

1 Peter 1:6-12
(Psalm 30:1-12; Luke 10:21-24)
“The Tested Genuineness of Your Faith”

Introduction

Peter opened his letter with a celebration of God’s mercy displayed in the new life won for us through Jesus’ life, death and resurrection victory over death. Thus, Peter writes, we have been “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and 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” (1:3-5). In studying these verses, we saw that in a world of death, God offers us eternal life; in a world of despair, God offers us living hope; in a world of decay, God offers us a lasting inheritance; and in a world of danger, God offers us salvation.

Now, in the verses before us this morning, Peter develops this new life of salvation in Christ, focusing especially on three of the marks of one whose faith proves genuine, and thus “more precious than gold” (1:7). These days there is resistance in Christ’s church to self-examination, a fear of getting one’s eyes off of Jesus and onto oneself, of trusting one’s faith rather than God’s grace, of putting oneself back under law. That is a legitimate concern. But it must not keep us from doing what the Bible calls us to do, namely to examine ourselves to see whether or not we bear the evidences of God’s grace at work within us, changing us from self-obsessed people of this world into self-forgetful, self-giving, other-directed people of God’s family.

So I invite you to look with me this morning at your life in the light of this text and to note three marks of one whose faith proves genuine in the storms and trials of life.

Body

1. Genuine faith rejoices in sharing Christ’s suffering (1:6-7).

Any talk of suffering for what we believe may seem strange to those of us who are accustomed to religious freedom. However, in the New Testament, the word we translate as “witness” was the Greek word “martyr.” Since all Christians are called to bear witness to their faith, all Christians were once considered martyrs in the strictest sense of the word. In some cultures today, persecution continues for those who confess Jesus as Lord. But in all cultures, truly following Jesus is counter-cultural, and even seen as subversive to those who would preserve the status quo.

So, then, the question in our culture should not be whether we have been arrested and beaten for the gospel, but rather whether or not we can say

with the apostle Paul, “I have been crucified with Christ. It no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). Are we heeding the words of our Lord Jesus, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matthew 16:24)? This is simply what it means to be his disciple.

Here is the reason that suffering yields joy to the Christian: “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” (1:7). Faith is both purified and proven genuine by suffering. Suffering for Christ matures us and brings him glory. This is the reason that the apostles rejoiced: “that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” of Christ (Acts 5:41).

2. Genuine faith rejoices in obtaining Christ’s salvation (1:8-9).

Genuine faith increasingly takes on the character of Jesus Christ whose life was marked supremely by love for his Father, by utter trust in his Father’s will, and by unspeakable joy that he could fulfill his Father’s will. So Peter writes, “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” (1:8).

Of course, the fullness of this joy will be realized in the future, and in one sense Peter is contrasting the way that we may suffer now with the joy that will be ours at the appearing of Christ in glory. However, I think that this contrast has been overplayed. After all, Peter begins our text by saying, “In this you rejoice” (1:6) *present tense*. Our joy begins now; it is one of the Spirit’s fruit as we are increasingly conformed to Christ. And in those times when we are caught up in worship and realize with joyful wonder that even now we who are united to Christ through faith are “seated with him in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 2:6), truly we “rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1:8).

As the Apostle Paul writes elsewhere to the Christians of Galatia, “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22). In our text, Peter describes the same kind of transformed life, one marked by love, joy and peace. This stands in stark contrast to the life of a Christian person or Christian community that merely reflects its surrounding culture. Here Peter describes a church that is radically and wonderfully counter-cultural, with Christians who rejoice even in their suffering and whose lives are marked supremely by the love, joy and peace of new life in Christ, of sharing in the life of the Trinity.

3. Genuine faith rejoices in understanding Christ's mystery (1:10-12).

Peter concludes this section of the letter with an astonishing observation and assertion: The prophets through whom God spoke to his people, the mighty men and women described in the Old Testament who stood against a disobedient people and called them to repentance, people who lived in intimate communion with God, nevertheless did not know as much about God's ways as does the simplest New Covenant believer. Astonishing! Although they "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" (1:10-12).

But surely the angels – who live in the searing light of God's presence and serve him day and night without rest – understand these things. No, writes Peter: these are "things into which angels long to look" (1:12). Even the angels, the majestic messengers of God, do not have the benefit that we have in our study of God's Word under the illumination of God's Spirit. Those whose faith proves genuine are students of God's Word, growing in their understanding of the mysteries now revealed to God's children. As Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God" (1 Corinthians 2:12).

How seldom are we sufficiently astonished by what God gives *even now* to those who are truly his, guarded by his power through faith.

Conclusion

What then shall we take from this text? How are we to ensure that our faith proves genuine in the face of whatever circumstances we should find our selves?

First, examine yourself and ask what area of your life you have been keeping back from Christ. What is the one area where you really do not want to hear what Christ has to say? He is welcome to speak into all the rest of your life, but not this one thing. Now, think of what it means to follow Jesus. Think of what it means to be a disciple. How will your faith be purged and purified, how will it prove genuine, if not in that very place where you do not trust God to have your greatest joy at heart? Entrust yourself to him at that point of your life. Find someone whom you can completely trust and tell that person of your battle, of your resolution, and ask him or her to hold you accountable in that very place where the battle for your soul rages.

Second, imagine what your life might look like if it were truly marked by love and joy and peace. I'm not thinking of an appearance of love, joy and peace plastered onto a life that is anxious and depressed. I'm thinking of a life transformed from the inside out by God's indwelling Spirit, working into the very core of your being the incredible good news of the gospel of grace. When the gospel begins to work its way with you, you realize that you are no longer alienated from God, but are his precious and dearly loved child, that the sins that once brought you such guilt and shame have been forgiven, removed forever, and that the power of sin to continue to drag you down has been broken by the death and resurrection victory of Jesus Christ. "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" (1:8).

Finally, realize what a treasure we have in the Bible, especially in the complete Bible, with the New Testament explaining the Old, and the prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel and all the rest opened and revealed in ways that the prophets themselves longed to understand. But they were told that it was for us, not for them, to understand these holy mysteries. And even more amazingly, we have been shown things in God's Word that angels long to see. How can we waste night after night watching TV, playing games, reading other books, but not the one Book that alone reveals the meaning of all the others, the great Story that alone makes sense of the stories of our lives? Will you not resolve to give yourself to the study of this Word until your life begins to be transformed by its truth, and you begin – whatever your native intelligence – to grow in wisdom and in the knowledge of our great God and King?

This is our real and lasting life's work, if we care for our lives. This is the gift of God, treasured by those whose faith proves genuine in the floods and fires and storms of life.

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