



Catalog No. 761

1 Peter 1:1-2

First Message

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JOY WRAPPED IN TEARS

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

A month ago today I was sitting with some friends on a beautiful hillside in Eastern Europe. My heart was filled with joy as I anticipated a reunion with other friends I had not seen in a year. As they came up over the hill, I went bounding toward them to greet them with a hug. My jubilation was checked, however, when I looked into their eyes. I could tell their hearts were broken. The very first words that came out of our translator's mouth to us in English were, "He is dead." He was referring to their spiritual leader who had died one month earlier. It would be hard to describe fully the impact this one man has had upon the Christians in that nation. He was imprisoned for 16 years for his faith. He saw an entire generation of people killed for Christ. While he was in prison he composed 10,000 poems of love and appreciation to Jesus Christ. These poems were smuggled out of the country and published, and became the hymnal for this denomination. Now there are some 300,000 to 500,000 Christians singing the hymns which this man composed.

Last year, when I met him, I realized I had never in my life encountered a more weighty individual. When I was in his presence I felt like dust on the scale compared to the weight of his glory. When we met, he looked me right in the eye and said, "You teach about the cross, but we live under the cross." Then, with tears coming from his eyes, he prayed for me. Though I could not understand what he was saying I knew what he was praying for. I could see it in his eyes. He was praying that I would experience the sweetness of Christ that he had enjoyed through suffering. Ten thousand people attended his funeral. More would have come but the police put a stop to it. Then they used the opportunity provided by his death to turn up the persecution on this denomination. Later that week we found out how hot the persecution was going to get. The police came four times to where we were and we had to escape into the forest.

After I had met these leaders and saw their brokenness, I went down by the river with one of our ministry team. She was deeply concerned about the whole situation. She said to me, "How can we speak a word of relevance to these people. They are broken. Their spirits are crushed. What can we say?" We knelt and prayed together, asking God to give us a word from heaven. As we prayed, the Lord turned the light on in my heart and brought me back to the whole year of study which we had undertaken in preparing the book of 1 Peter. As I thought about this book, it dawned on me that the context of this letter was exactly the same circumstances these people were facing.

When Peter wrote this book in the early '60's A.D., he was nearing the end of his life. He was writing as a father to a very weak and scattered church at a time when its leaders were ready to die. Who would fill their shoes? No more would these men who walked with Jesus at the Sea of Galilee, who saw him walk on water, who saw him feed the 5,000, who saw him heal the blind and the lame, be able to share their experiences. Most important of all, they had seen him crucified, and then they witnessed his resurrected life and were commissioned by him. No more would they be there to tell of these marvelous things.

Secondly, the church which the apostles were leaving behind was not highly organized. There was no great central bureaucracy, no monu-

ments, no money, no wealth. Rather, the church was a very loosely organized, decentralized group of small house churches that were weak and insignificant in comparison to the world.

Third, times were going to get worse as far as the government was concerned. Up to this time, Christianity in the Roman Empire was sheltered under the umbrella of legality, as the government treated it as a sect within Judaism. Judaism was a legal religion, so Christianity was considered legal. But then something changed. As Christianity spread, it began to attack the idolatry of the Roman system. In the Greco-Roman world, practically everything one did for a living was somehow associated with idolatry. When Christianity began to attack idolatry, as in the story in the book of Acts when the silversmith Demetrius charged that Paul and Silas were undermining his business, there was a backlash: "Men, you know that our prosperity depends on this business. This Paul has persuaded and turned away a considerable number of people, saying that gods made with hands are no gods at all. And not only is there danger that this trade of ours falls into disrepute, but also that the temple of the great goddess Artemis be regarded as worthless..." (Acts 19:25-27).

Roman law held that every man had the right to engage in business without interference. Christianity was now in trouble because it was undermining the economy. Christians were to be charged with "teaching customs which it is not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans." This cause of hostility would be universally operative.

When Nero became emperor in A.D. 64, Christians were so unpopular that Nero could successfully make them the scapegoat for the great fire which destroyed most of Rome. In order to divert suspicion that he had done it for his own entertainment, Nero accused the Christians, and the public was willing to believe the worst. The historian Tacitus knew that the charges were false, but he reveals how easily the public was willing to blame the Christians. Here is what he wrote:

Therefore, to scotch the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled as Christians. Christus, from whom they got their name, had been executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor; and the pernicious superstition was checked for a short time, only to break out afresh, not only in Judaea, the home of the plague, but in Rome itself, where all the horrible and shameful things in the world collect and find a home.

First, those who confessed themselves Christians were arrested; next, on their disclosures, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much on the charge of arson as for hatred of the human race. And their death was made a matter of sport: they were covered in wild beasts' skin and torn to pieces by dogs; or were fastened to crosses and set on fire in order to serve as torches by night when daylight failed. Nero had offered his garden for the spectacle and gave an exhibition in his circus, mingling with the crowd in the guise of a charioteer or mounted on his chariot. (F.F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*)

A change had occurred. No longer was Christianity a legal religion. It was not like Judaism, a religion of a nation, but, as one commentator says, “it was of the off-scourings of society” (F. F. Bruce).

This was where these Christians to whom Peter was writing found themselves. Their leaders were about to die. The church was highly unorganized and decentralized. They had no money. Persecution was going to flare up. What would Peter say to them? What words of advice could he give to these wounded people about how to have an influence in their society? What he says is very interesting, as a matter of fact. In the first two verses of the book he tells them who they are; he tells them about their identity. As Christians, they had a two-fold identity. If you understand that, you have the key to influence in the world regardless of what is happening around you. Identity is the most important thing. It's from this that everything else follows.

Listen to what Peter writes in these first two verses.

I. Our Relationship to the World: Scattered Aliens

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ to those who reside as aliens, scattered through Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood. May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure. (1 Pet 1:1-2 NASB)

Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, and Bithynia were provinces in Asia Minor, located between the Taurus Mountains and the Black Sea. It is likely that Peter ministered in this area after his departure from Jerusalem.

What he says here in these two verses could be more accurately translated by the Greek text: “To the elect sojourners of the dispersion (the diaspora).” *Sojourner* and *diaspora* are very significant terms. These words, which come right out of the Hebrew scriptures, are the key to our identity in the world. The prophets Micah, Isaiah and others wrote that after the Messiah came, God would take this tiny remnant of Jewish believers and scatter them among the nations. Micah (5:7-9) tells us that the remnant of Jacob, as it is among these peoples, would be “like dew,” bringing life, freshness and salvation. And, further, the remnant would be “like a lion.” It would be given strength to overcome its enemies.

What this is telling us is that God's method of salvation for the world is to take believers and scatter them everywhere. That is why the apostles did not create a strongly centralized church that could be seen by the world. Rather, Christians were scattered everywhere, in every segment of society—slaves, freemen, rich and poor. I believe the church loses its influence when it clusters together, setting a high profile and attacking the world. That is not the way to influence. The method is to be, in Jesus' words, “in the world but not of the world.” This is what Peter is telling his readers. He is saying, “Though you are scattered, be encouraged. You are part of God's method of salvation to the nations.”

Then he says, “While you are in the world you reside there as sojourners or aliens.” Again, this comes from the Old Testament, right out of the patriarchs. When Abraham was in the Land of Promise, he went to the sons of Heth to buy a grave for his wife, saying to them, “I am a stranger and sojourner among you.” He was declaring that there was no place on earth he could call his home. He had a sense of alienation while he was on earth.

Do you feel that way when you go to work every morning? When your children go off to school, do you feel a sense of alienation, that everything is temporary?

One of the classic expressions of this sense of alienation is found in Psalm 120, when the pilgrims in exile from Jerusalem express the alienation they feel in the world. One of them writes:

**Woe is me! For I sojourn in Meshech,
For I dwell in tents of Kedar
Too long has my soul had its dwelling
With those who hate peace,
I am for peace, and thus I speak;
But they are for war. (Ps 120:5-7)**

You arrive at work, or at school in the morning, seeking peace and harmony in relationships, but out of everyone's mouth comes hatred, enmity and strife. You feel alienated. But that is our relationship with the world. We are aliens, we are sojourners. This place is temporary.

Let me give you three important implications of this truth. First, I would say that we experience no permanent or abiding contentment in this life. Nothing in this life is permanent, whether it be a relationship, a job, a home, whatever. God is calling us to be pilgrims. When you enter into relationship with Christ, the first thing he asks you to do is to leave your earthly home and journey by slow stages through many dangers to your heavenly Zion. “Is there no joy?” you ask. Yes, there is joy, but, as one commentator says, “We taste the joy, but only as the wanderer drinks of the brook by the way.”

To symbolize this sense of transitoriness, the patriarchs had a symbol. They lived in tents. Whenever you meet Abraham in the Old Testament as a patriarch, even in the Land of Promise, he dwells in a tent. Tents symbolize that life is transitory. They offer mobility and freedom.

Here is what the writer of Hebrews says about Abraham:

By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow-heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which had foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Heb 11:9-10)

And with every tent comes a number of tent stakes. God designed life so that we pull up our stakes one by one and become more and more free on our journey to Zion.

The first stake I pulled up as a young man was when I went away to college. I felt alienated when I came up here to Stanford and found a whole university in turmoil and an anti-God sentiment among the faculty. I felt like an alien leaving home. For many, the next stake that is pulled up and discarded is when God calls us into marriage and we leave our mother and father for good. You are no longer under their headship. You journey off into a new adventure. Next, you may have to leave familiar territory and relocate to a new geographical area. God calls you to live somewhere else that is foreign and alien to you, so you move. Next, your parents die and you pick up those stakes. Then your children grow up and leave. That stake is pulled up. Finally, and most painful of all, your spouse dies and you're left alone in your tent. At last you die. You take down your tent and go home. You could say that life is a series of pulling up stakes. We find no permanent abiding possession here at all. But the place you are going to is permanent.

The second thing I would say is that if you drive your stakes too deep, and allow your roots to go too deep, it will cost you dearly. This is what happened on occasion with the patriarchs. In their narratives at times there is no mention of tents. That is because their roots were going too deep. There is no tent mentioned when Abraham went to Egypt. There is no tent mentioned when Jacob went to Shechem. He was told to journey to Bethel to meet God there, but instead he stopped in Shechem and put his roots down deep. But in the next chapter we find that his daughter was raped. His sons take on all the characteristics of the world and even abuse the holy symbol of circumcision as a means

to murder all the male inhabitants of a city. Jacob becomes odious to the Canaanites because he had allowed his roots to go too deep.

The third thing I would say is, do not oppose being scattered in the world. Be willing to venture forth to new arenas, to meet new unbelievers. We are living in an age of great opportunity. Everyone is talking about this sense of alienation. Everyone is looking for a home. Thousands are leaving East Germany. Thousands of Chinese are leaving mainland China and Hong Kong and coming here. They feel alienated. They are seeking a home. Look at all the so-called latch-key children who feel alienated in their own homes. Many couples in this church are being asked to go to other countries for a time on business. This is very exciting to me. Learn to be a pilgrim. Pick up your roots. Travel with God.

Elizabeth Singer Rowe expresses this very beautifully in her work "Devout Exercises of the Heart":

I am but a stranger and a pilgrim here,
In these wild regions, wandering and forlorn,
Restless and sighing for my native home.
Longing to reach my weary space of life,
And to fulfill my task. O haste the hour
Of joy and sweet repose! transporting hope!

That is our relationship with the world. We are scattered in the midst of it, but we feel alienated in it.

II. Our Relationship to God: Elect

Peter goes on to say that Christians have another relationship—our relationship with God. He tells these believers, "Though you sense alienation in the world, to God you are the elect, you are the chosen, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood."

The two great pillars of Israel's faith that set her apart from the Canaanite religion were monotheism and election. In other words, there was one God and Israel was his people. This is reiterated over and over again in the Jewish faith. In the words of the famous *Shema*, from Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" There is one God, and Israel is his people. Now the glorious truth is this, that through Jesus the Messiah, Gentiles like you and me are grafted into the people of God and called elect as well. What a privilege! Therefore, as we make our journey through this alien world, the whole point of pulling up the stakes is that you get to know this God who loves you and has elected you. While the symbol of the sojourner in the Old Testament was the tent, the symbol of knowing God was the altar. When God revealed himself to the patriarchs in the Old Testament, and showed his grace to them, they would build an altar of stones in appreciation. There they offered sacrifice and prayed to God, and also used the altar as memorial to preach and witness. So there were two symbols: the tent and the altar--aliens in the world, but loved of God.

A. The Source of Our Election: The Father

"To the elect, according to the foreknowledge of the Father." At times when people hear the doctrine of election, many feel a sense of revulsion. They think of God as randomly sorting people, like a computer--the elect and the damned. They feel that all of life is determined, and this results in a fatalistic view of things. This world view is destructive to relationships. But that is not what election means. I would rather replace it with the word love. This is what happens in a marriage. Out of all the women in the world a man selects one he wants to be intimate with. Election does not destroy relationships, it enhances them.

Peter tells us here that our election involves all three persons of the Trinity, the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit. In fact, the word used in the Old Testament to describe election is the word "to know intimately." God told Israel and Amos, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). Hosea says, "It was I who knew you in the wilderness" (Hosea 13:5). If you asked him what is the basis of election, Peter would say, "We were the elect according to the foreknowledge of God." That means that before history began God knew you and everything about you. He chose to have an intimate relationship with you despite you. Before time began he wrote your name in the book of life. David writes in Psalm 139:

Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance;
And in Thy book they were all written,
The days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was not one of them.
How precious also are Thy thoughts to me, O God!
How vast is the sum of them! (Ps 139:16-17)

What amazes David is not that God knows everything, but that God knows him intimately and wants to have a love relationship with him.

Peter experienced this in a dramatic way in his own life. Before the day of Pentecost, he denied Jesus and discovered what a wretch he was in his own arrogant strength. After the resurrection he went fishing again for the umpteenth time, contrary to the Lord's command to fish for men. Jesus appeared to him and told him to cast his net on the other side of the boat. He caught so many fish the net began to break. It began to dawn on Peter, "This is a rerun. We've been here before." He's caught again. This is after the resurrection, after he has denied the Lord. So Peter swims to shore and gets out dripping with shame. Imagine how you would feel if you were the apostle. You had just denied three times that you even knew Jesus. Even after God had vindicated him, now you've failed again. But rather than a word of rebuke, Jesus prepared breakfast for Peter. All he says to him is, "Do you love me?" The only answer Peter can come up with is, "You know me pretty well. I can't say I love you like ought to, but I love you like a friend." Jesus says to him, "Today you're a pastor." That's what this love does to us. The love of the Father is so great that although he knows all about us, what wretches we are, he loves us anyway. He wants to be intimate with us. He believes in us and wants to use us.

