

The Stabilizing Power of Thankfulness Part 3

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Our Identity in Christ

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Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter 1. 1 Peter 1. We are continuing our exposition of this first letter of Peter in this first section, verses 3 to 9, that we've been looking at for a number of weeks. This is actually our third Sunday looking at this particular paragraph, verses 3 to 9 of chapter 1. We've titled the messages in this paragraph "The Stabilizing Power of Thankfulness." The stabilizing power of thankfulness. We've noted that Peter's purpose in writing the letter, his overarching purpose is to prepare the saints of God to whom he writes to bear up under persecution. In the providence of God, Peter's writing just a year or two before a major persecution breaks out in Rome and then spreads across the Mediterranean world and Christians are the specific target of the government and the angst and anger of Nero the emperor and of the people at large. And so, in a time of increasing hostility, growing animosity, they already see those things, the storm clouds forming to create this kind of climate in which persecution would flourish, Peter writes this letter to stabilize and strengthen the Christian believers for the coming difficulties that lie ahead. And so in this letter we have an especially relevant message for Christians who live today in the Western world, particularly United States of America, where the climate is becoming increasingly hostile to the Christian faith, increasingly adverse and opposed to our gospel message. Just the very fact that we claim that there's one way to heaven is offensive to so many because it's a pluralistic society and the idea that people want to live with today is that all roads lead to heaven, that everything, you know, your truth, my truth, we all have truth. This is kind of the prevailing cultural consensus but the message of the gospel is that there is one Savior, there is one name under heaven by which men must be saved and that is the name of Jesus Christ, that he alone saves, and that the loving thing for us as those who have received salvation, is to proclaim that message to others with urgency and with joy and with warmth and love that we can let them know there is a way to be saved. But we have to be bold and also speaking it clearly in the way that God has commanded. And so, as we do that, we understand that suffering is something that we're going to have to experience. The Bible makes clear that it is the norm. Paul says in 1 Timothy 2:13 that or, chapter 2, verse 13, that it is God's the normal reality is that we will experience persecution. All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. And so it's something we have to be aware of and ready for and Peter writes this letter to help us to be ready for that, not only to be ready for persecution but to be ready for all manner of suffering. We're going to see today we're going to look at this particular issue of how we are to approach suffering.

Now I've made the note that Peter is basically giving us the stabilizing foundation he's laying in this first section, this first paragraph of the letter is to tell us to be thankful, and that's found in the phrase that he begins verse 3 with, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and then he recounts a series of seven blessings and he's rehearsing these for those to whom he writes to say, "Listen, look at what God has done for you and be thankful. Set your mind on the blessings that you have received. Actively enjoy them, delight in them. Actively thank God for them and you will be strengthened and fortified and enabled to stand against suffering and adversity." So it's the stabilizing power of thankfulness, the stabilizing power of gratitude. This is where Peter begins this letter that's written to help believers bear up, he begins with the issue of gratitude. How urgent that is for us to learn to be thankful and to cultivate thankful hearts.

So we've seen in the previous weeks, the last two Sundays we saw the first five blessings that he gives us. I'm going to read the text in a moment, but just to tell you as a way of review, we saw that we have received great mercy from God. We have received a new birth. If you're in Christ, you've received a new birth. Peter speaks about that which we read earlier from John 3. Jesus said you must be born again. Peter speaks of that new birth here in this passage. If you're a Christian, you've received great mercy, you've received a new birth, you've received a living hope, you are recipients of an eternal inheritance, we looked at last week, and ongoing present protection. We've seen those five blessings. Today we come to the sixth blessing for us in Christ and we're going to spend our time just looking at 1 today, that is the providence of God. So the theme of the message is the providence of God. I'm going to share with you five points about the providence of God, but this passage majors on this particular issue, verses 6 to 9 really unpack for us this wonder of God's providence, and he's going to show us the importance of our attitude toward God's governance of our lives, how important it is that we understand that he is in control and that when he brings adversity we need to have not grumbling and complaining hearts but trusting joyful hearts not in our suffering, not in the pain but in the God who has brought it and ordained it into our lives.

