

Powerful Pictures for Our Life

Pastor Tim Rech

1 Peter 1:22 – 2:12

Introduction

Is anyone here suffering this evening? If your answer is “no”, then just wait a day or so. Trouble always comes. And it comes in forms common to nearly all people; illness or disability, facing death, loss of a loved one, difficult relationships, time pressures, no work, too much work, war, money, various failures, persecution for our faith from family members, neighbors, and co-workers...the list goes on.

Trouble does not discriminate either. It comes to all races and ages and to Christians and non-Christians alike. For the unbeliever, it offers an opportunity to seek God and be saved or to simply harden them further in their lost condition. For the believer, as 1 Peter tells us, it is an opportunity to test the genuineness of our faith with the result that our maximum praise, glory, and honor will be expressed on that day when Jesus appears – a day when we obtain the outcome of our faith – the salvation of our souls. As the refrain of song we often sing together says, “It was worth it all”.

Trouble for the believer also affords an opportunity for us to demonstrate obedience in the face of our suffering. Progress in obedience then refines our hope which, in most cases, desperately needs refining. God wants our hope today, tomorrow and for the rest of our days to be set fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ when our salvation will be made complete, and not based upon any substitute objects in part or in full.

In our text for this evening, Peter presents several pictures which help us understand what God has done and is doing concerning His people in this life – pictures meant to encourage and to help us persevere through suffering. Pictures to show there is intentionality and purpose in God’s will for us.

A New Birth Imperishable (1:22-25)

The first picture is one of new birth. We read 1:22-25:

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for

*“All flesh is like grass
and all its glory like the flower of grass.
The grass withers,
and the flower falls,
25 but the word of the Lord remains forever.”*

And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

To Love One Another

In verse 22 Peter points out the result of receiving the gospel ("*obedience to the truth*") which purified our souls. Receiving Christ by faith gives us a pure and righteous standing before God. Peter then emphasizes one of the reasons for our being saved – that of receiving a sincere love for the brethren – such a love is characterized by genuine affection and fondness for one another. Is this such a surprise? Receiving the Spirit of God at conversion, why would we not receive His love?

Now having the capacity to love like God does, Peter commands the reader then to do it – love one another earnestly or intensely, a love that reciprocates and takes pleasure in one another. Such a love springs from a pure heart and considers its brother or sister as precious and is willing to continually sacrifice for him or her.

Its Imperishable Quality

Now how are we able to do this? Well, in verse 23 we have been born again to see and order our lives the same way that God does. We are able to love and are compelled to love the brethren. And this will never change - such new birth is settled or permanent because it comes from an imperishable seed *through the living and abiding Word of God*. Peter quotes Isaiah 40:6-10 which contrasts the weakness and brevity of human effort and will. Flesh is like the grass and its flowers – here one day and gone the next – exhibiting some glory for a time but then withering away. This is not the case with the Word of the Lord. Long after we are gone, His Word remains forever.

Verse 25 ends with "*and this is the good news that was preached to you*". Having received the good news of the Word, we have been born again never fading out – imperishable. This is what God's Word does to a man or woman who receives its good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Such a picture of a glorious truth and its command helps us to deal with the difficult situations of life we find ourselves in the here and now. Loving one another is always a remedy for suffering.

You see our natural tendency when suffering is to lose hope, withdraw from others, especially our brothers and sisters in Christ, and look for an escape. Our lives then look like a retreating army; moving backwards and away from the fight, heads down, wounded – every man for himself. And the enemy has won.

But this is not what the gospel calls us to do. In times of suffering, we are to engage even more, loving one another and being loved, and in the process, taking our minds off ourselves. Such loving activity takes our hope off the temporal and fleeting objects of hope in this world and moves it progressively towards "*the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ*" back in 1:13.

And God gives no conditions for persistently loving one another. There is no "if" statement to satisfy before loving other people. Well, if only he or she would reciprocate my love, then I will love them..

Loving people is risky. Sometime their response is hostile and worse yet, they do not even notice or care. But again, we are to love.

We need only to look to Christ for our example. No one faced such hostility like our Lord did. But He perfectly loved in return never wavering.

You might say, “but this will not solve or take away my problem”. You might be right but that is not the point. Problem removal is not the goal of the command. We are to be like Christ. We are to obey the command to love one another.

So do not miss this picture in dealing with suffering – we have been born from imperishable seed. We are here to stay. In the end, nothing can harm us. We are in the hands of and under the providential care of God. What can happen to us? We live a few decades as exiles in this dry and dusty land? – this is nothing compared to an eternity in glory. Or our obedience to God leads to our earthly death? – and we then go to be with the Lord. Either way, in Christ, we win.

And we can love people no matter what difficulty we face.