B. The Means of Our Election: The Holy Spirit

Then Peter gives the means of our election: "By the sanctification of the Spirit," he declares. The apostle understood what he was like before the Day of Pentecost. He saw God in Jesus. He knew about God's love. He saw the power, but it couldn't change his heart. But after the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit comes without measure and puts the love of God in his heart, he no longer knows about God; he knows God. After Pentecost, instead of being outside the courtroom when Jesus was condemned, Peter is inside the courtroom, talking to the same crowd that crucified Jesus Christ. He puts them on trial. "I'm not on trial here today," says Peter, "you are. We have a heavenly court going on here. You denied the power of Jesus Christ. God raised him from the dead. He is the judge, not you." That's some transformation. The Holy Spirit had come into his heart.

Some of you may be between those two stages. Perhaps some of you teenagers are here because your parents brought you. You know all about God but you've never entered into this experience of the Holy Spirit coming into your life and putting the love of God in your heart. But that is what it's all about. We are elected by the foreknowledge of the Father, and it is the Holy Spirit who makes our election real in our hearts.

C. The Purpose of Our Election: Grateful Obedience

What is the purpose of our election. Peter says, “to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood.” Notice what it doesn’t say. It doesn’t say that we might obey the law. Parents know the difference. Your children can obey to the letter of the rule but still be angry with you. In a relationship with Jesus Christ we don’t serve God out of duty. If you are here today out of duty, then you do not know God. The Christian who has the Holy Spirit poured out in his heart wakes up every morning and knows that he can come to Jesus Christ no matter what he has done the day before, the night before, the moment before; he can be cleansed by that blood and given new life. He is so touched by appreciation for what Christ has done he wants to please him from the heart, to please the Person who walks with him every day. That is so much higher than duty and law. That is the new covenant.

This is illustrated the book of Deuteronomy. At the end of his sixth year in service, a Hebrew slave was to be set free. His labor was over, his duty was done. But the slave could say, “No, I don’t want to go free. I love my master! I want to serve him for life.” The master would then take the slave and place his earlobe against a doorpost and drive an awl through it. Then he would place an ear-ring in his ear. In the Old Testament, the ear is the symbol of obedience, so what that ear-ring symbolized was that the slave was serving his master because he loved him. That is what a Christian does. And that is what our election is all about. You are elected by the foreknowledge of the Father who loves you. The Holy Spirit sets you apart and communicates that love to your heart. Then he writes the Ten Commandments in the spirit of your heart. That is your identity. You hunger to obey Jesus Christ out of love and appreciation.

III. The Result of Our Two-Fold Identity

Peter ends by telling us the result of that two-fold identity. He says to these Christians, “May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.” As we live in the world we have these two relationships: an alien world and a loving God. This creates a tension. Peter says that the tension between the two, the sense of alienation and love, hatred and hostility, rather than being a threat to your soul actually enhances God’s grace in the soul. This is what David expresses in Psalm 58. Here is what he wrote when he was a wanderer, an aimless fugitive fleeing from Saul,

**Thou hast taken account of my wanderings,
Put my tears in Thy bottle,
Are they not in Thy book? (Ps 56:8)**

David says that in the world he is restless, and filled with melancholy, but that pain gives birth to trust. That is why I have entitled this message, “Joy (In This Life Is Always) Wrapped In Tears.”

A brother shared with me on our trip that he had been dating a girl who really impressed him. I asked him what impressed him about her. “Her beauty,” he told me. It wasn’t a physical beauty, he said, but her spirit that was beautiful. When I asked what made her this way, he told me that as she was growing up she was emotionally abused by her father. She suffered a tremendous amount of verbal and physical abuse. As early as high school she decided that her father really could not be a father, and that she was going to have to get a father if she was going to be healthy. That was when she decided to make the Heavenly Father her father in practical ways. When she had emotional and physical needs, she would pray to him. She began to write poetry to God. Over the years this produced in her the most beautiful spirit. Joy wrapped in tears.

I discovered that this is what happened to us in Eastern Europe. Our love for these people was intensified, being birthed in the midst of persecution. The police were hounding us. We had to stand guard every time we met together. Toward the end of the week as we taught I Peter and the love relationships began to build, it became obvious to us that we couldn’t leave the campground (it is illegal for citizens to have dealings with foreigners) with these people because the police had put a roadblock at the end of the highway, checking every car that went out. Our host wanted to have a dinner and reception for us at his house, and although he had planned a wonderful party of appreciation and love, I had to look him in the eye and say, “David, we can’t go back with you. We’ve got to leave now. We have to pretend we don’t even know you.” We began to share our gifts with them, and the leader took me aside and said, “This is like the time when our friends escaped from prison and the police were watching us. The escapees came to our house but we couldn’t talk. We just looked at each other for two hours and wept.” That is the way we left those people; we were torn apart, and yet our love was enhanced.

My question to you is: Do you know God this way? Do you have a sense of alienation in the world? Does this pain drive you to the love of the Lord? Or is your relationship reversed? Perhaps you don’t know God because these roles are backwards: you are at home in the world and a stranger to God. No matter what your age, my prayer for you today is that you will answer the call and become a pilgrim. Take out all your stakes, get in your tent and travel this journey with God.

When I returned from Eastern Europe, I wrote a poem of appreciation to Jesus Christ for the marvelous experiences of joy in the midst of tears that I had there. In closing, I would like to share it with you.

Who am I, and what is my house
That you have brought me thus far.
To take me on chariot’s wings,
Down into your greenest pastures,
Where You give your people a feast in the wilderness.

Was it not enough of your grace,
To see love Divine,
In the Book
And in the eyes of those simple ones
From upon the shores.

But to drink from the river,
To know its tracking over the earth;
And to wade deeply in distant lands,
O this is too much for me.

Who can forget their faces
Their eyes full of pure light,
Their hearts swelling with love,
Their voices in sweet song.
O this is to dwell in your temple,
To meditate on your glory,
Living stones in Antimony!
I love you, my friends in Babylon.

Who am I and what is my house,
That you have brought me thus far?

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Catalog No. 762

1 Peter 1:3-5

Second Message

Brian Morgan

September 24th, 1989

EYES FIXED ON THE HORIZON

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

One of my favorite movies this year was *Dead Poets Society*, the story of a classic English boys school and a not-so-classic English professor who used the vehicle of poetry to give his adolescent students a passion for life—a difficult assignment, to say the least. But this man succeeded by employing rather unconventional teaching methods. In the first scene he marches his students out of the classroom and into a hallway, to a trophy case displaying pictures of all the former notable graduates of the school, people who had made a name for themselves in the world.

“Look into these faces,” he commands, “peer into their eyes. When they were here, the whole world was like an oyster opened before them. Where are they now?” he asks. “They are fertilizing worms! How many opportunities did they miss?” he wonders. He quotes Henry David Thoreau’s “Walden,” saying, “The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation.” Then, quoting a Latin saying, he cries, “*Carpe diem! Carpe diem!*” (Seize the day!). His exhortation echoes in the hearts of his young students. He wanted them to look to the horizon, to the inevitability of death, so that they might have a passion for life. This is how he urges them to give their life meaning, by seizing the day. I loved the movie, partly because I am a rebel at heart, and partly because I have a passion for life.

This is the same approach which the apostle Peter takes as he writes his first letter to Christians in A.D. 64. He wants them to live with a passion for life. He wants them to seize the day. They, too, must keep their eyes fixed on the horizon. Their horizon is not death, however. Peter looks past death to a cosmic renewal: A new heavens and a new earth. We have already seen that the early church was about to undergo a crisis. Soon the apostles who walked with Jesus will all have passed on. The church is weak, decentralized, and dispersed throughout the world. Persecution under the Emperor Nero is about to be intensified.

But Peter’s word to these early Christians is that when they fully understand their identity, who they are, and what is their relationship to the world (they are aliens and sojourners), then they will have influence in society. Everything would naturally follow once they understood their identity as believers. They were aliens to the world, pilgrims living in tents as they made their journey to their heavenly home. In the world therefore they experienced alienation. But, on the other hand, with God they were the elect; they were loved. The tension between these two realities, rather than being a threat to believers, actually enhances God’s grace in the soul of man.

In verses 3-12 of chapter 1, Peter tells these sojourners about the glorious salvation which Christ has accomplished. Like an artist working on canvas, he paints the whole panorama of salvation—future, present, and past—to demonstrate the fullness of this marvelous gift. This morning therefore we will look at our future salvation in Jesus Christ, given in verses 3-5.

I. A Living Hope

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, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith, for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice... (1 Pet 1:3-6a NASB)

According to Peter, hope is the dominant characteristic of Christians living in an alien world. But hope is a rare commodity in this world, isn’t it? Even what little hope there is comes in ever-diminishing quantities. Eloquent philosophers who have death as their horizon tell us there is no hope. Listen to the honest words of English philosopher Bertrand Russell, writing about life:

The life of man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach and where none tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent Death. Brief and powerless is Man’s life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day.

Man, according to the philosophers, has no hope.

What hope do the rabbis in the synagogue hold out? Do they offer any hope for man? At a memorial service I attended once I heard the rabbi recite the Kadesh, the prayers for the dead: “May their memory live forever in our hearts,” he prayed. A dead hope. I wondered to myself, “How long will their memory last?” Who cares about the generations that have preceded us? This is nothing but a dead hope.

How about the sports pages? Many people turn there for hope, if only for an hour or a day. Here is what the Philadelphia Eagles quarterback was quoted as saying last week: “I give so much of myself on Sunday, I drain all the life out of myself out there so that maybe our city can have a little pride. Maybe everybody can forget just for a little while how hard life really is.” An elusive hope, in other words.

When we look for hope in the world, then, here is what we find: no hope, a dead hope, and an elusive hope. But if you are a pilgrim following Jesus Christ, says Peter, you have a living hope. That is because our hope is based on a Person, Jesus the Messiah, who conquered death itself in the resurrection. When Jesus first announced that he was the Messianic King, the Jews were very excited. The prophets had talked about the Messiah’s dealing with the enemies of Israel, and the Jews felt that at last they would be vindicated. Here

was one who would overthrow the Romans. But Rome was too insignificant an enemy of the Messiah: He came to defeat the cosmic enemy of sin itself—sin, pride, the world, the flesh, and the devil, yea, even the last enemy, death. When Jesus defeated that last enemy by his resurrection from the dead, according to the apostles, he opened the door to a new age, to eternal life. Now, for the first time, eternity had invaded the realm of time. Now it was now possible to enter into that new dimension by being born again. This is what the Christian can experience in the world today.

The meaning of the words “born again,” a term which is very widely used in our day, escapes many people. The Greek preposition which comes before the verb in Scripture can either mean born “again” (a second time), or, born “from above,” i.e. from heaven. In his encounter with Nicodemus, Jesus said to this man, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you are born again, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus interpreted Jesus’ words as saying he had to be born again physically. This is why he asks Jesus, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter again into his mother’s womb?” But Jesus meant his words to be taken in the second sense, in light of the promise of the New Covenant (John 3:3-8). “No,” he replied, “it means being born of water and of Spirit. ‘That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.’” This was to fulfill what the prophets predicted, when God would remove the heart of stone from his people and give them a heart of flesh which would respond to him.

The new birth is described in two aspects: 1) cleansing (“born of water”), and 2) new life (“born of Spirit”) (John 3:5). This is what the prophets had longed for, as we see in Ezekiel:

“For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands, and bring you into your own land. Then I will *sprinkle clean water on you* [born of water] and you will be clean... Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit [born of Spirit] within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will be careful to observe my ordinances” (Ezek 36:25-27)

All of this is available to us now, says Peter. Eternity has burst forth into history. Christians have a living hope.

The implication for believers is clear: We should be excited about life! Woe to us if we are bored! Woe to us if we have the blahs, if we regard life as humdrum, if we are living merely in three dimensions, when the fourth dimension has been opened up to us in this world.

In the movie I mentioned earlier, the professor urged his students to have a new perspective on life. To emphasize his point, he read poem by Byron from their classic poetry textbook. Then he read the textbook’s analysis of the poem, which was very formulaic, pedantic and boring. The scene showed the boys taking copious notes of what he was saying, but when he had finished he interrupts them, “This is all wrong! Tear this introduction out of your books!” The boys gleefully comply and begin ripping pages from their textbook. They were learning that there was a new, more fulfilling way to look at the poems of Byron.

When I was taking a course on religion at Stanford University years ago, the textbook was a 1,200-page work by a liberal theologian. Every word seemed to have five syllables. This writer referred to God as “the ground of all being,” “the ultimate concern,” etc. I got so tired of all this stuff that I went with my roommate to the highest point in our fraternity building in protest and tossed the textbook

out the window. We were saying that there was another view of life, in the Scriptures themselves, that was much easier to understand. The Bible takes us into the fourth dimension. Our textbook weighed us down on earth.

I would encourage you students present who are taking courses in psychology, history, sociology, philosophy, or whatever, that when you hear what the finite minds of men have to say about these subjects, you can agree that they have made good observations about life, but they are missing a whole dimension. The Kingdom of God has come from heaven to earth, and it has opened up eternity to us. In physics, Newton saw only three dimensions. Einstein saw four. He introduced his Theory of Relativity, and blew apart Newtonian physics. This is how we are to live as Christians. The new age is present and we enter into it by means of the Holy Spirit. Eternity is here to feed the soul right now.

I have been trying to teach this concept to my children. While on vacation in Oregon this summer, I took my youngest daughter Katie for a walk in a meadow. It had just rained, and there were puddles of water all over the place. While she was looking into a puddle, I asked her, “Katie, what do you see?” “Mud,” she said. Then we walked some distance and looked back at the meadow. Now we saw the puddles from a different angle. They reflected the beautiful light back coming down from the sky back toward the heavens, making the puddles a mirror of the heavens. “What do you see now?” I asked her. “I see clouds and snow-capped peaks and sky,” she said.

It is the same with us. When we gaze directly into our soul, as my daughter had gazed into a puddle, what we see is muck and mire. But when we come to Christ, God washes us with his blood, cleanses us with his Spirit, and his light shines in our spirit. That is when we see the new creation reflected in our life. As Christians, this is the kind of perspective we should have. We have a living hope, based on One who has conquered death, and inaugurated the Kingdom of God, and we partake of that by means of the Holy Spirit. If you are not born again, you are missing this whole new dimension. Christians have a living hope!

II. A Future Hope: “Still But Not Yet”

Although we have a living hope, it is also a future hope. It is still yet to be, as Peter declares in verses 4-5: “[We] obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away; reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” Though we feed on this life it is merely a taste of something yet to come. The Kingdom has already been inaugurated—it is now—but it is still yet future.

What exactly is this inheritance to be revealed at the last time? What are you and I going to possess? We are going to possess the life of God himself! And, Scripture goes on to say, not only is God our inheritance, but the saints are his inheritance. We are going to possess the life of God in the symphony of the saints of all time. This is not just an abstract thought. It is God’s love in all of its dimensions—its length and breadth and height and width—in all of his people whom you love.

I had a taste of this love earlier this year in Eastern Europe. During the first week, while we were camping, one of our team shared with our friends there that it was the love of Christ that brought him to God. About five years ago, he said, that love manifested itself in his room one night. He woke up and sensed the presence of Christ

in such an overwhelming way that he came to faith. He had never since had the same experience, he said.