Let's read God's word together. We'll read verses 3 to 9 of 1 Peter 1.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so 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; 8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy

inexpressible and full of glory, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Let's pray.

Our Father, how grateful we are for Your word, the perfection of the written word that You have given to us by Your Spirit through the holy prophets and apostles. As we come now to Your word, Lord, Your written word, we know that we need Your Spirit and Your grace to open the eyes of our hearts to help us to see and understand and believe, repent, and walk in obedience to the things that we read. So we ask that You might guide our thoughts, that You might overcome the obstacles, the unbelief in our hearts, the hardness, the love of the things of the world, the lure of sin and worldliness, and You might help us to put those things to death through the cross of Christ and we might see the surpassing beauty of our Savior and the indescribable goodness of our God and Father. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

So the stabilizing power of thankfulness, the providence of God. We need to be thankful for the providence of God and to the degree that we learn to be thankful for the providence of God, we will be able to stand and bear up under suffering. This idea of attitude is so critical. Peter understands this. He starts right here at the beginning saying, "Listen, we need to get our attitudes right. We need to adjust our attitudes to the reality of Scripture knowing that we're going to experience difficulty and pain and suffering in this world." Jesus said, "In this world you shall have tribulation," that's a promise, "but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." God has not promised to deliver you from suffering, he promises to deliver you in and through suffering. That's the biblical picture. So we don't believe in a kind of name it, claim it, name your circumstances. No, God is the one who leads you in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. He has mapped out the path of everyone who belongs to him and he's going to guide you, if you belong to Jesus, through paths that at times will be in dark places and difficulties and trials and tribulations, and this passage makes it abundantly clear here. But in those, if your heart is right toward him, you will overcome in the midst of the suffering. This is what he describes here, that if we have faith, if we trust in the promises of God in the midst of our trials, we will see God do amazing things that are beyond our wildest imagination. We'll see his glory. We will see him transform us and will transform the way that we see him.

So the stabilizing power of thankfulness and this issue that we're looking at today, the sixth benefit that we have received according to Peter in this passage is we have the confidence in the providence of God. So the providence of God is the sixth blessing. That's the theme of the message and I want to explain what the word providence means. Just our church's name, Providence Church, what does providence mean? It's funny how we use words so often and we forget what they mean, don't we? You know, it's always good to go back and review your terms. What does this mean? Well, the doctrine of divine providence is essentially the idea that God is sovereign over every single thing that happens in this universe, that he's sovereign in such a way, though, that he is not the author of evil in any way yet he governs all evil to his appointed purposes. Whatsoever comes to pass comes to pass by his foreordination, according to his will. In fact, the

doctrine of providence, you can look up in the London Baptist Confession, the fifth chapter is all about the providence of God. 1689 London Baptist Confession is an excellent document to read. It uses language like this: God upholds, directs, arranges, and governs all creatures and all things from the greatest to the least by his perfect wisdom for his appointed ends. His appointed ends are his own glory and the good of his church. Everything that happens God governs for his glory and the good of his people.

J. I. Packer in his helpful book "Concise Theology," defines providence this way: providence is God's continued exercise of his almighty power whereby according to his own will he keeps all creatures in being, he keeps everything alive, that's part of his... God is so much bigger than we imagine. It's not that he just comes in every now and then and gets involved in life but the world's just running like a watch, a clock that he wound and made and he leaves it alone. No, God is actually so involved in everything that he's holding everything in existence. As Colossians 1 says "in Christ all things consist," hold together. He's created them and he continues to uphold all things by the word of his power. Well, this doctrine of providence, Packer goes on to say, keeps all creatures in being, involves himself in all events and directs all things to their appointed end. The model is of purposive personal management with total hands-on control. God is completely in charge of his world. His hand may be hidden but his rule is absolute.

