gentiles, perhaps “you” members of a future generation. All of these things pertaining to eternal salvation are of interest also to the angels, Peter says. These beings do not know what it is to experience personal salvation. So they are learning by observing God’s program of salvation.

Peter says that the angels long “to peer” into these things pertaining to the gospel. The Greek word that is used here is the same one that was used in John #20 v. 11, which we recently studied, where Mary Magdalene was said “to peer” into the empty tomb.

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews lists many of the Old Testament heroes of the faith who faced great challenges and difficulties but persevered by the exercise of faith. At the beginning of #12 the author says (PROJECTOR ON--- HEBREWS 12:1) to fellow Christians, **“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, (HEBREWS 12:2) looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (HEBREWS 12:3) Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.”**

The point is that we are not alone in our suffering. There are other people in history who suffered great trials, often because of what they believed. The Lord Jesus Himself suffered. But the faith that these people had was worthy of suffering. They looked forward to the final result of that faith. They looked forward to an ultimate vindication from God. (PROJECTOR OFF) The prophets made careful search and inquiry as to when this future salvation would come. It was the object of scrutiny by the angels.

So when we face trials, especially trials that are related to our Christian faith, there is encouragement that comes from remembering that we are part of a long tradition in which trials and difficulties have confronted godly people, but in which also people persevered because they recognized that this salvation thing deserved such perseverance.

The power for persevering in problems involves a past, a present, and a future perspective. It helps us to persevere in the midst of trials when we remember the historical significance of our salvation. That is the past. We need also to recognize that there is a divine purpose for our trials in the present. We then need to look to the future. We need to keep in mind that we are faced with the prospect of a future inheritance.

There is evidence that our friend John applied these principles to his life as he encountered various trials. As a Christian he looked to the future with the hope that one day he would see his loved ones who died in heaven. He was also convinced that all that happened in his present life was part of a divine purpose. He once said that all that people do and believe is religious in nature. John was also certainly aware of the historic significance of his eternal salvation. He wrote about it in his music.

We remember John better by his German name--- Johann. Johann wrote over 200 cantatas. At the end of each one he inscribed SDG (BACH SDG), initials for the Latin words Soli Deo Gloria--- to God alone the glory. His chorale preludes for organ were dedicated to the Most High God. At the beginning of his

books of keyboard music he wrote the letters INJ--- In Nomine Jesu--- In the Name of Jesus. Johann once wrote, **“The aim and final reason of all music should be none else but the Glory of God and the recreation of the mind.”**

Johann Sebastian Bach was an organist and a composer. In the midst of a life of trials and suffering he persevered to produce beautiful music that glorified God. One of the works that he produced was “Jesus, Joy of Man’s Desiring.” (BEGIN TO BRING UP MUSIC) Is Jesus the object of your desire this morning? As we listen to this testimony of a Christian who faced a lot of trials in his life, let’s embrace that persevering faith as ours as well. (JESU JOY OF MAN’S DESIRING)

Jesu, joy of man's desiring

Holy wisdom, love most bright

Drawn by Thee, our souls aspiring

Soar to uncreated light

Word of God, our flesh that fashioned

With the fire of life impassioned

Striving still to truth unknown

Soaring, dying round Thy throne