As we continued teaching during the week, and our love for these people became even more intense because the police were hounding us all the time, when it was time for a number of them to leave, they shared with us words of appreciation that I will never forget. All of us were so overcome with emotion we were unable to speak. I said to my friend who had shared his testimony earlier, “You must say something.” Although he was weeping, he was able at last to say, “I have already said that when I came to Christ it was his love that led me to do this. Now I have experienced *love twice*.” The initial experience which he had face to face with Christ was now filled out in a symphony with these simple ones who loved him, and it was a far greater experience, filled out in the panoramic symphony of the saints. That is what heaven will be like.

Some morning we will all awake from our dark midnight, whether it be sickness, divorce, loneliness, an accident, whatever, and we will find ourselves standing by a stream in our resurrection bodies. We will hear Abraham speaking to his people. We will hear David singing. We will see the Lord descending from his throne. And we will see a prepared table stretching from east to west. That is when we will begin to comprehend the dimensions of the love of Christ.

So we have a living hope and a future hope.

There is a third dimension to our hope, says Peter.

III. A Sure Hope

A. An Incorruptible Future

Notice the adjectives that the apostle uses to describe our future: it is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading (it will not fade away). In the Old Testament, the land was the inheritance which God gave to his people. That was how they experienced the life of God. This is why the psalmists pleaded to be spared from death—because in death they would be separated from their physical inheritance, the land. Their desire was to continue to walk in the land of the living. But in the New Covenant we have an inheritance that cannot be taken away from us in death. It is imperishable.

And it is undefiled. Referring to their inheritance in the Old Testament, Moses warns the Israelites in Leviticus 18:27 to not defile the land by sinning. They did, of course, corrupt the land and the land spewed them out of its mouth. But our new inheritance is unspoiled and unstained by any taint of sin.

Finally, our new inheritance will not fade away. In her exile, Israel lost her land, but our inheritance is not a temporary thing; it is unimpaired by time. Abraham knew this. The writer to the Hebrews tells us Abraham knew that the land of Israel was merely a shadow of the heavenly land which was yet future. Here is what he says,

By faith [Abraham] lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow-heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. (Heb 11:9-10)

Ray Stedman is presently writing a commentary on Hebrews (actually, his first exegetical commentary for teachers). Here is what he says about this verse:

Abraham saw what John saw in Revelation: a city coming down from heaven on earth (Rev 21). That is what Abraham longed for;

an earth run after God's order, where people would dwell together in peace, harmony, blessing, beauty and liberty. Because of that hope he was content to dwell his whole life in tents, looking for God's fulfillment. Abraham shows us that faith seizes upon a revealed event and lives in anticipation of it...Once again we see the deliberate link between the visible and the invisible. The land of Canaan was a picture of the heavenly country which would be theirs by faith.¹

This is the incorruptible future to which Peter is referring. As the apostle says later, in his second letter, “according to His promise we are looking for a new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Pet 3:13).

B. A Secure Future

Secondly, says Peter, our future is secure. God protects it for us. It is, in the apostle's words, “reserved in heaven for you.” As the executor of several estates I find it is very difficult to protect assets. Inflation, taxes and attorneys' fees see to that. But there is none of that in heaven. Our inheritance is reserved; it is secure.

Not only that, but God protects those who are the recipients of this inheritance. Peter says that we “are protected by the power of God through faith.” Faith surrounds us like a military garrison to protect us until we meet the Lord in glory, and he brings the two together.

My wife's mother and grandmother died in consecutive years and I became executor of both estates. The grandmother had land in Oklahoma that had been in the family since the Land Rush, and it was her desire that this whole section of wheat farms be passed down intact to her grandchildren. During the last ten years of her life she saved thousands upon thousands of dollars in savings accounts to pay the estate taxes upon her death, and she went to her grave feeling she had accomplished her goal to protect the family inheritance. As her executor, however, I soon discovered that the money she had saved did not even begin to meet the taxes demanded of the estate. In the end we had to sell all the farms in order to pay the Internal Revenue Service and the attorneys. There is nothing left of the inheritance of land which had been passed down through the generations.

The remaining monies were passed down to the two grandchildren, my wife and her sister. The sister took some of the money and began to spend it on cocaine. I had to step in to protect her life and her inheritance by setting up a trust fund so that she could not get her hands on the money. But it was too late. Her drug habit resulted in her contracting AIDS, and she died. Despite all my good intentions, I could preserve neither the inheritance nor the heirs. Ten days before this young woman died, however, as she lay on her death bed, two of my Christian brothers led her to Christ. Now everything is different and her hope is secure. God had preserved for her her inheritance in the new heavens and the new earth. No one could touch that. And he gave her a resurrection body. On that glorious day when she died she received her true inheritance because she had been born again.

What a blessed hope we have as we contemplate our secure future! The implications for us are clear: We ought to live with abandon! Let us stop worrying about material and physical things and invest instead in the new heavens and the new earth “where rust and moth do not destroy.” I was rebuked in Eastern Europe when I realized how much I possess and yet how little I risk for Jesus. I was with people who had very little, yet they risked everything for him. Although nationals are forbidden to have contact with foreigners, the family

I stayed with had shared their food with an American missionary who was in the hospital there because the food he was receiving was so bad. Although the police caught them, they did not care about the risk they were taking but every day faithfully brought this man a meal. They were not investing in this life but in the New Jerusalem. Then I came to stay with this family although they already had a reputation for befriending foreigners. I remained with them for a week and they fed me and loved me at great risk to themselves. They got caught again but they did not care. Their faith overcame any fear they might have had. Let us live with abandon like these brothers and sisters!

Cast your eyes on your ultimate destination, says Peter. What an important word to take to heart by those who are about to undergo intense persecution! Look to the new heavens and new earth, with all of their beauty and glory. Look beyond the veil of this life and see the absolute certainty of heavenly realities. This living hope will stabilize your wavering soul, and sharpen your appetite for the world to come.

This then is the Christian's hope: a living hope, a future hope, and a secure hope. What does God ask of us in return?

IV. Our Response: Singing Before Dawn

A. Bless God: Appreciation for Mercy

Our text today opens with the words "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again"; and it ends in verse 6 with the words, "in this you greatly rejoice..." God began a whole new cosmic creation for us. What did we contribute to this marvelous work? Nothing, except our sin, which put Jesus Christ on the cross. What moved God to set all of this in motion was his great heart of mercy shown to every one of us. In the Scriptures, mercy and loyal love are the basis of all God's actions in salvation history. Though he is mighty and sovereign, his heart is easily moved to come to our aid because of our helplessness in order that he might fulfill his covenantal love towards us. This is why he sets all of this in motion. In Psalm 40, the king writes,

He brought me up out of the pit of destruction, out of the miry clay;

And He set my feet upon a rock, making my footsteps firm.

And He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God...

Thou, O Lord, wilt not withhold Thy *compassion* from me;

Thy [*loyal love*] and Thy truth will continually preserve me.

(Ps 40:2, 3, 11)

B. Rejoice In God

All that God wants is appreciation from us in return for the marvelous things which he has done for us. Bless God. Thank him and sing to him with joy before the dawn.

In *Dead Poets Society*, the theme "Seize the day" was the professor's constant reminder to his students. One boy determined to do just that by going into the theater. He took the leading role in a play by Shakespeare and met with great success. But the young man's father coerced him into leaving the stage because he saw no future in it for him. There was nothing but death on the horizon for this young man. In order to "seize the day," he felt he had no option but to take his own life. He committed suicide to make his life meaningful.

But Peter gives these Christians a new horizon, beyond the veil of death, a salvation so glorious—and guaranteed—that it evokes joy inexpressible and full of glory, even in the midst of persecution. A true, heartfelt understanding of this gift ought to bring resounding choruses of praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing moves our hearts more than when people take the time to tell us we are appreciated. Nothing moves the heart of God more than when we take time to tell him we appreciate him.

I want to close this morning by sharing with you the most valuable gift I brought out of Eastern Europe. The leader of the denomination we were sharing with, who had written 10,000 poems to Jesus while he was imprisoned for his faith, died a few months before we got there this year. We received a copy of the last poem which he wrote shortly before his death, and I want to read that to you now. This poem actually celebrates an incident in the apostle Peter's life, the time when Peter was in a boat out on the lake of Galilee and he saw Jesus standing on the shore. Here is what this man wrote in his own hand before he died.

I SEE YOU ON THE SHORE

I see you on the shore,

I have yet to walk,

But you wait for me there,

My sorrow to break

In sweet verse of my heart.

You come on the cloud,

The storm is heavy,

My boat I have pushed into the white waters

Victoriously,

My love sings for You.

You rise up leading

The Universe

The histories below,

I know, soon

The divine walking

Will be at an end.

Fellow pilgrims, keep your eyes on the horizon and you will see Jesus on the shore.

1. Ray C. Stedman, *Hebrews* (IVP New Testament Commentary; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 124, 126.

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1 Peter 1:6-12

Third Message

Brian Morgan

October 1, 1989

FEET PLANTED UPON THE EARTH

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

The apostle Peter's word to his fellow-pilgrims in the first century A.D. was that they should keep their eyes fixed on the horizon if they truly wanted to seize the day and live their lives with abandon. They should look to a new heavens and a new earth, a new Zion, a new Jerusalem that was undefiled, incorruptible, and would not fade away. They could live with abandon because they possessed a living and secure hope.

In our text today the viewpoint changes from heaven to earth. Here, the apostle tells believers not about their future salvation but of their present experience of salvation. His word to these aliens and sojourners is that they should keep their feet firmly planted on the earth.

Let us think about this for a moment. What should be our first words to someone who embraces Jesus Christ, is baptized, and embarks on a pilgrim's journey to Zion? What should we tell him to expect in this life? What should a young couple, their faces aglow, having just made idyllic vows of love and commitment to each other in marriage, expect to encounter in their new life together? What should you tell your children to expect as they leave home and go away to school? What can a young adult expect upon entering the business world for the first time? What do you say to a couple when their children finally leave home and the dog dies? They expect retirement bliss, but what will be their experience?

Peter has a word for what all of these various categories of people should expect. It is suffering. This is what life brings. Suffering: Toil, pain, and grief. So although we are pilgrims living in an alien land, with our eyes fixed on the horizon, anticipating a glorious new creation, yet our feet should be planted in this earth. This is the apostle's word for Christians in that first century day and for Christians in all of time.

A number of years ago, when I was college pastor at Peninsula Bible Church, I made it a practice to take our students on a backpacking trip once a year. Once I asked my fellow-pastor Paul Winslow if he would lead the trip, and he agreed. He told me he had in mind a place way up in the High Sierras—Spotted Lakes—where, he said, hardly anyone ever went backpacking. It had snow-capped peaks, sheer granite cliffs tumbling down to the lake-edge, and tremendous fishing. It sounded terrific. Not only that, he said, he knew a shortcut which shaved seven miles off the trail. We could hardly wait to get started.

Getting to Spotted Lakes, however, was another story. I wish my hiking boots could speak! While my thoughts were in the heavens as I contemplated what lay at journey's end, my hiking boots had to walk in the rocks and dust, bearing me and my backpack through much toil and suffering.

The trip had a rather painful beginning. The gas gauge in our van got stuck on "Full," and we ran out of gas on a logging road, 22 miles from the nearest gas station. We had to turn around and coast all the way down the road, at midnight, without lights! And not all of it was downhill. We all had to get out at various points and push the van, and our possessions, uphill. We finally reached our base camp, a small church building, late that night and set up camp. Next morning one

of our girls became very ill and could not continue. Another of our girls volunteered to remain with her and wait for the rest of us to return. But they had to keep moving their tent all weekend because a number of men kept bothering them. Meanwhile, the shortcut to the lake turned out to be a hard slog cross-country over boulders. We had to rock-climb our way over unforged trails to the beautiful setting that always seemed to lie just ahead.

And we found it was beautiful indeed when we finally got there. It was everything we had been led to believe it was. Paul had taken along ropes to teach us rock-climbing. Next day, when I was halfway up a cliff, I heard a thunderous crash below. One of our guys had dislodged a ten-foot boulder which rolled over his foot, breaking it in two places. The boulder rolled down the hill right toward where our students were camped. I thought everyone there was going to be killed, but the rock broke into several pieces and miraculously missed everyone. The remainder of our time at the lake was fairly uneventful, but when we packed up to leave, Paul had to carry the injured student on his back over the five miles of rocky terrain back to the van. And I had to carry Paul's backpack, as well as my own!

It was quite a weekend, not at all what we had expected. Certainly the vision we had been presented with at the beginning was fulfilled. The horizon on which we had our eyes fixed was worth the effort it took to get there. But the journey was strewn with rocks and dust, hardship, toil and pain. My hiking boots, which were firmly planted on the earth throughout the trip, would attest to that.

This is the point that Peter is making to these first century believers. Already he has painted for them a picture of their future salvation; now he goes on to tell them of their experience of salvation in this life, and that will involve suffering. At first, Christians were tolerated and even encouraged by the Roman government. But by A.D. 64 they had become so unpopular that Nero could make them scapegoats for the great fire of Rome. More than once Peter alludes to the slander and insults they faced (1 Pet 2:12; 3:14, 16; 4:14). They were accused of cannibalism (eating the body of Christ), and incest (for giving one another a "holy kiss"), etc.

Between A.D. 75–98, under the Flavian emperors and Domitian, a new form of persecution was adopted. Now Christians were condemned not on a specific charge, but for simply bearing the name "Christian" (1 Pet 4:14). No charge or crime of immorality was brought against them, rather Christians were simply asked, "Are you a Christian?" Their reply was grounds for the death sentence. Trajan's reign (A.D. 98–117) "was marked by a policy of imperial expansion; the frontiers of the empire were pushed beyond the Rhine, Danube and Euphrates...the Roman civilization in the new province of Dacia has left its mark in the name, language and general culture of the land and people of Romania" (F.F. Bruce).

During this period the policy of executing Christians merely for bearing the name Christ was fully employed. This is seen in the correspondence of Pliny, a young governor in Bithynia (part of the area to which Peter addressed his letter), to the Emperor Trajan:

My Lord: It is my custom to refer to you everything that I am in doubt about; for who is better able either to correct my hesitation or instruct my ignorance? So far this has been my procedure when people were charged before me with being Christians. I have asked the accused themselves if they were Christians; if they said "yes," I asked them a second and third time, warning them of the penalty; if they persisted I ordered them to be led off to execution. For I had no doubt that, whatever kind of thing it was that they pleaded guilty to, their stubbornness and unyielding obstinacy at any rate deserved to be punished. There were others afflicted with the like madness whom I marked down to be referred to Rome, because they were Roman citizens.