That is the doctrine of divine providence, and if you read your Bible carefully, you can come to and obediently and submissively you can come to no other conclusion and this is the mind of the prophets and the apostles. This is the mind of God that he's revealed himself. He is sovereign over everything and it's good that he is. It does create some questions for us and the Psalms, as you read the Psalms sometimes they're asking, "Why, O Lord, why have You allowed this to happen? How long, O Lord?" And God invites that kind of humble questioning when you come to the Lord with a heart that's ready to listen and a knee that's ready to bow, you can pour out your heart to God. "Lord, I don't know why You've allowed this to happen." And suffering can be incredibly difficult and painful. Doesn't make it easy, it's not easy, it's unbearable apart from the grace of God, apart from the sustaining power of the Holy Spirit. Apart from the manifest presence of Christ, it is unbearable but God intends to be with us in the suffering. As I said, "In this world you shall have tribulation but be of good cheer, I've overcome the world."

So this idea of providence he's explaining when he's telling them in verse 6, he says, "In this you greatly rejoice," that is, you have great joy over the fact that God has given you an eternal inheritance. You have an eternal inheritance in heaven. You have that, as he said in verse 4, it's imperishable, undefiled, will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you. You're protected by the power of God. Verse 6, "In this you greatly rejoice." You rejoice in your future inheritance, you rejoice in God's present protection but even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.

This word distressed, you have been distressed by various trials, the idea is you've been made sorrowful, you've been grieved. The other translations, the NIV says you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. The ESV says you have been grieved by various trials. This word distress is a strong word. It does speak of the great inner suffering that

comes from pain. It's not just the pain itself, the difficult circumstances themselves, it's the effect it has on the soul. So with that which is happening outside is wreaking havoc on the inside.

And there's a contrast here. He says you have great joy. Remember, we talked about this in previous weeks, the phrase "in this you greatly rejoice" is a very strong word. It means to delight. It means to exult, to have joy that is intense joy. In these things, these blessings you have intense joy though now for a little while you are distressed, you are made sorrowful with these various trials. But the reason you're made sorrowful and he says, "if necessary." One of the things, and the NIV doesn't translate that phrase "if necessary," and I think it's very important that it be there. It's in the text. For a little while, if necessary. What God is telling you, listen, the reason we suffer is because it's necessary. There's no unnecessary suffering for the Christian. Think about that: if you're suffering there is some necessary reason that you're suffering. Not accidental. And if we have a right attitude toward it and we're to have this dual stance towards suffering. Suffering we're going to see is an opportunity to experience some tremendous blessings of God.

Now I want you to, we're not to be Christians who become masochistic. "Just bring on the suffering, Lord. I want suffering. I want to suffer." I mean, that's crazy, and in reality the wonder of the gospel is that it changes our hearts so that we now see the world at the same time we can see it with a dual stance, we can see death as our greatest enemy and also for the Christian your greatest friend because for the Christian death means the entrance into something far better. That's why Paul could say, "For me to live is Christ, to die is gain. I don't know whether to choose. Should I go on and be with Christ? That's better by far, but I want to choose to stay here for your benefit." You see this dual stance toward death and dual stance towards suffering.

Suffering in itself is evil in that it's harming God's good creation. All suffering, physical suffering, emotional suffering, relational difficulties, these things are all a manner of it you look at it and say it's evil. Yes, it is but God's providential governance of suffering means that whatever evil, whatever Satan means for evil God can use for good. And so the Christian has an ability to hate the cancer diagnosis on the one hand, to hate the ugliness that cancer brings and the decay and the destruction that it brings to the body, we can say that's evil, that's a part of what sin brought in the world, but at the same time as the outer man is experiencing decay, the inner man can be renewed. God can bring something out of it, and this is what's happening in this passage. He's describing a supernatural experience of the presence of Christ, transforming power of the presence of Christ through what God has done in the midst of suffering.