Is this comforting to you? I hope so. But if not, then maybe you have a way to go in aligning your hope *fully on the grace that will come at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

A Newborn Infant (2:1-3)

Now we are not only born again by the Word of God, the good news, but we grow by the Word. Picking up in 2:1 we read:

2 So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. 2 Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation— 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Given the love we possess through our new birth and are commanded to express towards one another, we are to put away the expressions of the old life before our conversion. You know, those things like deep seated hatred for people (malice), being crafty manipulators (deceivers), acting like we are something we are not (hypocrites), wanting in our hearts what others have (envy), and also misrepresenting people to others (slander). Now these things have already been put away from us positionally in Christ. However, in practice old habits and responses die hard. We are weak people and these things arise from time-to-time. However, this evil behavior cannot be the constant characteristics of your day-to-day life – not when you possess the Spirit of God. If they do, then you may need to meditate back on 1:22-23.

These attitudes and responses to difficult life situations often arise when we suffer. But to help us, Peter gives us another picture in 2:2 – that of a newborn infant. Now unlike other places in Scripture, Peter is not referring to Christian immaturity here. Rather he is pointing us to an intense yearning for the Word of God, spiritual milk, just like an infant’s continuous longing for physical milk.

Babies need regular nourishment for two reasons; to maintain strength and to grow. They need their strength to ward off the harmful things that threaten their life in those early months. And they need to grow so they can become something. No one wants to see an infant remain an infant. Baby’s milk must be regular also – cannot miss a meal. But do not worry, they will let you know when they are hungry. They love their milk and long (and cry for it) when needed.

And so we need regular milk as well – spiritual milk. In facing day-to-day life and the troubles and temptations that come with it (as well as the blessings), we need to be strengthened by this milk, the

Word of God. It is our source for spiritual life. Feeding on a steady diet of the Word from Sunday preaching and teaching to Wednesday flocks to our personal reading and study of the Word is critical to maintaining our spiritual strength.

When we deny ourselves of a regular intake of God's Word, we become fatigued, unable to respond biblically to our troubles and to resist temptation, and less apt to obey – we are vulnerable. When we starve ourselves of the Word, life becomes darker and seems to be closing in on us. And it is a downward spiral, the less we receive of the Word, the more our life seems to come apart which often leads us to retreat further from God and from His people. Our witness begins to falter, we become more friendly with the world, and we find ourselves in predicaments where we say, "what happened – how did I get here?"

Furthermore, by not taking in the Word of God, we will not grow in our obedience. And obedience during difficult times gives us hope. This is serious because as we get older, troubles seem only to multiply. If not growing spiritually, we are susceptible to what lies ahead.

Note that in verse 3, Peter tells us this should not be a problem though; *"3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good* – The Lord's goodness being His kind, loving, and benevolent posture toward His people. Peter references Psalm 34:8 where David writes in the midst of much danger from his enemies:

*8 Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!
Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!
9 Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints,
for those who fear him have no lack!
10 The young lions suffer want and hunger;
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.*

The Lord's goodness as expressed in His Word and through His people is a place to take refuge and where we will lack no good thing even in the hard things of life.

So having tasted or experienced the Lord, our desiring of the Word ought always be present. And this is where the analogy of the infant continues to hold up. Infants do not have to be reminded to take milk – they naturally desire it. Such is the case with born again believers – they should naturally long to take in the Word regularly. Our desire should typically be high. The primary purpose of our gatherings is to hear the Word. We are Word centered in all of our public gatherings and this should translate to our one-on-one relationships as well. Do you speak Scripture or its content to yourself and to one another?

Our ability to go through hard things is often proportionate to our staying close to the Lord through His Word. Seek Him, fear Him, and take refuge in His Word at all times. It is critical to navigating our trials in a way that imitates Christ and pleases God.

A Spiritual House (2:4-8)

Peter then switches to another helpful picture. We read 2:4-8:

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it stands in Scripture:

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

7 So the honor is for you who believe, but for those who do not believe,

*“The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone,”[a]*

8 and

*“A stone of stumbling,
and a rock of offense.”*

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Its Living Stones

This picture gives us perspective in our suffering. God’s people are incorporated into a building process. Peter likens us to living stones who continually come to Christ who is also a living stone – the living stone who was rejected by men. Men, after testing Him, found Jesus Christ not to meet their specifications and therefore rejected Him. He did not match the qualities of the god of their imagination. They said in effect “we do not want a humble and suffering servant God who died on a cross – one who by His words and witness makes us feel uncomfortable. We want power and we want some stuff! Crucify Him!”.

So Jesus Christ, a living stone was rejected by men but in God’s eyes was chosen, precious, and highly honored according to verse 4. And so we also as living stones continually come to Him after our conversion. This continuous action refers to our daily relationship with Christ. We come to Christ regularly as we intake and apply His Word, as we pray, and as we fellowship and serve together as a community of believers. In this process we are being built up together as living stones into a spiritual house to be a “set apart” priesthood to offer up to God’s altar spiritual sacrifices. It is a divinely approved building project.