The case seemed to me to a proper one for consultation, particularly because of the number of those who were accused. For many of every age, every class, and of both sexes are being accused and will continue to be accused. Nor has this contagious superstition spread through the cities only, but also through the villages and the countryside. But I think it can be checked and put right. At any rate the temples, which had been well nigh abandoned, are beginning to be frequented again... From all this it is easy to judge what a multitude of people can be reclaimed, if an opportunity is granted them to renounce Christianity. (F. F. Bruce, *The Spreading Flame*)

These are the times to which Peter is writing. And the apostle's word to us today is the same as it was to these believers in the first century and every century since. He wants to us to have our feet planted on the earth, and to have a realistic perspective on suffering. He tells us the purpose of suffering; what our response to suffering should be; and finally, he tells us of the privilege of suffering.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 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; 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, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet 1:6-9 NASB)

I. A Realistic Perspective on Suffering (1:6)

A. It is But For A "Little While"

Peter begins by giving Christians a realistic perspective on suffering. The first thing he says is that suffering in this life is only for "a little while." If your perspective is eternity, not time, then you will view life as something of very short duration. Even if your affliction to you seems long-term--perhaps you are suffering from disease, or rejection, or loneliness--Peter says that is still just "a little while" compared to eternity.

B. It Is An Absolute Necessity

The second thing Peter says about suffering is that it is an absolute necessity. Jeremiah wrote his book of Lamentations following the sacking of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. He saw all the horror of the bloodshed, the cannibalism and the cruelty, yet he wrote these words,

It is good for a man that he should bear,
Thy yoke in his youth.
Let him sit alone and be silent
Since He has laid it on him.
Let him put his mouth in the dust,
Perhaps there is a hope.
Let him give his cheek to the smiter;

Let him be filled with reproach.

For the Lord will not reject forever,

For if He causes grief,

Then He will have compassion

According to His abundant loyal love.

For He does not afflict willingly [from His heart],

Or grieve the sons of men. (Lam 3:19-32)

The writer to the Hebrews goes even further:

But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. (Heb 12:8)

Suffering, according to the apostle, is an absolute necessity in the Christian life.

C. It Does Cause Grief to the Soul

No matter what form the suffering takes, it does cause grief ("distress") to the soul. Suffering hurts; it grieves the soul. In the New Testament, this word is used of the time when Jesus told his disciples he would have to go to the cross. It is also used of Jesus in Gethsemane, when he asked that the cup pass from him. This is the grief which the apostle Paul felt when his spiritual children in Corinth rejected him and his gospel.

What are the implications of this? First, we should not be surprised by it. Suffering is the norm in the Christian life. We should expect it, and we should teach it, especially to young converts. The first thing a young convert ought to hear is that one enters the Kingdom of God through many afflictions.

Second, though Peter says we live in hope, we will still grieve. Hope may transcend grief but it does not obliterate it. We must allow each other the freedom to lament as part of our worship. At times we are so eager to get on to resurrection life we bury our grief and do not deal with it. We are ready with glib answers. But this is wrong. One third of the psalms, the Hebrew book of worship, are psalms of lament and grief, remembering national disasters and individual grief. Many of the psalms do not provide any answers, but all of them provide opportunity for believers to bring their grief in worship to the Lord. Christians at times need opportunity to hurt and weep, not answers to their dilemmas. We must not speak too quickly or grief may be buried.

The deaths of two of my children taught me this. My father has a Welsh background, my mother English, and both are stoics. I was taught never to show emotion or share grief. Even when my son was in intensive care, my mother said to me, "I promised myself I would not cry"--so as not to be a burden to us. But I have learned the value of grief, the cleansing aspects of it, and how it leads us to deeper things in our worship of God.

So it is very important that Christians have a realistic view of suffering, according to Peter. Suffering is necessary, and therefore we should expect it. But we must allow ourselves the freedom to express our grief, for hope does not obliterate sorrow. Finally, we should see suffering in light of eternity. It is merely for "a little while."

II. The Goal Of Suffering (1:7)

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.

A. A Proven Faith

The word "proof" was used of purifying and strengthening metals by passing them through fire. The fire brought the impurities to the surface to be skimmed off, and in the natural cooling process the metal was tempered and thus strengthened. In like manner, the fire of suffer-

ing removes the impurities of our faith and strengthens it. Our faith is not pure; it needs testing. We trust God, but we also depend on our other things—our background, our wisdom, wealth, or relationships, even our scheming. But suffering removes these things, purifying our faith, with the result that when we go to heaven, “at the revelation of Jesus Christ,” our faith will be perfect, without impurities. Did you know that in heaven we will live by faith also? But in heaven our faith will be so pure that the life of Christ will come flowing through us in a symphony of praise and glory to God. This is what God seeks for us.

Hezekiah was a godly king in Israel, but his faith needed testing. The Assyrians had utterly destroyed the Northern Kingdom, and Hezekiah responded by increasing taxation on his people to pay for military resources to defend Judah. He had many chariots built. He tore down buildings in Jerusalem in order to fortify the walls of the city. He built a conduit, Hezekiah’s tunnel, in the middle of the city that would withstand a siege. He felt ready for the coming assault. But then the prophet Isaiah came to him and said, “Hezekiah, you did all this but not by Me. You did not check in with God but instead trusted your own strength—your defenses, your chariots, your arm of flesh. But all of this will be of no avail. The Assyrians are coming like a flood which will overflow the Euphrates, all through Judea, and this flood will come right up to your neck. There it will stop, by grace.”

This is exactly what happened. The Assyrians wiped out all of Hezekiah’s defenses and surrounded Jerusalem. They came taunting Hezekiah and blaspheming the name of the Lord. There was nothing left for the king to do but to pray. Hezekiah took the blasphemous letters to the temple and laid them out before the altar. There he prayed, “God, save this city for the sake of your loyal love.” Finally, he had arrived where God wanted him to be. That night an angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians. God has tested and purified Hezekiah’s faith.

This is what God is doing with us when we get sick, when we feel lonely and rejected, when we are out of work. It must be God plus nothing.

There we have the purpose of suffering.

III. Our Present Response To Suffering (1:8-9)

Peter continues, in verses 8-9, by telling us what suffering does for us in the present.

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, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Suffering, according to these verses, helps us in three ways in our relationship with God.

A. To Love Him

At first I took these statements by Peter to be imperatives, but now I feel they are indicatives; they are descriptions. God designs suffering for us, and this is what it does in our present experience. First, suffering causes us to love God; it increases our capacity to love him. Proverbs says,

**My son, do not reject the discipline of the Lord,
Or loathe His reproof,
For whom the Lord loves He reproves,
Even as a father, the son in whom he delights. (Prov 3:11-12)**

Whenever we are wounded, that is when we feel the love of God. God cares for us. He wants us to be righteous. When we are wounded we are weak and vulnerable. Then, as we share this, all the saints enter into our experience and begin to weep with us, showing forth the love

of Christ and fulfilling the royal law, the commandment of Jesus that we should “love one another.” Suffering helps us to obey the commandments. We can say with the psalmist, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word” (Ps 119:67).

B. To Trust Him

We should not break covenant with God by turning to other means of salvation in the crises, but trust in him alone.

C. To Rejoice In Him

Suffering increases our capacity for joy. Like the saints of old in “tears of the night,” we prepare songs of victory in the morning, when we can express our joy to the fullest. Such joy so overcomes the soul it cannot be put into words, and gives full weight to the majesty of Christ.

One of my closest friends was wounded deeply last week. As he led our men’s group on Wednesday morning, he began by saying that it was a very difficult day for him. On that day three years ago, he said, his six-week-old son died. This great loss had purified his faith and taught him to love God. The pain was further intensified, he told us, because his grandmother had just died and he was going to her funeral that very day. To make matters even more painful, his wife had miscarried earlier that week. As we watched our strong leader become weak and vulnerable, a wave of transcendent love filled that room. No one spoke a word. All sensed the presence of Christ.

This is what suffering does. It increases our capacity to know the love of God as it is expressed through the saints.

When Dick and GERALYN Giese’s little boy Andrew was born just a few weeks ago he swallowed some meconium, and we were not sure he was going to live. The doctors had to treat him with a rare procedure in which they put a shunt in one of the arteries that led to his brain in order to drain out his blood and thus allow his lungs to heal. Dick shared with me that in the midst of this pain he and GERALYN truly learned how to sing. Every night they sang the hymn *How Great Thou Art* to their little Andrew. One evening as they sat in their car outside the hospital with another couple they sang that hymn together. He said that they all felt they had been transcended to heaven. In anticipation of what God was going to do, he shared, they were either going to have a wonderful baby dedication or a wonderful memorial service. Such was the faith which this couple possessed. But God spared that little life, and we are going to have a great baby dedication.

Suffering then, according to Peter, is the mandatory road to reach this glorious salvation we are destined to inherit. Let us not be surprised by it, but welcome it as a friend that will purify and strengthen us. And let us rejoice in its greatest benefit, as it creates in the human heart a greater capacity for God, who has infinite pleasures to dispense to those who love him.

This is what we need to hear from the evangelists. I get so tired of evangelistic programs and gimmicks that come in the mail all the time. But I think God has a very simple plan for evangelism. It is accomplished by pilgrims living out their lives in this world. As we go out we are wounded, which makes us weak, which in turn makes us vulnerable, which causes us to pray to God, and then the love of all the saints pours over us in a symphony. As the world watches this they see Jesus Christ and they themselves want to partake of this life. That is God’s evangelistic thrust. Go on out into the world and be wounded. As the world watches, the Kingdom of God grows.

IV. The Privilege Of Suffering (1:10-12)

Peter ends this section on suffering by writing on the past history of salvation, in verses 10-12.

As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what time or manner of time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.

The apostle has been looking into our present salvation, which is characterized by suffering. Now he goes into the past history of our salvation, saying, “As to this salvation, the prophets wrote about it.” Here we get an insight into the revelation given to the prophets who hungered for illumination, even into their own writings. In this case it was clear that Messiah would come and suffer, and an age of glory would follow. The prophets knew what they had prophesied, but they did not know at *what date* or in *what stage* of history (i.e. what season of time) the prophecy would be fulfilled. Though they had revelation, they studied, searched out, and reflected on what they wrote to attain deeper insight into the mystery of *when*.

I find it intriguing that the prophets had questions about what they wrote. They did not have all the answers. They were instruments, human minds, behind which was a divine mind writing more in the text than they understood. Like us, the prophets had to do Bible study, and they had to pray for greater illumination about the things which they themselves had written.

Some texts may read that they were “seeking to know the person or the time,” but I don’t think that is what it should say. I think it should be translated “what time or manner of time” the Spirit was indicating about Christ. They had a question: When will these things be? They were diligent. They prayed for illumination and, by God’s grace, their minds were illumined. They discovered that they were not writing about their generation, but about us, you and me. What a privilege, to be living in an age which the prophets wrote about! The Old Testament is speaking about you and me.

There are two implications to all of this, according to the apostle. The grace and the glory about which the prophets wrote is now available by the Holy Spirit, but it demands appropriation. Our age is characterized by suffering—we enter into the sufferings of Christ—but Christ also inaugurated the glories to follow. So when suffering comes, the Spirit can give your body glory and grace to meet the need.

Secondly, says Peter, this grace is divinely instructive. Ours is an age characterized by “things into which angels long to look.” When you are undergoing suffering, the spotlight turns on you, and an audience of angels studies you with awe and amazement as they observe God’s redemption at work. Though the outer man is decaying, though we suffer disease or loneliness or divorce or death, even turmoil of our own making, the angels are studying us all the while.

What other response can these things evoke in us but the response of gratitude to God! What amazing grace! Here is a salvation gifted to us before the beginning of time, which broke into history and secured an everlasting inheritance which is guaranteed along with its recipient. Seen in such light we must think small of our present sufferings

which, rather than thwarting the purposes of God, enhances them in full measure. How can we not but give abounding thanks that we live in an age which the prophets only dreamed about, and the angels study with awe. Thanks be to God!

The early Christians responded faithfully to Peter’s letter. Trajan wrote back commending the policy of Pliny, and this policy was continued by his successors, Hadrian (A.D. 117-138), and Antonine (138-161). During this time, one of the best known Christian martyrs was Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, who was executed in 156. After the proconsul attempted to persuade him to revile Christ and be set free, he replied, “Eighty-six years have I served Him, and He has done me no wrong; how then can I blaspheme my Saviour and King?” Polycarp was then sent to be burned at the stake. What a glorious example of the truth embodied in 1 Peter!

I am thrilled to know that that same spirit is alive in pilgrims today. Occasionally we are privileged to meet what I call a radical pilgrim, and over the last several months I have come to know such a young man. Kevin is in his late 20’s, and a graduate of Stanford University. He went out into the corporate world as a stockbroker, and his future opened up before him like an oyster. But his faith was on the back burner of his life until suffering entered the picture. He had severe stomach pains, which were misdiagnosed as a problem with ulcers, but on his fourth visit to the emergency room it was discovered that he had advanced cancer of the colon. It had gone deeply into the large intestine and had spread to the lymph nodes. Following surgery, the doctors gave this young man six months to live. He submitted his body to radiation treatment and received such a large dose that his body was burned inside and out. Amazingly, after this treatment, no trace of cancer could be found. They don’t know whether it will return, however. Then he had to undergo more surgery to repair the damage done by the radiation. His pain is still so intense that he has to take 150 milligrams of morphine each day. He can’t drive a car or work as a stockbroker.

In the midst of this trial, he met a young woman and they began dating. He told me that often their dates would end up in an emergency room. During his lengthy stay at the hospital, she came to see him every morning before work, and every day after work she read the Psalms to him for several hours. The pain was so intense, and his body so filled with drugs, he built his days around those visits. But his suffering only enhanced their love and strengthened their faith in Christ. Three weeks ago, this young couple shared their wedding vows. You can imagine the impact this ceremony had on a large group of people, many of whom were not Christians. “In sickness and in health,” read the pastor, but they have known only sickness. They came down the aisle together, weeping with joy, with no guarantees about their future.

Their eyes of this young couple are fixed on the horizon, and their feet are firmly planted on the earth. They want to live as pilgrims, a testimony of faith to those around them. They would tell you that everything Peter says about suffering is true. Suffering is real, and it grieves the soul. Yet suffering had purified their faith because they relied solely on God. Suffering had created their love for one another, enhanced their love for Christ, and given them an increased capacity for joy.

Pilgrims, keep your eyes fixed on the horizon, but keep your feet planted on the earth. Amen.

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1 Peter 1:13-21

Fourth Message

Brian Morgan

October 8, 1989

THREE DANGERS AT SEA

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

I have several consuming passions in life, and one of them is a love of the sea. My Welsh surname, Morgan, even means “born by the sea.” Growing up in Southern California I took every opportunity to spend time sailing. One of my favorite memories is the time I sailed in a 44-foot ketch from Catalina to San Pedro. The ketch had an extra large Genoa sail, larger even than a mainsail, which took so much wind the boat almost keeled over. But while my buddies were holding on in the stern with their stomachs heaving, I was standing in the bow, my heart surging in excitement and anticipation of a great sail. To me, the sea has always been a place of vision where I sensed restlessness and a hunger for places beyond.