So we're looking at the providence of God and the fact that the Lord does do everything he does for our good and his glory, things that we would never imagine, that we would never want to have happen. The Lord brings them in for his purposes and our good. You know, Isaiah 55, some verses that many of you have heard, probably most of you have heard where Isaiah says, "My ways," God through Isaiah says, "My ways are not your ways, nor are My thoughts your thoughts for as high as the heavens are above the earth,

so are My thoughts above your thoughts and My ways above your ways." The way God does things is so different than how we would do them and the way he does things is perfect.

Now it doesn't appear that way on the front end so often though, does it? We find ourselves perplexed, confused, why is it happening the way it is, but what Peter is describing here is the Lord brings in verse 6, he brings very various trials, that is and the idea of the phrase here "various trials," the word various means variegated, multi-colored, trials, tests. Sometimes this word is translated temptation. When God sends it, it's a trial. When Satan sends it, it's a temptation. The idea is it tests your virtue. It tests your character. God sends it to test it and to prove it genuine. God sends whatever trial he sends to strengthen your faith, not to destroy it. Satan at the same time is trying to destroy your faith when he sends something like that when he's involved. But what Peter is saying what we need to focus on is what God is doing. In fact, that's the beauty of what you see in Scripture. You know, Satan is talked about enough in the Bible to make sure you know that he is real. We have an adversary. Peter's going to end this letter talking about the devil. He's going to say, "You have an adversary, a roaring lion seeking who he may devour. So be aware of him. Be on guard because you have an adversary." But he only talks about, Satan doesn't get a lot of time in the word of God because we don't need to spend our time thinking about him, we need to spend our time thinking about God.

I love this. This is so beautifully illustrated in the book of Job. But thinking about the fact that Satan does not get a lot of airtime in Scripture, he does get enough that you know he's real. Ephesians 6 we're told we're in a spiritual warfare and this world really is a spiritual warfare. If we could see the invisible world, there are principalities and powers at work in everything, and God's angels are all around us and God is at work. If we could see the spiritual world that it is real, but we're not to focus on that because the Scripture keeps our focus on the word of God and on living life and loving him and loving other people and serving other human beings for his glory and telling other human beings the gospel so that they can be delivered from the domain of darkness. And so he does get enough time though in Scripture, God tells us enough about him to know that he is a real adversary and I was saying Job is a great illustration of that. The first two chapters of Job are very interesting. I encourage you to read it again soon. The first two chapters you have Satan appearing before God. Apparently with regularity the sons of God, they're called the sons of God, Satan and his demons appear before the Lord and Satan appears before God and God asked Satan what he's been doing. He's been out roaming up and down on the earth. And God brings up Job. Satan didn't say, "I'd like to go after Job." God says, "Have you considered My servant Job? He fears God and turns away from evil. There's no one like him." Now why does God do that? Because God knows what Satan's going to do next, which Satan's gonna say, "The only reason he fears You is because You have a hedge of protection around everything that he has. If You remove that hedge of protection, let me destroy all of his stuff, he will curse You to Your face." And God says, "Okay." He removes the hedge and he says, "Don't touch him." And Satan then destroys everything Job has. He has the Sabeans and the Chaldeans come in and these bands raid all of his livestock, his camels, his sheep. They take it all away. Satan unleashes somehow a wind and it destroys the house where all of his sons and daughters are having