And these sacrifices are acceptable to God. Why? Because they are offered through Jesus Christ – the only path by which sacrifices are acceptable to God.

Peter proves this by citing Isaiah 28:16:

*“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious,
and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”*

Its Cornerstone

It turns out that the living stone of Jesus Christ is no ordinary stone. But He is the cornerstone of this spiritual house. For those of you who build buildings you will understand the significance as it relates to a structure. Isaiah and Peter knew their audience could relate to this concept. The cornerstone is the first stone set when constructing a masonry building. It is the critical stone since all other stones are set referencing the cornerstone therefore the entire structure's position is determined by it. Jesus Christ, chosen and precious to God, is the reference point of the spiritual house we are being built into.

Look at the last phrase of 2:6, "*and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame*". The whoever is us and all those who rest their faith upon Christ. We will not be put to shame – we will positively not be disappointed.

It gets better. Verse 7 tells us by believing the good news of Jesus Christ we too are precious and honored in the sight of God. We share in God's approval as we are identified with Christ share in His sufferings. We are rejected by men just as they reject Christ yet are chosen by God. It goes without saying that God's approval far supersedes that of men.

Such is not the case "*for those who do not believe*" in verse 7. Peter goes to Psalm 118:22 and Isaiah 8:14 to show how it was foretold how unbelievers would examine and reject the Christ, the cornerstone. Rather than believe and submit to Him, they would trip over the cornerstone and be offended by Him. They stumble because they were disobeyed God's Word. They were appointed to disobedience.

But do you see what God is doing in time with His people; continually building them into a spiritual house as they walk with Christ? And this building project is being done in the face of hard things and even rejection for our faith which is no different than what Christ faced. Even though it is difficult for a time, we can and will endure. We who believe have a sure hope that will not disappoint.

A Divine Display (2:9-12)

Peter continues with a final picture ; a people brought from darkness into the light in order to proclaim God and then to model Him before the world. We read 2:9-12...

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

11 Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. 12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Verse 9 begins with "But" to contrast God's people from unbelievers. Believers are special in God's eyes and have a new identity. They are a chosen race – a race not defined by nationality or skin color but by the fact they received Jesus Christ through faith given to them by God. In view of the emphasis on racial divide in our land, oh, how much the church can look biblically radical. God's people are king-priests offering spiritual sacrifices as we considered earlier in this passage. God's people are a holy nation made up of set apart people to be holy like Him in character. They are a people set apart for God and God alone.

In Proclamation

Such a choosing by God is intentional and has purpose. First, His people are to proclaim everywhere God's excellent attributes and deeds which were to bring us out of our former darkness and into participating in the light – His marvelous light. Formerly we were not a people (*sheep without a shepherd*) having not yet been given mercy. But this has all changed. Those who believe have become objects of mercy and are part of a new people – God's people. There is much for us to proclaim. Yes, even while suffering.

In Manner of Life

Peter then tells believers, those loved by God, to live according to such a lofty identity. As we live as aliens and exiles alongside those who are unsaved, we are to constantly restrain ourselves from the passions or cravings of our sin nature. Such passions are like an ever present army making war against our souls – we must be vigilant and hold them back.

Rather keep your manner of life honorable among the unsaved, Peter writes. Through the consistent goodness of our deeds, we are to represent God well. So when unbelieving opposition comes in the form of slander and other criticism (equating being a Christian with an evildoer), they will see your good and beautiful deeds.

You see, the unsaved are watching Christians very closely. It may not seem like it, but they do not miss anything. They are constantly, carefully, and attentively watching. They are looking for any sign of inconsistency between a believer's walk and talk – especially when the Christian undergoes suffering – perhaps identical suffering to what they are experiencing. They say in their hearts, "How will he or she handle this?"

Now most are waiting to pounce on any failure or perceived failure they see as an excuse to dismiss Jesus Christ and their utter need for Him altogether. And often they will tell everyone saying, "See, I told you."

But others are on a divinely ordained search asking questions concerning Christ and the good deeds of His people like, "*Could it be so?*" It could very well be that God is using you and the quality of your godly life to draw and save them. The last phrase of verse 12 says that "*they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation*". Perhaps God is visiting the lost sinner and saving them by His grace and adding him or her to His holy nation – another living stone. If so, that person will glorify God and thank Him for your faithful witness especially if they treated you badly in doing so.

Application

In suffering:

Do you love the brethren and people in general in self-sacrificial ways?

Are you a person immersed in the Word? Do you long for it? Have you tasted that the Lord is good?

Do you see yourself as part of the building project to build a spiritual house? Do you see the glory of it?

What are you proclaiming and displaying to this world?

Could it be that we have much more capacity to suffer for Christ and the gospel than we have been willing to endure so far in life? – look at Jesus

Persevering in obedience and faith while suffering fills us with hope. May these pictures instruct and encourage us as we walk before our God in this life.

All Scriptures referenced from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version. ESV® Text Edition: 2016. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.