A study of the sea in the Scriptures is fascinating. In the Ancient Near East, the sea was greatly feared. To the Jews, it symbolized the unbelieving Gentile world, a world characterized by darkness, restlessness and disorder. The Jews were not a sea-loving people. The land was their first love; they never ventured forth very much. But Isaiah had a vision of a Servant who would come and bring justice to the nations. At that time, Isaiah prophesied, “the coastlands would wait expectantly for Thy law” (Isa 42:4).

When Jesus, the Servant, came, he had many dealings on the sea and by the sea with Peter, the author of our study. Peter was called to Christ on the sea. He was with Jesus during a severe storm on the sea. He shared the miracle of the enormous catch of fish from the sea. He paid his taxes at Jesus’ direction with a coin he took from a fish. He was ordained by the sea. And after Pentecost, at Joppa, by the seacoast, Peter had that life-changing vision which revealed that the Gentiles would be fellow-heirs with the Jews in the Kingdom of God.

Two thousand years later we can safely say that we are living in an age when God is bringing the whole sea, the whole Gentile world, under his dominion. As believers, we are to live like sailors who venture forth into dangerous and uncharted waters, bringing the sea under Christ’s dominion.

As I was studying our text for this morning from Peter’s first letter, I was struck with how well it fit the metaphor of sailing. The sea is a dangerous place. Our text today, however, reads like a manual written to protect us from storms at sea as we go forth with the gospel of Christ. Peter lists three dangers we will face, and he gives three antidotes to protect us in the midst of life’s storms. Verses 1 through 12 of chapter 1 set out the great salvation, future, present, and past, that Jesus Christ has accomplished for us.

Beginning in verse 13, Peter details what our response should be.

I. Lost Horizon (1:13)

Therefore, girding the loins of your mind, keeping sober, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. (NASB)

A. The Command: Keep A Long-Range Focus

When we face suffering, when we are battered by affliction, we are tempted to forget our bearings. We forget where we are headed and lose our way. We become lost at sea! We respond by reacting to whatever hits us, losing our original purpose and direction. Discouragement strikes, and the flesh begins to assert itself, especially when all of our imperfections come to the surface.

Peter’s antidote to this temptation is given us in this verse: We must keep a long-range focus. Sailors in the ancient world used a sextant to fix their course. The stars on the horizon were their guide, so no matter what the weather conditions they could keep their bearings—where they were, and where they were headed. Peter, the fisherman, uses the same word: “fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” If you fix your hope on this present life, however, you will certainly be disappointed.

But one day yet future we will be vindicated. One day we will be a perfectly holy people, on the day of the revelation of Jesus Christ. That is the day on which we should fix our hope. If we look to any other horizon or source, however promising or hopeful it may seem for the moment, we will be disappointed. When you take driver’s education, the instructor always says, “Aim high in your steering.” Don’t look at the hood of your car, but aim high. This is what the apostle is saying.

In order to maintain this long-range focus, however, two prerequisites are necessary.

B. Prerequisite #1: A Clear Mind, Ready for Action

“...having girded the loins of the mind.” Here is our first prerequisite, says Peter: We must “gird the loins of our mind.” Today we would use the expression “rolling up our sleeves.” Here is what Charles Bigg says about this word picture:

The verb is used of gathering or tucking up long skirts by means of a belt so as to be ready for energetic action. Peter may be thinking of our Lord’s words, “Be dressed in readiness, and your lamps alight...” (Luke 12:35,46). Luke may also have in mind the imagery from the Exodus for the same word is used there...“eat it with your loins girded” (Ex. 12:11). It recalls “unto obedience” (v.2). Those who have loins girded are ready for instant obedience and are ready to move out on their journey of faith.

When a storm arises at sea, all deck hands must have clear minds ready for action. There must be an instantaneous response to the Captain’s orders, for the lives of all on board depend on it. Believers must keep their minds prepared and focused to receive orders from our Lord, no matter what their feelings are.

Notice that there is no word about feelings here. If you are caught in a storm, your feelings are the last thing you will want to consult. Obedience is what will bring you safely through the storms of life. Keep your eyes on the Captain. As the psalmist says,

To Thee I lift up my eyes,
 O Thou who art enthroned in the heavens!
 Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master,
 As the eyes of a maid to the hand of her mistress;
 So our eyes look to the Lord our God,
 Until He shall be gracious to us. (Ps 123:1-2)

“...having girded the loins of the mind.” We must be ready to obey instantly.

C. Prerequisite #2: Maintaining Clear Thinking

“...keeping sober.” The idea here is soberness of thinking. When one is drunk, one cannot react quickly and decisively. We all know what happens when a captain of a ship drinks, sets his course, and goes to sleep. This is what the captain of the Exxon Valdez did on Good Friday this year, and his actions destroyed the State of Alaska. I was in Alaska one month after this happened and I saw for myself the tragic aftermath of one man’s drunkenness. Alaskans are land-loving people. They don’t live for their homes or their cars. They love their land. They consider their state the most beautiful vacation land in the country. But now their spirit is broken. Many have lost their jobs. One man’s failure to keep sober has spelt ruin for thousands.

Just as drunkenness inhibits the ability to respond quickly and decisively, this text is pointing out that worldly thinking also can intoxicate us and slow us down in our obedient response to the Lord. The world influences us with wrong expectations. Idolatry can cloud our thinking. Success can make us drunk. But success may be just a diversion which makes us take our eyes off our Captain.

Jesus never allowed this to happen to him. He always kept a long-range focus. Even in his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, when the Jews hailed him as their King, he saw through all of their praise for what it was—a mere vapor. He saw beyond the momentary praise and honor to a garden, a kangaroo court, and a cross. He never allowed his thinking and his obedience to his heavenly Father to become clouded by the drunkenness which success can bring.

So we are not to allow suffering to derail our hope in the short run, but we are to be doggedly committed to fix our hope on the second coming of Christ. This not only takes diligent effort, it also requires advance preparation of the mind to be ready to answer the call of our Lord. Here is what the 18th century saint, Philip Doddridge, wrote along these lines,

Can you, even when your natural spirits are weak and low, and you are not in any frame of mind for the ardors and ecstasies of devotion, nevertheless find a pleasing rest, a calm repose of heart, in the thought that God is near you? That he sees the secret feelings of your soul while you are, as it were, laboring up the hill, and casting a longing eye toward Him, though you cannot say you enjoy any tangible communications from Him?¹

That is how we should labor. Whether we feel like it or not, we must keep our long-range focus.

The next temptation is described in verses 14-16.

II. Sloppy Ethics (1:14-17)

As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

The second temptation we face in the midst of suffering is to compromise our ethics, to give way because of weariness to the old habit

patterns of our pre-Christian days. This is so easy to do, because these actions take no thought or struggle. We merely give in to the pressures from without to do from within what comes naturally.

We are especially vulnerable to “being conformed” to these lusts during a time of suffering. Just as it is supremely important for a ship to be correctly rigged during a storm, so it is equally important for the Christian who is undergoing suffering to be holy when the spotlight is shining on him. Think of Dave Dravecky, the pitcher who recovered from cancer surgery on his pitching arm and then broke his arm while pitching in his second game. In the midst of his suffering the whole world was watching. He did not indulge in self-pity or complaining; his ethics were not sloppy. It is even more important during suffering to maintain pure ethics. The antidote, says Peter, is to “be holy, like the Holy One who called you,” in all our behavior.

Of all the commands in this book, “be holy” is the one that jars me. How difficult it is to be holy! One evening last week, my wife went out for about an hour and a half, and my only assignment was to get our three daughters to bed. They had been fed and bathed—even most of their homework had been done. I had an hour and a half to do my part, but I got anything but instant obedience. It was the end of the day and I was tired, and I lost it through angry speech with all three of them, individually and collectively. When Emily got home, I asked her, “How do you do this all day? I give up!” I was intrigued to discover how easy it was not to be holy! I didn’t choose; it came naturally to me to be a wretch who provoked his children to anger. But the command is to “be holy,” so how do we do it?

Let us first define what to “be holy” means.

A. The Definition of Holiness

The word “holy” is used four times for emphasis in these verses. The Hebrew idea behind the word is “to be separated out from the world so as to belong completely to God for his use alone.” We are to be so immersed in God that our life becomes as transcendent and perfect as his. But the Scriptures tell us that God is so high above man in the way he thinks and acts that his thoughts are not like ours, his actions are not like ours. If we want to measure the difference, according to Isaiah, it is a huge chasm that is higher than the heavens are above the earth.

God had to teach this principle of holiness in a graduated scale to the Old Testament saints. For instance, all of the earth belonged to God, but Israel was his in a special way. But the land of Bashan was even more fertile and even more holy. Then the temple area, where God would dwell, was even more holy. The outer courts were holy, but holier still were the inner courts, the Holy Place, and finally, the Holy of Holies. Between each of these divisions there was a wall. Nobody could walk through any of these places willy-nilly. They had to be ritually purified and cleansed or else the holiness of these places would result in their death. The Old Testament also taught that this holiness had to be protected from defilement. Thus, a leper could not enter the temple. A prostitute could not enter. Neither could a Gentile. All of these separations were meant to protect the holiness of God. This is how the Old Testament saints learned what it meant to be holy.

But when Jesus came from heaven to earth, the heavenly temple now dwelt among men, so there no longer was need for a temple of stone. Holiness therefore is intensified in the New Testament age. Jesus was not defiled when he touched the leper. He was not defiled when the woman with the issue of blood touched him. On the contrary, Jesus’ holiness was such that he cleansed them, sanctified them

and made them whole through forgiving their sins. Holiness is intensified. Jesus died on the cross, and was raised from the dead, and he sent his Spirit to live inside believers in a relationship with him. Now the law, which was formerly written on stone, is written on believers' hearts to make them holy. Now he sends his pilgrims all over the world possessing this intensified, relational holiness.

There is a great difference between saints in the Old and New Testament eras as to how they should act in the world. In the Old Testament, for instance, if a man found an uncleanness in his wife, he could divorce her and send her away. I think this uncleanness was idolatry. If the woman was bringing idolatry into the home, for the sake of the home she could be divorced by her husband. But in the New Testament, the apostle says that if one is married to an unbeliever, which is idolatry, one is to remain in the marriage because the believing partner sanctifies the children of that union.

Holiness is intensified! I am not saying that the world is not a dangerous place or that we cannot be defiled by it. This book tells us, however, that by means of the Holy Spirit we can be in the world, but rather than the world destroying us we can bring transcendence to whatever situation we find ourselves in because of what Jesus Christ has done. In the New Testament, holiness is intensified.

B. The Basis for Holiness

Thus holiness is not mere ethics. It is not accomplished by trying to imitate God. The holy God who lives in our hearts himself transcends our homes, our work place, wherever we find ourselves. We can depend on him and his life for whatever we need. "Like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior." So don't you husbands tell your wives when you are rebuked, "I'm sorry, but that's me. You're stuck with me. My parents didn't communicate; neither do I." You wives, don't say to your husbands, "I was abused when I was young, so I can't love you. You're stuck." You can be holy "according to the Holy One who called you."

C. The Extent of Holiness

The New Testament tells us that we can be holy in all our behavior because of what Jesus has done. When you pay your taxes, be holy. Be holy when you stand in line. In Eastern Europe last year, a number of us were waiting in line for a chair lift on a mountain. Our hosts put a couple of their people in line to reserve places for the rest of us while we toured the area. When we returned, the line had grown considerably, and our group of about 15 Americans and nationals prepared to enter the line ahead of everybody. But my friend Jim refused to do this, and went instead to the end of the line, a four and a half hour wait. That was a holy response to a situation he faced. In the transcendence of this incident he ended up having a ministry to those he found himself waiting beside at the end of the line.

Peter says that believers are to be dressed in readiness, prepared to obey their Lord. The next step is to not compromise their ethics, but to present themselves fully to God, to be holy in every area.

In the next section, verses 17-21, the apostle tells us what will keep us motivated to continue living in this state of ready obedience. Sometimes the storms of life go on so long we are tempted to give up. This happened once to Peter. During a storm at sea, he woke Jesus up and cried, "Don't you care? We're perishing!" He was losing his motivation.

III. Lost Motivation (1:17-21)

And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

When we see the wicked prospering, and there is no apparent reward for our own purity of heart, we are tempted to lose motivation. Here, Peter repeats the same command (though he uses a different verb, "conduct oneself in fear," instead of "be holy"), knowing how easy it is, living in the present age, to lose our motivation for holy living. Often we think like Asaph, in Psalm 73, whose perspective is clouded as he sees the rewards of the wicked and the plight of the righteous:

Surely God is good to Israel,
To those who are pure in heart!
But as for me, my feet came close to stumbling...
For I was envious of the arrogant,
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
For there are no pains in their death;
And their body is fat.
They are not in trouble as other men;
Nor are they plagued like mankind.
Therefore pride is their necklace...
Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure. (Ps 73:1-6a, 13a)

What is the antidote to this as we live in the midst of the storms? Three things are to motivate us, says Peter.

A. Knowing the Fear of the Lord

This term, "the fear of the Lord," has two aspects. First, an objective aspect: The term assumes that God has revealed his will, and that his will is known; and second, a subjective aspect: The individual then gives his whole heart to serving God as he has revealed himself.

"And since you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man's work..." One day, says Peter, we will die, and this wonderful Being whom we call Heavenly Father will don the cloak of a judge. As we stand before him his penetrating eye will look past our deeds to our motives, our thoughts and our attitudes, and we will be judged according to our works. Though we are saved by grace, through faith, our judgment is based on works. This is a powerful motivator for righteous living during our short, temporary stay upon the earth. Everything God has said regarding sin will come to pass.

But we find a stronger and more powerful motivator in verses 18-19.

B. Knowing The Love Of The Lord

"...knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things...but with precious blood." Contemplate the cost of your redemption—the precious blood of our Lord Jesus. While I was studying at Stanford University, one of the things that motivated me to do well was the fact that my father was paying for my education. I had turned down a full scholarship to another university, and I didn't receive a dime

to go to Stanford; my father paid the price in full, in silver and gold (today it does cost blood!).

We all have inherited a very futile way of life from our forefathers. I have found that we all come from futile backgrounds. Nothing works as it should. We are all dysfunctional. The more we probe into our past, the more futility we discover. The reason for this is that Adam was dysfunctional. When he died, the whole race died. Don't blame your parents or your grandparents; it all goes back to Adam. God turned this whole universe over to Adam, and in one active lie, Adam turned it over to the devil and to darkness.

What did it cost to redeem what Adam had done, to redeem you and me? No amount of silver or gold could accomplish this. The price was the blood of his only Son. In the movie "Sophie's Choice," the mother had to decide which one of her two children she had to turn over to the Nazis. Just imagine the pain that caused her. But God had just one Son, his only-begotten Jesus.

Nowhere in Scripture do we read of the excruciating pain the Father suffered in giving up his only Son. In Samuel, we read of the pain an earthly father, David, suffered over the pain his rebellious son had caused him. David had many sons, but listen to these words describing his grief over Absalom:

And the king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept. And thus he said as he walked, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I have died instead of you, my son, my son!" (2 Sam 18:33)

These words, poignant as they are, are not even a hint of what God the Father suffered when he had to give up his Son. He did not have to turn over his Son to the evil Nazis, but to the Romans, the Sanhedrin, and, behind them, the devil himself and all of his demonic darkness.