a meal, they all die. And remember as you read through the rest of that chapter, each calamity that happens, only one servant escapes. Everybody's killed except for one. You know, the Sabeans come in, they take the camels and they kill everybody except one, one guy escapes. And the Chaldeans the same thing. And then the servants that are in the house are killed with the children, with his adult children. One servant escapes so that they all can then come in one after another and say, "Job, listen, this is what happened. We were tending your flocks and the Sabeans came in and they killed everybody and they took all of your flocks. And the same thing happened with the Chaldeans. And the same thing happened with your children. We're all having a feast together in the oldest son's house and this wind came and they all died, all the servants, all your children and I alone have escaped." And so in perfect synchronized timing, Satan has laid it out so that Job finds out he's lost all of his camels, he's lost all of his sheep, he's lost all of his children. All of his wealth, all of his family, boom boom boom boom. And we know because we're seeing behind the veil, because God in his wisdom has given us that view in Scripture, we're seeing what happened, what Job does not know. Job doesn't know how this happened, that Satan was the one involved. Now he's a good enough theologian that he knows it, and by the end of his life he certainly knew it. But this is what Job says, "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." And the author of Job says this, "In this Job did not sin with his mouth or blame God." Job has rightly said what is true, is what the author is saying. It is true the Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Job actually says, "Naked came I from my mother's womb and naked shall I return. I brought nothing into this world. I'm gonna take nothing out. I've got no complaints against God." And Scripture authenticates that's the way you should think about it. When God sovereignly works in your life, you take everything away, you should bless the name of God and acknowledge that you brought nothing to this world, you'll take nothing out, you deserve nothing else. But you see, Satan was involved but where's our focus? Our focus is on what God is doing.

In the second chapter, Satan comes again and guess who brings up Job? Is it Satan? No. God said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? He maintains his integrity though you enticed me against him." And Satan says, "Skin for skin. If You'll let me touch him, his flesh, he'll curse You." And so Satan then afflicts Job with this terrible wasting disease that he has boils all over his body from the top of his head to the bottoms of his feet. He's in such agony, such pain and misery that he sits out on the trash heap scraping himself with shards of ceramic just to bear with the pain and the affliction, the agony. His wife looks at him in his misery and says, "Job, why do you maintain your integrity? Curse God and die." She's saying, "Curse God so that He will kill you because you've got to put yourself out of this misery." And Job says this to his wife. Now, remember Satan's the one that's been doing all the work, "Shall we accept good from the hand of the Lord and not adversity? You speak like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from the hand of Lord, and not adversity? Can he not give us what He wants to give us?" In all these things, Job did not sin with his mouth or blame God, the Scripture says. He got it right. He nailed it. No matter that evil is real, evil is evil, evil is wicked. Satan will be judged for what he did to Job even though God, though you see the foreordination of God? God just brings up Job. God doesn't tempt Job. God doesn't, I mean, God doesn't tempt Job himself. God brings up Job to Satan and Satan does what Satan will do, and

God knows that that's going to happen, and so God's foreordaining that we then would have this glorious picture into the reality of how God works in his universe and we would have a model of how we should respond.

Now Job then from chapter 3 to chapter 37, he struggles a little bit, or 36. He struggles a little bit and then God comes down and straightens him out but the end of Job is far better than the beginning, and that's what the Scripture makes clear. He ends up saying, "I knew about You. I'd heard about You." Now he was a man who feared God, shunned evil, there was no one like him on the face of the earth God said at the beginning. He was a man who knew God. He bears up this tremendous testimony then he struggles for 35 chapters. His friends continue to harass him. He's got Christian friends like you and me sometimes that we don't always do the best job, we're not always instruments in the Redeemer's hands like we're doing on Wednesday night. We tend to be sometimes instruments in the enemy's hands, don't we? We can be when we're not walking in the Spirit, not walking in the word. He had some bad friends and they were believing friends but they were not theologically sound friends and God at the end of the chapter says, "Listen, you guys need to ask Job to pray for you otherwise you're going to be dead meat. I'm going to deal with you because My servant Job has been faithful to Me. You need to ask him to pray for you."

