

GREATER THAN GOLD

SERIES: BELOVED EXILES: STUDIES IN 1 PETER



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1 Peter 1:6-25
2nd Message
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Abraham, the father of all who have faith, was a Bedouin. He lived in a tent, in the Promised Land, looking forward to the "...city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:10b)

Having already considered 1 Peter 1:1-5 (message 091011), we return to our studies in 1 Peter, a book written for Bedouins—chosen people who are scattered abroad, known by God, and yet strangers in the world. We are those who are born anew in Jesus' resurrection and called to live in a particular place in a world that is waiting to be made new.

Children need to learn the concepts of time and space. Initially an infant lives in a world in which all time is 'now' and all space is 'here.' Regarding time, development can be measured by the ability to imagine the future and defer gratification—"You can have one cookie now, but if you wait five minutes you can have two." Conceiving of an unseen world yet to come is an important skill to learn.

Similarly, an infant is comforted by the presence of his mother when being held, yet unhappy when put down. Eventually the child learns to trust that a loving mother does not cease to exist when she is in another room, when she cannot be seen or touched.

Time and space are challenges of faith for adults as well. Will we defer gratification offered by the world because we are convinced of blessings guaranteed by God in our future? Can we love and trust a Savior whom we cannot see?

1 Peter 1:6-7

‘In this you greatly rejoice,

The 'this' refers to instruction we find in verses 1-5. We are chosen by God, sanctified by the Spirit, born anew in Jesus' resurrection, and given an inheritance that cannot ever fail.

‘In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which

perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

The description here is not of persecution, in particular, but common human struggles that everybody goes through. They are heavy, grievous trials that don't pass quickly: lasting bouts with depression; mountainous financial responsibilities; a spouse dying of an incurable disease; caustic parents; self-defeating patterns in relationships; or perhaps an out-of-control child. These struggles occur to believers and unbelievers alike.

This letter has much to say about suffering in the Christian life; two points are made in these verses: 1) trials are temporary and do not rob the joy inherent in the gospel; and 2) trials have a purpose.

Pain and confusion do not revoke greater truths. Suffering does not herald the triumph of evil. We must be honest about our hurt, even wrestle with God, acknowledging what we don't understand. But even so, hallelujahs are not cancelled. Our joy is rooted in eternity. Grievous trials will come to an end.

Christian community is central in remembering to "...rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." (1 Peter 1:6) When the darkness is deepest, another can pray for us, stand with us, and sing the song our voice can't utter. Our companions can speak against the word of the deceiver who will claim that God cannot be trusted. Trials come to an end even if they last a lifetime. Our secure hope lies in the world to come. Like the child who gets two cookies, we are wise to anticipate by faith the gifts God has promised.

In discussing the purpose of suffering, Peter uses the metaphor of a refining fire. The distress of great heat removes impurities letting the beauty of the purified gold remain. Suffering can have a similar effect on us—detaching us from ideas and indulgences that are harmful.

How does suffering as a refining fire work? We need to discover our limits and inadequacies. If we can make our

lives work in our own strength and take credit for good outcomes, God will always remain on the periphery. But, when we are overwhelmed and cry to heaven for help, we discover the love and power of God. He becomes greater and we are less impressed with ourselves. Our suffering deepens appreciation for Jesus' suffering on our behalf. Like gold, we are made less self absorbed and more beautiful by great heat. Those who withdraw from hard assignments rather than reach upward for help never grow to maturity.

1 Peter 1:8-9

⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Verses 6-7 highlight the call to believe in future realities; believe in rewards that will come, though not yet. Verses 8-9 regard present realities we cannot see—like the infant who grows to trust the love of a mother who is not in the same room.

1 Peter 1:8

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

I offered my life to Christ when I was a sophomore in high school at a weekend Young Life camp. I had almost no previous exposure to the Bible or the core ideas of the faith. For the first time I heard the message of the cross, and the profound love of the Son of God who died for me. I felt certain that I would never be an adequate follower of Jesus, but was caught by the power of his sacrificial love for me.

It took time for me to discover that this new relationship had changed me. Not only was I grateful that Jesus loved me, but I became aware that I loved him. I knew, that though I struggled with selfishness in hundreds of ways at the deepest level, I wanted to please God with my life. The familiar lyric made sense to me, "I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today."¹ Peter had seen Jesus and loved him. He was delighted to write to believers who had not seen, and do not now see Jesus, and yet loved him at the core of their being.

The Christian church is weak, shallow, and conflicted in many ways. But I believe that Peter's words in 1:8 are our surest hope. Divided by generational differences, geography, language, politics, modes of worship, and even points of theology—what brings periods of renewal now (and one day will renew us forever) is the discovery that a different sort of Christian has the same love for Jesus that I know in myself. "You believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy." (1 Peter 1:8b)

We should also expect that love for Jesus may precede a conscious change in our self description. There are a growing number of people worldwide, raised in Muslim cultures and living with the habits of Islam, who love Jesus. These folks don't call themselves Christians, yet know that they are followers of Jesus. The same is true of Jews, secular humanists, and many others. This phenomenon, of love preceding understanding, has occurred historically. I expect we will see beautiful plants grow from these seeds that are being sown around the world.

1 Peter 1:10-12

¹⁰Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹²It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Peter heard Jesus say to Thomas, "Because you have seen me you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:29) Peter's readers (including us) are the recipients of this blessing. The divinely inspired prophets wrote of things they would never see and could not understand. Angels love God, surely, but they do not experience salvation from sin and the indwelling of the Spirit. They continually behold Him and yet will never know that which fills our hearts. If you love Jesus at the deepest level of your heart, you are a wonder to behold—receiving a gift that the apostles and prophets and angels miss out on.

Infants have to learn the concepts of time and space.

Faith has to wrestle with these as well. We know there is purpose in suffering, and we joyfully lay hold of the future even amid serious hardship in the present. Like a child whose mother is in another room, we love the One who is fully present, but unseen.

I want to conclude by just reading the final verses of Chapter 1. The mysteries of faith call us to 'live our lives' with awareness (v.17), 'prepared for action' (v.13), and committed to 'love one another from the heart' (v.22).

1 Peter 1:13-25

¹³Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. ¹⁴As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

¹⁷Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. ¹⁸For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. ²⁰He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. ²¹Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

²²Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. ²³For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. ²⁴For,

**"All men are like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of
the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall,**

**²⁵but the word of the Lord stands for
ever."**

And this is the word that was preached to you.

We love the One whom we can't see, and realize we have been transformed by that love. We become obedient from the heart and bring honor to the Lord. May our experience fascinate the angels who look on, as well as those in our lives who do not yet believe.

NOTES:

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