What further complicates this is that the Father in his sovereignty had orchestrated these events. He had designed history so that it would work out this way. He himself was indirectly responsible for the pain. Behind the beating, the mockery, the crown of thorns and the bloodshed was the wrath of God toward sin. What pain! But nowhere do we find a description of the pain to the Father's heart all of this caused. He loved us so much he did all of this for us. Love was his motivation, and that love is the strongest motivation upon the human heart.

God is just. God is loving. And God is faithful.

C. Knowing the Faithfulness of the Lord

"He has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." God demonstrated his faithfulness in history by bringing to fulfillment his glorious plan of redemption which he had in mind since the beginning of time. But especially in our time God has made good his promises to the Fathers, and shown his utter faithfulness to his word by means of the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Such a demonstration ought to evoke a sense of overwhelming privilege as we participate in this fulfillment. This also strengthens our faith that our God can be trusted entirely. As we look to the future, we know that what God has begun he will indeed finish.

What keeps us motivated to holy conduct? Peter's words to us here are: Fear, love, and God's faithfulness. We could add, as does the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, "but the greatest of these is love."

As I watched the television news reports of the damage done on the East Coast by the great hurricane Hugo, when the sea was whipped up by the great winds and it left its place to destroy cities, I thought of the wreckage of many Christian lives today. We are a generation of shipwrecked Christians. Many have given up their hope for the age to come and have fallen for the illusions of this present age. Others are adrift upon the seas of life, not going anywhere. They have forgotten how to use their sextant. They are tossed to and fro by the winds. We see other shipwrecks, the floating debris of others who failed to be storm-prepared in obedience. The storm overcame them and they drowned in the pleasures of this age. Others have run aground. The storms they face never seem to end. They just lie there battered. They don't have the strength to hoist their sails afresh.

As we see all this carnage around us, we are tempted to come about and sail for the nearest safe haven. We are tempted to trade in our sailboat for a houseboat. We want to tie up at the dock and rest at anchor. We say we are living on the sea, but we never venture forth to new waters. The dangers are too great, we say. Others trade in their sailboats for the Love Boat. Surrounded by others of the same persuasion, and living in luxury, they never take risks and never touch anyone else. (I'm not sure the Love Boat has our destination on its itinerary.) Friends, I would rather die at sea than rust away at the dock!

Peter warns us that it is dangerous out there. The sea is not a safe place. But this keeps our focus clear. The danger keeps us close to our Captain, the Lord Jesus. It forces us to bring him into every situation we encounter, to keep course correcting. It keeps us weak so that he can be strong. It makes us lean on his love and faithfulness.

So let us keep on sailing into adventure and danger. This is where God wants us to be. He has promised to take us safely through the storms until that day when we see him on the shore. Then we will be safely home. We will have reached the new heavens and the new earth, and there will be no more storms, no more sea. On that day we will say with Isaiah,

**Was it not Thou who dried up the sea,
The waters of the great deep;
Who made the depths of the sea a pathway
For the redeemed to cross over?
So the ransomed of the Lord will return,
And come with joyful shouting to Zion;
And everlasting joy will be on their heads.
They will obtain gladness and joy,
And sorrow and sighing will flee away. (Isa 51:10-11)**

1. Philip Doddridge, *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (1745), in David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Burning and a Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 183.

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1 Peter 1:22–2:3

Fifth Message

Brian Morgan

October 15, 1989

BONDING HEARTS

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

While we were on our way to Eastern Europe last year, a member of our team met a young Jewish man on the plane ride to Frankfurt. He shared the Lord with David, and told him of our upcoming ministry behind the Iron Curtain. When we arrived in Frankfurt airport, I called our group together and asked David to say a Hebrew blessing for us as we went our separate ways. (He was going on to Israel, while we were heading East.) "This is the only one I know," he replied, and he recited in Hebrew: "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together as *one*." All of our team knew these words from the first verse of Psalm 133, and we sang this prayer of unity, together with David, there in the airport.

Before the Tower of Babel, mankind had one common language, but in his arrogant self-assertion, mankind in a societal revolt tried to storm heaven and become as God. God responded by confusing man's language. As a result, linguistic groups were formed; nations and nationalism splintered and spread, and racial, sexual and age divisions led to wars and competition between different peoples. But just as soon as these divisions first appeared, there also surfaced among men a deep longing to get rid of those barriers and live together as one in peace and harmony.

Psalm 133 is an expression of that hoped-for unity. The psalm also gives the means by which that unity will be accomplished.

**Behold, how good and pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together as one.
It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Coming down upon the beard, Aaron's beard,
Coming down upon the edge of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
Coming down upon the mountains of Zion,
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forever.**

According to this prayer, mankind cannot in their own strength become as one. The United Nations cannot do it. No great leader can accomplish it. Oneness is a supernatural gift bestowed by the Spirit of God, of which the oil mentioned in Psalm 133 is a picture. Oil is poured on Aaron's head. It drips down over his face and onto his robes, touching every part of his life. This is what must occur if mankind is to become as one. It can only happen as a result of an outpouring of God's Spirit. And not only by God's Spirit, but by his Word, which he commands upon Zion. His Word falls like the morning dew, bringing life and refreshment. If mankind is to be one, the Spirit of God must be poured out on Mount Zion; then a new society, a new humanity will be established.

The author of our text today in First Peter, the apostle himself, was an eyewitness of and participant in the actual historical event when God reversed the curse of the Tower of Babel. That happened on the Day of Pentecost. On that day, Peter saw with his eye and heard with his ear the Spirit of God poured out upon that mountain. Present on that occasion were Jews from every nation, all of them speaking different languages, when God poured upon them the gift of tongues to establish the one humanity, one people filled with his Spirit, who spoke with one tongue. On Pentecost, a whole new creation was begun by the Spirit of God and the Word of God, and the dominant characteristic of that people was their unity of spirit.

This is Peter's theme this morning—community and love in the body of Christ. He has already documented for us God's great plan of salvation, past, present, and future, and we have looked at three of five commands which he gives us in response to this glorious salvation. Today we come to command number four: we must "*ferently love one another*." When Peter wrote this letter, there was a great hunger for community. For three hundred years, the Greek philosophers had dreamed of a utopian age when all men would live as equals and share all things in common. Plato wrote about this in his *Republic*. But when this was attempted, the result was dismal failure. Then the Romans made attempts at community. They had their communal clubs, dining clubs, burial clubs, trade guilds, pagan clubs and taverns, all of which were based on common interest or class status. But fellowship in these societies was shallow, superficial, and immoral. Justin Martyr refers to their idol factories where the sculptors, though they claimed to be brothers, "are practised in every vice...even their own girls who work alongside them they debauch."

It is no different today. Our culture has lost its sense of community. Ten years ago the American family, consisting of father, mother and children, comprised 44% of the living units in this country. Today that number has dropped to 27%. The divorce rate is a horrendous 50%. Yet there is a great yearning in our culture to belong. This is manifested in an extreme sense by the young runaways who try to lose themselves in our cities and end up working for pimps. Ask them why they are doing this and they will say, "He cares for me." They are looking for community. Why do teenagers run away to join cults whose leaders are half crazy and whose doctrines are absurd? The answer, in one word, is, community, the need to belong.

In our text this morning, then, Peter unfolds the real tapestry of love and community in all of its biblical depth.

I. The Proper Standard Of Love (1:22)

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart (NASB)

Here is the standard of love we should have toward one another in Christ: we are to "ferently love one another from the heart." "Ferently" can mean "straining intensity," or, "steady, constant." Love takes effort! And it takes constancy; it should not be a part-time emotion. It should be genuine, and it should be "from the heart." Our love should be genuine, not hypocritical. We cannot display one thing outwardly and feel something else inside.

The word "heart" is one of the most important theological words in the Old Testament. Its basic root refers to that part of life that is remote and hidden. We use the expression "the heart of the sea," or, "the heart of the jungle." The human heart is the most protected organ in the human body. There is an aspect of our lives that is deep and hidden from other people. And it is very easy to draw a veil over and protect our hearts. We can appear one way but inside we can quite easily be something else.

But here is God's standard of love, which he gave to his people in Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul

and with all your might.” Peter’s standard for love and community is not new. He is merely repeating what God himself set forth in Deuteronomy. God, in his basic nature, is one. There is no internal division in him. He has complete integrity. What he says he will do he will do. And because God is that way, this is how he wants us to love him—with no internal division. He wants our whole heart, our whole life, all the hidden things, and we must respond with all our might. What a high standard God demands!

Once I counseled a fairly typical Silicon Valley couple who were having problems. The husband was a workaholic; the wife felt she wasn’t even second, but perhaps third or fourth on his list of priorities. When she told her husband of this, he said, “All right, what do you want? Should I be home at a certain time? Shall I call you first? What would you like me to do?” He went on to list a number of things which he thought might make her happy. Finally, I said to him, “Your wife doesn’t want any of those things. She wants you, your whole heart, but right now she doesn’t think she has your heart. Your work is your god.”

Before we can love one another properly, we must understand the kind of love that God requires of us. It must be genuine (from the heart), and it must be constant. But how do we do this? Is this just another law which we must obey? I discovered even in courtship that at times it was hard to love someone who was loveable. I had to ask myself, “How then can I love unlovable people?” Peter answers this question in the following verses.

II. The Basis For Love: Our New Birth (1:22-25)

Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart, for you have been born again not of a seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God. For,

**“All flesh is like grass,
And all its glory like the flower of the grass.
The grass withers,
And the flower falls off,
But the word of the Lord abides forever.”**

And this is the word which was preached to you.

No flesh can produce this kind of love. We need a new purity and a new heart to do so. In order to love this way, from the heart, with fervency and constancy, says Peter, what is needed is a deep cleansing and purification of our old life and all its selfish ways. This came about, explains the apostle, when we accepted the gospel “in obedience to the truth,” and our lives were cleansed by the blood of Christ. Everything about the old selfish ways was forgiven and cleansed; we awake every morning forgiven and cleansed.

But we receive even more than a new purity when we receive Christ. He also gives us a new heart. And this is not a temporary change. This did not come into being by the choices or will of men (from “flesh”), whose commitments and glory are like the grass and the flower of the grass, which wither in adversity in the wind and the heat. Such is the commitment of mere men. But we have been born by a creative miracle, matching that which occurred in Genesis 1, when God spoke and by his creative word life came out of darkness and order out of chaos.

Peter quotes Isaiah 40, a very significant text, to make his point. This text speaks of Israel under the curse of the Deuteronomy covenant because she did not love God with her whole heart. She went after idols and committed apostasy. The theocracy was dead, the temple overrun, the land polluted. Israel, which was to be a light to the nations, was captive in Babylon, the center of world idolatry. But the prophet Isaiah came with a word of comfort for the people, saying that a messenger was

coming: “A voice is calling, Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness...”

This word had its spiritual fulfillment in the person of John the Baptist in the New Testament:

**Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God.
Let every valley be lifted up,
And every mountain and hill be made low;
And let...
A voice says, “Call out.”
Then he answered, “What shall I call out?”
All flesh is grass and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
When the breath of the Lord flows upon it;
Surely the people are grass.
The grass withers, the flower fades,
But the word of our God stands forever. (Isa 40:3-8)**

John the Baptist announced a new King, God incarnate, who would come and do a creative miracle with the people of God, accomplishing what they themselves could not: He would love God with his whole heart; he would die on a tree for the sins of the people; and he would create by his word a new people of God who have one heart. This is what Jeremiah prophesied (Jer 32:39-40). These people would have a new heart which would enable them to love God with their whole heart. And all of this happened by the miraculous Word of God, which is living (it provides a continual source of life); it is abiding (it establishes new, permanent foundations); and it is everlasting (its nourishment will never fail to bring rich sustenance and eternal results).

All believers, says Peter, Jew and Gentile alike, are born again by this imperishable seed. It is not a seed of flesh (you do not have to be an Israelite to belong to the Kingdom), but you are now born of spirit and given a radical new heart that loves God like Jesus loves God. The Christian life is not lived by studying Jesus’ life and then trying to imitate him in the home or in the workplace. The Christian life, rather, is the life of Jesus given you that responds to the Heavenly Father and loves the way he loves. You have been born by that Word—a creative miracle.

The result is that we can love God with one heart in the New Covenant. This is exactly what happened in the church, as the book of Acts reports. The Spirit came upon believers, and immediately there was a fervent love for God and for one another, so much so that they freely gave up their possessions. A spirit of love transcended their circumstances and they brought their belongings to give to the poor. This tradition continued throughout the centuries. The church father, Tertullian, wrote following the revival in Africa that funds were given

to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls who were destitute of means and parents, and of old people now confined to the house, and such as have suffered shipwreck...or any who happen to be in the mines or banished to the islands of shut up in prison for their fidelity to God’s Church ...One in mind and soul, we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another. All things in common among us except our wives.

Pliny the Younger, the Roman governor who persecuted the church, came to the same conclusion after investigating the church.

Christians make no impact on the world by going into combat with the world on the world’s terms. This is not the way the church advances the Kingdom of God. But when the world sees insignificant people like you and I filled with transcendent love for one another, that is when people want to become part of the church.

Church history shows that the second generation of church fathers departed from this and began writing apologies—critical, intellectual defenses of their faith. They argued with clarity and logic to try and con-

vert others. But in his excellent work, *Evangelism And The Early Church*, Michael Green says that to his knowledge not one convert came to Christ despite all this writing. He feels that what happened is that Christians became a little self-righteous and harsh. They lost this transcendent love which the apostles had for each other and for the world. This is why they lost their impact. I'm not saying that apologetics are not important, because they are, but when you go toe-to-toe with the world and you argue with their terms and their tools, you may win the argument but you will lose the war. Transcendent love, on the other hand, is what brings down the barriers and makes an impact for Jesus Christ.

Recently I asked our church plant manager to share at our men's study how he came to Christ. He said that he arrived in California a few years ago, having been banished from his native Poland. He had become heavily involved in the Solidarity union movement in that country and was imprisoned for a year. This did not deter his involvement, and so the Polish government gave him a choice of many years in prison or banishment from Poland. He decided to leave, and his family arrived in San Francisco some time later. He spoke no English, he had no money, he told us, and in addition, his wife was mad at him!

Then they met a woman in our body who has a ministry with refugees from Eastern Europe. She made a highway for this man and his family. She introduced him to a couple in our congregation, who invited them to stay with them as long as they had need. "Our home is your home," they told them. On their first Sunday living with this family, they all came to church here, although they could not understand a word of what was said. That didn't matter, he said, because they sensed that the congregation was filled with realism and love. This love is what brought him to Christ. This is the kind of love Peter is talking about.