So Job is vindicated at the end and then he ends up with more children than he had before. He has double the children, double the blessings. All of the blessings that God just pours them back on Job. This is to show us that this is one of the first books given in Scripture, the Hebrew is the oldest and the setting seems to be he seems to be contemporary with Abraham, probably about 2000 BC. It's the doctrine of divine providence that runs throughout the Scriptures and if you and I can change the way we see suffering, change the way we see our circumstances, if we began to realign the way we think to the way God thinks everything will change.

The providence of God does five amazing things for us according to this passage and we see this in the key phrase "so that," verse 7, or "in order that." You have been distressed by various trials so that. In the Greek, literally, there's a conjunction that means "in order that." So by purpose that you're suffering is purposeful and productive. You're suffering. When you suffer as a believer, you know that your suffering is purposeful. Job's suffering was purposeful. It was to help him come to know God so that at the end of his life he said, I mean at the end of that suffering when God spoke to him and straightened him out Job said, "Before I had heard about You with my ears, now I've seen You with my eyes and I repent in dust and ashes. I now know You in a way I never knew You before because of my suffering. It's all worth it. It's more than worth what I went through."

So this idea of providence, what are the five blessings that come that we see in this passage? First thing is suffering as a believer when we suffer rightly, God has ordered it, he's done it to give us these five blessings "in order that." These have come in order that, so that your faith will be proved, or you could say suffering proves your faith. This is the first blessing of suffering. Suffering proves your faith. I'm reading the New American Standard, "so that the proof of your faith." The NIV says, "so that the proven genuineness

of your faith." The ESV says "so that the tested genuineness of your faith. These have come so that the tested genuineness of your faith." And he's using a picture and then this, he goes into a parenthesis to talk about this process of proving or testing. The word translated "proof of your faith," the NASB, is a word which means "to test and approve." It means to put something into and the image he's going to use that is perfect for this that Peter himself uses is that of a refiner of metal, of precious metal, that you prove the genuineness of the gold, the fire proves it. You've got fool's gold. Looks like gold, but it's not gold. How do you know the difference? You put it in the fire. True gold emerges from the fire pure, more glorious, more beautiful.

And he's saying that suffering does this to our faith. It proves the genuineness of it. You could say instead of "proves your faith," you could say "purifies your faith." This is the first blessing of suffering for the believer and so it's an opportunity to have my faith strengthened. Do you feel like you need more faith? Don't you often feel that way? I know I do. Do you find yourself praying like the man who said to Jesus, "I believe, help my unbelief"? One of the ways he answers that prayer is by bringing suffering into our lives. "I believe, help my unbelief," and so he brings affliction into our lives and it's prescription affliction. It's made, it's measured out exactly the dose that you need to purify your faith. This is how God works. These are his ways that are not our ways. His thoughts that are not our thoughts. He has a perfect way to deepen the reality of our spiritual well-being.

It purifies our faith. You see how that picture, he paints the picture there in verse 7, "so that the proof of your faith being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire." It's the refiner's fire. They would heat up the metal, skim off the dross. The impurities rise to the surface when you heat metal up and then they would use a skimmer and skim across the top to remove the impurities and now the metal that is in that pot is purer than it was before. Heat it up again, impurities rise, you skim it off, and that metal becomes purer and purer and purer so that 10 karat becomes 14 karat and 18 karat and 24 karat gold. This is what God is doing to our faith. This is what God wants to do to our faith, he wants to prove the genuineness and to prove the beauty of our faith.

If you want more faith you're going to need to suffer. This is why, no, we're not to ask for suffering. As I said, we have a dual stance towards suffering as Christians. We know suffering is evil, that in the new heavens and new earth there will be no suffering, there will be no decay or disease or death. There will be no suffering in the new heavens and new earth but in this world there has to be because sin has wrecked this world and at this present time that God is going to use the suffering to purify our faith. And what this means is, and there's this, there's also this thing going on here if you look at this faith and he talks about in verse 8, "though, you have not seen Him, you love Him, though you do not see Him now but believe in Him." One of the contrasts that the Bible paints again and again is that faith is believing the word of God not what you see with your eyes. The contrast is faith versus sight. Now listen carefully: it's not faith versus reality. Biblical faith is actually the most real thing there is. We believe in the things that are really true, but appearances are not always reality and so the Christian is the one who's learning to see that which is unseen.

As Paul says, in II Corinthians 4 when he talks about our outer man is wasting away, our inner man's being renewed. He says while we look at the things which are eternal, the temporal things are passing away, the eternal things, those are the things we're looking at. The eternal things are unseen. You see them with faith. And so the Christian, we believe the promise of God, we believe that God has saved us, that if you're a Christian, if you've repented of your sins and placed your faith in Jesus, you have been delivered from the domain of darkness, transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved Son, you are marked and set apart for heaven, you have an inheritance in heaven, you're heading there, you have a living hope, but in reality there's nothing that you can see in this world that verifies that. Only the word of God and that is more than enough for the believer. The grass withers, the flower fades but the word of our God stands forever. And faith comes by the hearing of the word of Christ, by the hearing of the word of God. You believe his word, that's faith and in the gift of faith you see that which is unseeable He says, he's saying in verse 8, "though you don't see Jesus, you've not ever seen Jesus with your eyes, you love Him. Though you don't see Him now, you're not seeing Him now, you are believing in Him." You see, you're not seeing but you're believing and what in reality in the believing you come to experience his presence so that you have joy inexpressible, full of glory.

It proves your faith. There's something about suffering that makes you look at the unseen things with a new intensity and focus. When you suffer you see what really matters. In fact, Peter makes this point. Look at chapter 4, verse 1. I told you suffering is one of his key themes and he explains the benefit of suffering, how it purifies us in chapter 4 verse 1. "Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God." Do you see that? You suffer in the flesh you see that sin is not what it's cracked up to be. Satan wraps it up, packages it. He makes adultery look good. He makes homosexuality look good. He makes all these different things look good to each sinner according to their particular tastes. He has a way of packaging sin to you and to me in just the best way possible. But when you suffer in the flesh and you see this world is not your home, this world is a mess, this world is empty, this world is vanity, then sin loses its hold on you.

That's what Peter's saying in chapter 4 verse 1, and that's what he's saying back in chapter 1, verse 7, your faith is proved through the various trials that come. You see, the world is not your home. You long for a better country. That's what's happening with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Hebrews 11. The fact that they had to suffer by living in tents their whole lives, even though God said this land of Canaan is yours but he never gave it to them, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob never possessed the land. God says it's yours, but they still lived in tents. They didn't really own it. "What's going on? Lord, why are you telling us it's ours but we're not owning it?" They suffered the life of a nomad not having a home, not having firm roots so that they then would have eyes of faith and they desired a better country, that is, a heavenly country. God was teaching them, "No, this world is not your home. You don't want Me just to make this world the very best thing that it can be." You and I in our foolishness, that's how we pray far too often. "God, if You'll just make

my life everything I want it to be. I want to, I want to love Jesus but just make my circumstances what I want here." We're trying to put our roots down in this sick, dying world. It's insane. And God uses suffering to remind us, "Wait a minute. No, I don't want to put my roots down here. I'm a stranger, an alien passing through. I want heaven. I want to be where we're in the presence of God enjoying the bounty of all that He's made and everything works the way it's supposed to." No more decay. No more disease. No more dying. No more sorrow. He wipes away every tear from our eyes in heaven.