The second necessity for a proper love is not only to know the proper standard, but to also know the basis for such love. In the New Covenant, such a high standard is indeed possible because of our new birth, which has given us a new nature. Thus we have been fully cleansed from our past, sinful ways, and now have a heart that responds to the living God. This has been made possible through the living Word of God, something no human effort could bring about.

So it is possible for us to love because there has been a radical change in our heart; we have a new nature which enables us to love this way. But we still struggle at times, don't we? Love grows cold. Our love for God grows cold. Our love for our spouses grows cold. Our love for strangers grows cold. Why is this?

Last week, our receptionist called me to speak to a street person who was looking for help. Because I felt I had been taken advantage of in similar situations a couple of times recently, before I met this man I pre-determined in my mind to send him to a local ministry that takes care of these types of needs. This ministry is very street-wise, and is careful not to give out money which may be used to buy drugs. This man, however, told me he needed a voucher for gas for his car as he was looking for work. We don't have gas vouchers, so I sent him along to this other ministry group, and he was on his way out of my office in 15 minutes. When I got home that evening, the Lord convicted me that, regardless of why this man visited me, I had never allowed my heart to open up to him. I was not willing to offer him my time to get to know him, to pray for him, perhaps to lead him to Christ. I had closed my heart, and I had to confess my sin to God.

Why do we fail so often? Peter is a realist. In this next section we will see that though we have been born again by means of an imperishable, divine seed that has given us a new, perfect spirit, other forces are at work, too, in this garden of our spirit. Sin, like weeds, does not need to be cultivated. Sin can stifle this new life which we possess. Our responsibility is to choke out the weeds which would seek to do this; and then, positively, to cultivate the new seed which indwells us. This explains the

conflict in the Christian life, and why love is not automatic. Yes, you are born again, but you must now begin to cultivate this new seed, as the apostle goes on to say in the next verses.

III. Cultivating Love (2:1-3)

Therefore, putting aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, since you have tasted the kindness of the Lord.

A. Starve The Flesh (2:1)

There are two things we must do to cultivate love: We must starve the flesh, and we must feed the spirit. Sin manifests itself in these terms which Peter uses—malice, guile, hypocrisy, envy, slander. Notice that all of these manifestations of sin are relational terms; they are things which destroy loving relationships. We don't have to work at them. They lurk in all of us, ready to engage themselves. Our job now is to put these sins aside.

Malice is probably a good general term for all of these things. This is just plain old wickedness. Malice is an attitude of self-seeking, self-grasping which, if indulged in, results in an act of wickedness which destroys fellowship in the community. We have an example of this in the book of Acts. In Acts 8, the magician Simon Magus saw the apostles laying hands on new converts and their receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. This man offered Peter some money so that he, too, might possess this gift. But Peter saw right through his motives. He said to him, "Repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray that if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bondage of iniquity" (Acts 8:22). The church fathers report that Simon did not repent, however, but later went to Rome and presented himself as a god and demanded to be worshiped. He loved notoriety, and thought he could use money to accomplish his desires in the kingdom of God. This is the sin of malice.

The next two sins that Peter lists, guile and hypocrisy (the first an attitude, the second an action), I would describe as false actions of wickedness. Guile is deceit and cunning. The word is used in the Septuagint of Jacob, the master of deceit, who coveted his brother's blessing and employed deceit and trickery to get it. Later, Isaac said to Esau, who had been deprived, "Your brother came *deceitfully*, and has taken away your blessing" (Gen 27:35). Though Jacob desired a good thing, he used craftiness to get it, thus driving a wedge between him and his brother that remained for 20 years. At times we can appear very righteous, but what we are really doing is disguising our true intentions to get what we want. Our religious actions thus are a cover for wickedness.

Hypocrisy is a sin which comes naturally to all of us. When we talk about ourselves, we always put ourselves in a good light. This is especially true of any talk about our spirituality. The classic example of hypocrisy in the early church, which happened in the context of cultivating love, were the doings of Ananias and Saphira. Barnabas so loved the church he sold a field and presented the money as a gift to the apostles. When Ananias and Saphira saw how this enhanced the young man's reputation, they, too, sold a piece of property and pretended to hand all of the money over to the apostles. They had kept some of the money for themselves, which was not wrong, but they kept that hidden so as to deceive the church in their effort to enhance their reputation. But Peter saw through their scheme and the damage it would have done to the church, and the couple dropped dead at the feet of the apostle. Hypocrisy, wanting to appear in a better light than is true of us, kills fellowship in the church.

The last two sins are envy and slander. The sin of envy is manifested when the flesh cannot rejoice when others begin to advance or are blessed, but rather thinks ill of them for what they have, whether it be

material things or good reputation. We think that God has a finite number of blessings to give his children, therefore we envy others and feel, like children, that we must elbow our way past our peers to get our share of the goodies. This, too, destroys fellowship in the body of Christ.

Slander is when we use speech to give in to our envy and destroy someone's reputation by our words. This can occur even when what we say is true. But true love, rather than exposing the sins of others, instead draws a veil over them so that people appear in the best light. This is difficult area for me. With my analytical mind I see people's weaknesses and in a moment I can destroy someone's reputation.

So these are the things that we must starve. While we have an imperishable seed residing in us, a new nature and a new spirit, all this wickedness too lies inside, waiting for an opportunity to manifest itself. These are the things which we must starve and kill.

There is yet one other thing we must do.

B. Feed The Spirit (2:2-3)

"...like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, since you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."

We must cultivate and feed this new life which we possess. But what should we feed it with? If we turn to books on history, philosophy or sociology, even the writers of religious teachings, we will have to extract truth from error so that our souls are edified. It is not so when we read the Scriptures, says Peter. The Scriptures are pure and unadulterated. The Bible alone will feed your soul with pure food. That is why we, like newborn babes, should long for this pure milk. You mothers know that your infants long to be fed at mother's breast eight times a day! Believers should give themselves to the Word of God with the same intensity.

We had a great man in our midst who went to be with the Lord last year. When he was in his 30's, he decided that he would read through the Bible once every year, and for the next forty years he followed this practice. At the beginning of each year he would buy a new Bible and a journal and then embark on another year of feeding on the pure milk of God's Word. Anyone could see what this had done in his life, producing in him a gracious and loving spirit toward all. At his death, I decided to follow his example in reading through the Scriptures each year. I bought one of those new one-year Bibles and I have been reading daily. Although I don't remember everything I read, this is having a very cleansing effect in my life. Not only does it expose to me my sin, it also uncovers my motives, and keeps me humble, trusting God.

Reading the Scriptures cultivates love and causes growth in the Christian life. I cannot exhort you too strongly: Read the Word! When I get up in the morning, I don't want to see the newspaper or listen to the radio. What I long for is the pure, unadulterated milk of the Word of God for my first spiritual meal of the day.

What is our motive for doing this? Here it is: "Since we have tasted the kindness of the Lord," says Peter. Notice that he moves from the Word of God to the very life and grace of God himself. How do you grow to love someone? I have discovered that all we have to do on our men's retreat is ask two men to share their lives and the floodgates of love open up. When people share who they are, truthfully and transparently, you cannot help but love them. This is what God has done in his Word. He has designed it so that his life is mediated by his Word. So if you want your love for God and for others to grow, you must begin feeding on God's Word. This is where he has put his life. The reason we don't grow is that we are looking for this love in other places. How many of you singles enter a relationship looking for this kind of love only to be

disappointed? We place expectations on others which they cannot possibly meet. Even spouses fall into this trap.

In verse 2, Peter quotes David's word in Psalm 34. When he wrote this, David had no friends. He was being hunted, his life in danger, and he ended up in the territory of the Philistines. There he was forced to act like a madman to get out of a tight spot. All alone, in the cave of Adulam, he wrote about the glory of a man who meets God and the angel of the Lord encamps around him. "O, taste and see that the Lord is good," exclaimed David. We cannot cultivate love until we first have been loved by God, and God is waiting to love us through his Scriptures. There is a feast ready for us, but our appetites have been spoiled because we have been feeding the flesh, we have been feeding on other relationships.

If we starve the flesh, and feed the spirit, then this love will be cultivated in full measure.

It is now possible for us to love one another from the depths of our heart because of our new nature. God has created a new heart for us, one which can respond in obedience to him. But this new life, says Peter, must be fed in order to cultivate love. God has provided the richest and purest food, the living Word, to sustain it. This food quickens the soul; it does not give out; and it interacts with us continually in the depth of our being.

I want to leave us with three things. This passage ought to enlighten, encourage, and rebuke us with respect to our love for one another.

First, we are enlightened as to the radical nature of our new birth, which not only cleansed us but created in us a heart that responds to God, making love possible.

Second, we are encouraged to ask ourselves whether we are feeding daily on God's Word so as to cultivate this new life. We will not receive nourishment from other sources, so we must not neglect the Scriptures.

Third, in light of these first two, we need to be rebuked if our love is hypocritical, shallow or inconsistent. If we find ourselves not loving, the issue no longer is that we can't love, but that we choose not to.

When David, our young friend in Frankfurt airport, sang the words, "Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together as one," I had no idea of the impact this prayer would have on my life. This psalm became the theme for our trip to Eastern Europe. There we met a people whose love was so pure and burned so bright it was like a holy fire that consumed everything it could not love. It was impossible to experience this love and remain unchanged. We all came back with our hearts enlarged and our souls purified with love for Jesus Christ.

Though I love to travel and to see the Spirit of God move across the four winds, I must also say that my greatest joy is being right here in Silicon Valley, walking with a group of men who are learning to fervently love one another. I could tell you their names, but they are an insignificant group. What is thrilling to me, however, is that they have all learned the great truth that as men we are mud, we are all flesh, we are all weak. But knowing this creates an atmosphere of trust among us. We do not have to hide anything. There are no secrets in this group. All of these men look beyond the flesh and see the incorruptible seed of a new nature, and divine gifts. Therefore when they speak to one another, they encourage each other with honor, dignity and loyalty, without competition or pride. This is my greatest joy in life. I can sing, with David,

**Behold, how good and pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together as one.**

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Catalog No. 766

1 Peter 2:4-10

Sixth Message

Brian Morgan

October 22, 1989

NEW CONSTRUCTION

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

The earthquake which struck our area on Tuesday last should have revealed to each of us at least two things: how sure are our foundations, and how well are we anchored to them.

A few years ago at an earthquake preparedness seminar, a number of geologists and engineers talked about the earthquake which would surely shake the Bay Area one of these days, and what homeowners could do to minimize damage to their homes. Some time later, when I put an addition on our home, I followed the advice I heard at the meeting and nailed 4×8 ft plywood siding both inside and outside the new construction. Then, when we moved into the renovated areas, I bolted most of our free-standing furniture to the studs in an effort to forestall the expected damage when the earthquake struck. I forgot to do this in my study, however, and on Tuesday afternoon when the quake finally came, seven book cases (which I had neglected to tie to the wall studs), holding more than 600 books, came crashing down. I learned firsthand the lesson that no matter how good the foundations, if we are not anchored to them we are in trouble.

Later, as I thought about the damage done to the Santa Cruz, Los Gatos and San Francisco Marina districts, where the ground itself gave way, I wondered what could anyone do to escape the damage and destruction. I heard one person say on television, "If you can't trust the ground you walk on, what can you trust?" No matter how well people prepare for the "Big One," as it is called (that is yet to come), they are getting a sense that something bigger than them is at work out there, and that man is but dust.

New construction is our theme this morning as we continue our studies in 1 Peter. The apostle has already given us five commands in response to our glorious salvation in Jesus Christ. His fifth exhortation, which we looked at last week, was, "long for the pure milk of the word." Today, in verses 4-10, he tells us what happens to our soul when we feed on God's Word. When we do this, we learn the secret of a new building program which God is engaged in in this present age. An understanding of this secret holds the key to world history and answers the question of where we can find secure foundations.

This passage takes us to the heart of Old Testament theology. It explains how the Old Testament Scriptures testify not just to mere facts, but to a living Person, Jesus Christ himself, who is the very corner stone of God's new building project, the new temple which he is erecting in this age. Though this corner stone was rejected by men, God places infinite value on him. Those who embrace Jesus also have this honor bestowed upon them, so that they, too, are "being built up" as living stones, ministering priestly service in this heavenly kingdom. The value you place on this corner stone, therefore, determines your destiny, according to the apostle.

Our text has two parts:

I. The New Temple: Summary (2:4-5)

A. Christ the Cornerstone (2:4)

B. We as the Living Stones (2:5)

II. The New Temple: Details (2:6-10)

A. Christ the Cornerstone (2:6-8)

B. We as the Living Stones (2:9-10)

And coming to Him as a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God, you also as living stones are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture:

**"Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone,
And he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed."**

This precious value, then, is for you who believe, but for those who disbelieve,

**"The stone which the builders rejected,
This became the very corner stone,"**

and,

"A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense";

for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you have not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

I. New Materials: Living Stones (2:4)

And coming to Him as a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God,

This new temple, says Peter, has four characteristics in this new age which Jesus has inaugurated. First, God is using new materials for this new construction. Builders are always looking for new kinds of materials, products which are more beautiful than formerly and which will stand up better.

Isaiah saw a day when God would use new materials in this temple. The prophet wrote (44-66) to the Babylonian exiles who had endured the destruction of the old temple. Even the rubble which remained was raked and turned over, and the Jews were taken captive to Babylon. But Isaiah had a vision to comfort the captives. One day, he foresaw, a new temple, built with new materials, would be erected. Here are the prophet's words to the people,

**O afflicted one, storm-tossed and not comforted,
Behold, I will set your stones in antimony,
and your foundation I will lay in sapphires.
Moreover, I will make your battlements of rubies,**

**And your gates of crystal,
And your entire wall of precious stones. (Isa 54:11-12)**

The prophet uses jewels and precious stones to impress upon the Jews how valuable the new temple would be. Here, Peter picks up that concept and calls the materials “living stones.”

When Jesus, the Messianic King who revered God’s temple (“One greater than Solomon”) saw the money-changers at work in the temple of his day, he overturned their tables and drove them out of the temple. Later, when the authorities asked him by what right and by what authority he did this, Jesus replied (John 2:18-22), “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” The Jews therefore said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and You will raise it up in three days?” But He was speaking of the temple of *His body*. When therefore He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture, and the word which Jesus had spoken.”

Jesus, the Messiah, did this as a symbolic act that this temple would be judged and overthrown. A new temple would be built, but this time living stones would replace the old order of bricks, mortar and human hands. This time, says Peter, you and I, living stones, will be the new construction, fitted together to form the new temple, like precious stones reflecting the glory of Jesus Christ.

There is great significance to this. First, no longer do we have to go to Jerusalem to find heaven on earth, for this is what the temple was—the place to worship God, where people lived in harmony in his presence. But Jesus said, “Wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, I am in their midst.” Now the Holy of Holies is present wherever Christians gather together any place on earth.

Second, this demonstrates what we ought to value in the church. We do not place value in buildings but in living stones. Earthquakes have a way of refocusing our priorities, don’t they? I have talked to many people since the earthquake on Tuesday but not one of them has spent any time mourning the loss of any of their possessions. On the contrary, all were thankful that they and their loved ones survived.