Faith is being purified, the eyes, the spiritual eyes of our souls are being clarified and focused on heaven and glory. This is the reason we suffer. This is God's good purpose in it. Like I said, suffering is still evil in the sense that there's this dual thing going on. Yes, if you're dealing with a tremendously painful affliction, the reality of that pain every day, something that you naturally draw back from. I was reading in Isaiah this week where Hezekiah's told he's going to die and he pleads with God, he mourns before the Lord and God gives him 15 more years of life. And I was thinking to myself, this is the passage just shows you, hey, though death in many ways is or in the truest sense is entrance into the presence of God, something that we long for and glory in, yet the Lord understands that death, in another sense, is something that is evil, and he gives Hezekiah the blessing of 15 more years of life. And it's fine to want to live longer. It's not sinful. But just don't do it in an inordinate way, such that it makes you stop longing for heaven. Faith is purified through suffering and faith becomes clearer, the eyes, the spiritual eyes of our hearts lay hold of heaven through our suffering.

Let's do one more point this morning and we'll fit the other three next time, Lord willing. It not only proves your faith, it glorifies your Savior. Suffering for believers, we have the opportunity to have our faith purified but also to actively glorify our Savior, that when you in the midst of suffering, when you trust God, when you did do like Job and say, "The Lord gave, the Lord's taken away," that brings glory to Christ.

Look how he shows us this in verse 7, "so 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" Every time that you bear up under suffering and trust God, it adds to the glory that is going to be made known when Jesus comes back. He is glorified more intensely by the faith of believers so you bear up in the midst of suffering, you trust him, you are adding to the glory that will be made known. According to the word of God, it will be made known, it will be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ when Jesus comes back and when that which we can't see becomes that which we can. He makes himself known so that every eye sees him. All of the faith of believers who've held on sometimes by their fingernails trusting God, that faith is going to result in glorious praise to Jesus Christ. So you hanging in there when you don't feel like you can, but you're asking God, "Lord, help me. I need Your Spirit. I need You to help me. Help me hold on. I trust You, Lord. I know Your word." And you cling to his word, that is going to redound in praise and glory and honor to Christ. You are adding to the glory of Christ actively by your obedience. God works through means, even our faith adds to his glory.

So you see, there's such opportunity. Your faith can be purified and you can glorify your Savior. Do you want to magnify Jesus and bless him for what he's done? Trust him in your suffering. Praise him. Thank him. Not for the affliction itself, not for the work of Satan himself, not for the effects of sin itself, not for the disease, not for the evil that we see in the world, not for the wicked deeds that people do. No, but for the fact that God, like Joseph said to his brothers, remember what Joseph said to his brothers? When they came after Jacob had died, they were afraid now he was going to finally get them. "Now that dad's gone, he's not going to protect us anymore. Joseph's going to let us have it. We deserve it." And he said to them, "You meant it for evil but God meant it for good to bring about a great salvation. So I'm not embittered against you because I'm not focused on the evil that is being done, I'm focused on the good that my God is doing." If you focus on the good that your God is doing, you can in everything give thanks for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you, and when you do, your faith is purified and you are adding to the glory of your marvelous Savior. That means you have an opportunity every time, and I have an opportunity every time we suffer to strengthen our faith and to magnify Christ.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we marvel at Your ways and we join with the words of Isaiah and just praising You and delighting in the fact that You are not like us. We would never do things the way You do them because we are foolish, we're of yesterday and we know nothing. You, O Lord, are perfect in wisdom. Everything You do is beautiful, lovely. Your timing is immaculate. Lord, You know exactly how much suffering each of us needs to make us more like Jesus to purify our faith, and You measure it out in love, in wisdom. Your heart is kind, so kindly disposed to us that You support us in the moment. You give us every measure of grace to walk through it. You were there supporting Job. Even though he couldn't see You, You were upholding him. And Lord, You made his testimony something that we're talking about 4,000 years later and how many believers have been encouraged because of what you did in that man's life? Lord, make us more faithful in suffering. Give us strength to bear up. Purify our faith. Make our faith clearer and bolder and stronger. Our trust in Jesus, our faith is that complete dependence upon You and Your promises and Your finished work. It's nothing in us, it's all about You. Deepen our absolute reliance and trust upon Christ and, Lord, and use that to give Him the glory that He so richly deserves. Make us faithful, Lord. We pray in His name. Amen.