I can bear testimony to this myself. I have a little earthenware jar in my possession which I got in Israel. It dates from the time of David, 3,000 years ago. I placed that gem on the mantle in my livingroom, although at the time I felt it might be presumptuous to take such a precious thing, which has survived three millennia, to my California home. When the earthquake struck, any thought of saving the vase never even entered my head, however. I immediately ran past the livingroom and grabbed my three children and brought them to safety. Living stones, not material things, are what we value in the church.

Not only is this new and living temple built with new materials, it has new and better foundations than the old, according to Peter.

II. New Foundations (2:6)

I would like to read Peter’s quotation, from Isaiah 28:16, from the original Hebrew so that we may hear the alliteration which the prophet used for emphasis:

For this is contained in Scripture:

**“Behold, I will *found* in Zion a stone,
A tested stone, a costly cornerstone for the *foundation*, well
founded,
He who believes in Him will not be in haste.”**

Second Samuel 7 tells us that David’s son would be the temple builder: “When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (7:12-13). Solomon built the first earthly temple, and Jesus, David’s greater son, would build the heavenly temple. What is amazing, though, is the prophet then declares that this Messianic King is also the temple and the corner stone of the temple!

The word used here of the Messiah is that he is a “*tested stone*.” This word is used in the Old Testament with God as the subject, when he is testing things to determine their essential qualities, especially integrity. God has put this stone to the test and found it to be true, righteous, and filled with integrity. That is why the throne of this One is unshakable. Because the throne is thus established, according to the psalmists, it is unshakable, and God’s loyal love would not forsake it forever. The implication here is that Jesus was a righteous King, a tested stone, therefore his throne has stability; it is immovable.

Because of this, Jesus became the precious corner stone of the foundation. God sees this stone as having infinite value. It is the chief stone by which the rest of the building is not only built upon, but measured and tied together. The very next verse in Isaiah reads, “I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the level.” The entire temple is built upon Jesus. He holds it together, and he is the standard by which everything else is measured. Friends, how you value this stone determines your destiny.

So Jesus is the tested stone, and the precious corner stone of the foundation.

Now, thirdly, because of these two realities, the text emphasizes that this new temple is permanent. Unlike the first two temples, which were destroyed by the Babylonians and the Romans, no enemy or natural disaster can destroy it. This sense of permanency is emphasized three times in the text. God would lay a foundation, a stone of foundation, a foundation stone well laid. Integrity is its own defense.

Psalms 89 says,

**I have made a covenant with My chosen;
I have sworn to David My servant,
I will establish your seed forever,
And build up your throne to all generations. (3-4)**

**Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Thy throne;
Loyal love and faithfulness go before Thee. (14)**

If you therefore have placed your life in Christ, and are anchored to that foundation, according to Isaiah, “he who trusts in Him will not be in haste.” This word “haste” speaks of that inner agitation which we have all been feeling for the past few days when we were tempted to believe that our security depended on ourselves. This is when our lives become hectic and feverish, as we run around trying to hold the disparate parts together. But if we have placed our life in Jesus, we will not be in haste when the judgment comes. My seven-year-old likes to sing the song, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” That’s our life in Christ.

On Wednesday mornings at 6:30 we have our men’s Bible study and prayer meeting here at church. Last Wednesday, less than 14 hours after the earthquake, I thought that no one would come, so I was feverishly acting in haste, straightening out my home. Later,

however, I found out that 20 men had come anyway, and they all went out to breakfast together. There they prayed, and anchored themselves to the Kingdom. They were not in haste.

This is what Isaiah goes on to say in chapter 54, verses 13-14:

**And all your sons will be taught of the LORD;
And the well-being of your sons will be great.
In righteousness you will be established;
You will be far from oppression, for you will not fear;
And from terror, for it will not come near you.**

So this new temple is not only built with new and better materials, it has deeper foundations that are immovable, because it is established in righteousness.

This temple has a third quality..

III. Built Without Human Subsidy (2:7)

This precious value, then, is for you who believe. But for those who disbelieve,

**“The stone which the builders rejected,
This became the very corner stone.”**

In contrast to the old, the new temple is built without human subsidy. Both the first and second temples in Israel were built with great contributions by world empires. When Israel came out of Egypt, she exited with much of the wealth of Egypt from which she built the tabernacle. The surrounding nations poured their wealth into Solomon's temple and his beautiful palaces. In the first century, the temple complex was beautified largely by King Herod, who embellished it with decorated stone. It was a glorious achievement, with its great columns, gold and bronze work, acacia wood, ivory, etc. It was obvious that the gross national product of many nations went into this building made with human hands. But when the heavenly temple came to be built, it was not built with human subsidy. In fact, the builders rejected it. The authorities in Jerusalem regarded the corner stone as unfit for God's Kingdom.

There were many opinions among the Jews as to how the Kingdom of God would appear. The Essenes, who valued asceticism, thought that Messiah would inaugurate the kingdom in the wilderness. The Sadducees, the wealthy landowners who had the ear of the Romans, were investors in the earthly Jerusalem and they were comfortable with the status quo. The Pharisees, who were not part of the temple, but who wanted to democratize the Torah so as to get the temple into the home, added all of their legalities in order to do so. The Zealots felt that the kingdom would be introduced by the sword and revolution, by overthrowing Rome. They had no use for any of the other groupings.

Jesus fit none of these categories, however (see Luke 7:31-35), and thus he was rejected and set aside. Here is what Isaiah says of him,

**“For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot [suckling],
And like a root out of parched ground” (Isa 53:2)**

Isaiah compared Jesus with a tender, green shoot (like a sucker shoot) and a parched root in the soil. He was not a part of mainline Judaism. He did not fit any of the traditional categories. He seemed to have no potential, so the Jews rejected him. “We esteemed Him not,” says Isaiah.

But God says that the very one whom the builders rejected became the corner stone of the new building project. In God's eyes he

had infinite value. The Word of God alone, not man, would bring about the building of this new temple not built with hands.

When we see this new temple being built worldwide in all its glory, we will say that the Word of God alone and the Spirit of God built this temple. Not only was no human help or no human subsidy utilized in the building, it was built in the face of human opposition. But only the eye of faith can see this building being erected. It is not visible to the world, for the world does not value it.

Woe to us when we crave worldly subsidy, with unrighteous mammon, to build the church! We don't need it. In fact, the building proceeds better when it is opposed by the government. Then it is built by pure word and pure spirit, to the glory of God.

There is the new temple: New materials, better foundations, and built without human subsidy.

The apostle has a fourth point.

IV. Constructing the New Demolishes the Old (2:8)

To those who disbelieve...A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

Here we have the amazing revelation that as God is proceeding with the new construction, he is at the same time demolishing the old. Peter quotes from Isaiah 8:14, where the prophet predicted that a flood of judgment (the Assyrian invasion) was about to come upon Israel. But if the nation would repent, and trust in the Lord, in the midst of that judgment God would become a sanctuary to them. If they refused to make the Lord the rock of their trust, however, this same rock would crush them like a great stone carried by a raging torrent. Peter says that Jesus was that stone. For some, it would be a sanctuary to flee to; for others, it would be a rock of judgment.

Jesus said he had come to build his new temple, and in the process the old would be torn down. In the Olivet Discourse he said, “My word will be vindicated because this old temple will be destroyed in the midst of the birth of the new, so woe to you rich who have invested in Jerusalem. You will see the Roman armies coming. Then you must get out of Jerusalem. Flee to the hill country. Pray that this will not happen in winter.” Between the announcement of that gospel and the coming was a 40-year period. They had 40 years to repent. The believing remnant read this text in the Olivet Discourse and they repented and fled Jerusalem. Then the Romans came and destroyed the city.

The year A.D. 70 is a very important date in world history. This was the date that vindicated the word of Jesus as a prophet. What he said was right; all the rest of Judaism was wrong. His kingdom was built and the earthly kingdom was destroyed.

So that we can enter into and experience this holocaust which occurred when the Roman armies invaded Jerusalem, I will read part of the account by the contemporary historian, Josephus, describing the fire in the temple:

While the holy house was on fire, everything was plundered that came to hand, and 10,000 of those that were caught were slain; nor was there a commiseration of any age, or any reverence of gravity; but children, and old men, and profane persons, and priests, were all slain in the same manner...as well as those that made supplication for their lives, as those that defended themselves by fighting. The flame was also carried a long way, and made an echo, together with the groans of those who were slain; and because this hill was

high, and the works at the temple were very great, one would have thought that the whole city had been on fire.

Nor can one imagine anything either greater or more terrible than this noise; for there was at once a shout of Roman legions, who were marching all together, and a sad clamor of the seditious, who were now surrounded with fire and sword. The people also that were left above were beaten back upon the enemy, and under a great consternation, and made sad moans at the calamity they were under; the multitude also that was in the city joined in this outcry with those that were upon the hill; and beside many of those that were worn away by the famine, and their mouths almost closed when they saw the fire of the holy house, they exerted their utmost strength, and broke out into groans and outcries again...

Yet was the misery itself more terrible than this disorder; for one would have thought that the hill itself, on which the temple stood, was seething-hot, as full of fire on every part of it, that the blood was larger in quantity than the fire and those that were slain more in number than those that slew them; for the ground did nowhere appear visible, for the dead bodies that lay on it; but the soldiers went over heaps of these bodies, as they ran upon such as fled from them.

In that year of A.D. 70, 1,200,000 Jews died in Jerusalem! They died because they failed to believe the word of Jesus that judgment was coming. They had invested in Jerusalem and had lost everything. But for the believing remnant of Jews who took the word of Jesus seriously, the stone became a sanctuary, not the means of their destruction.

I personally feel that what happened in Israel in the years A.D. 33–70 is a microcosm of world history. Just as Israel as a nation had the gospel preached to them and had opportunity to repent before the judgment came, so Jesus says, in the Olivet Discourse, that as the kingdom goes forth to the Gentile nations it will be born in the midst of labor pains, famine, wars, rumors of wars, and earthquakes. All of these disasters will break down the old, created order, and at the same time give birth to the new order, the church of Jesus Christ. What happened to Israel in that day is happening in the nations of the world throughout the age. The judgment of an earthquake which we experienced in these past few days is nothing compared to the judgment that is yet to come. Think of the great tribulation, when God will pour out his wrath in full measure on all the nations. But this destruction of the old will give birth to the new. At the end, the only thing that will be left standing will be the new temple. This is the point of the text.

A couple who are friends of mine lost their home in the earthquake on Tuesday. Due to faulty construction, their home slid off its foundations, down the side of a hill. When I visited them, the husband told me that although they had lost everything, he had made a list of more than 200 things for which he could be thankful in the midst of the disaster which had struck. Christian friends had given them gifts of money, places to stay, meals, everything. The old had been destroyed, but these “living stones” were precious and beautiful to behold. The highlight of my week was talking with this couple and hearing them express their thanksgiving to God for what he was doing. They are part of the new construction, the living temple which is being built.

Here then are the qualities of God’s new construction: New materials, new foundation, no human subsidy, and the new demolishes the old.

Our text answers the question, “If you can’t trust the ground you walk on, what can you trust?” in two commands: Come, and believe. Come to Jesus, and put your trust in him. When I was remodelling my home, I discovered that I had to use anchor bolts to anchor the house to its foundations. Then, when an earthquake strikes, the home will not slip from its foundations. If you are not anchored in Jesus Christ, it doesn’t matter how good are the foundations of the new temple. You cannot be loosely associated with this stone. It’s no use coming to church or religious meetings if you are not firmly anchored.

Come to Jesus, believe in him, and anchor your life in him. Make that foundation your life’s trust. Then, when the judgment comes, you will not be found in haste. You will be secure, and you can worship in peace. My friends lost their home because it was not tied to its foundations. But they were not tied to their home. They had anchored themselves to the living stone. If you do the same, then you can say with the author of the book of Hebrews,

And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth, but also the heaven.” And this expression, “Yet once more,” denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, in order that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. (Heb 12:26-29)

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1 Peter 2:4-10

Seventh Message

Brian Morgan

October 29, 1989

RECONSTRUCTED IN JEWELS

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

Ten years ago, I was in the town of Egbe, in Nigeria, participating in a pastors conference with our PBC staff. I taught at a high school located by a missionary compound which served as our headquarters. I grew to love the young people at this school. They asked very insightful questions about the Christian life, and they were keenly interested in everything we had to say.

There were hardly any men to be seen in this little town and I questioned a missionary about this. He told me that the typical pattern in this area was that men married at an early age and had large families. Then they left to go to Lagos, the capital city, to find employment. Most of them never returned to their wives and families. I wondered how this rejection by their fathers would impact a generation of young people.

Today, I find I'm asking the same question in our own Bay Area. Where are the fathers? And what is going to happen to the many children who are facing the same kind of rejection in our own society? Studies have shown that three out of five children of divorced parents regard divorce as a kind of personal rejection, and they struggle with guilt because of that. The same studies show that children from nine through the teen years bear deeper scars than younger children. As the psychologists explore, they are discovering that more and more children are being raised in dysfunctional homes. Alcoholism, drugs, and emotional and sexual abuse are quite common in the homes of America today. People who have suffered these types of backgrounds, and who have found help, discover that a study of these kinds of behavior patterns is an eye-opener. Things seem to click and fall into place for them, and they see for the first time why their families acted in certain ways.

As we see the effects of this kind of rejection in our culture today, the question we must ask is, Is reconstruction possible? Can lives be put back together when the foundations that are already laid are so faulty and crumbling? Our text from First Peter this morning has good news along these lines. God, says the apostle, is occupied in a worldwide building and reconstruction project that is the secret to world history. The good news is that God wants each of us to play an integral part in his new, spiritual temple which he is constructing.

I have always loved construction. As a child, I loved to explore building sites where new homes were being going up. Later, during my college years, and even after I graduated, I worked on construction projects. One building I worked on, at Fourth and Market in San Francisco, I am happy to report, withstood the earthquake! I remember the sense of euphoria I enjoyed while I worked on that building. Whether walking on the steel girders on the 33rd floor, or assisting as a carpenter's helper in the basement, I felt privileged to be part of a major building project.

How much more exciting and significant, then, is this new building project which God is doing worldwide! And how privileged we are to be called by him to participate in a building made without hands, one that will last forever.

We have already seen that our text, 1 Peter 2:4-10, has two parts.

And coming to Him as a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious In the sight of God, you also as living stones are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ For this is contained in Scripture:

**"Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone,
And he who believes In Him shall not be disappointed."**

This precious value, then, is for you who believe, but for those who disbelieve,

**"The stone which the builders rejected,
This became the very corner stone,"**

and,

"A stone of stumbling and a rock of offense";

for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (NASB)

The text opens with a summary which describes Jesus as the corner stone, and us as the living stones (vv. 4-5). Peter then fleshes out the summary, in verses 6-10. Verses 6-8 (which we looked at last week) describe Christ, the corner stone; verses 9-10 (which we will cover today) describe us, the living stones being built into God's new temple.

I. The Foundation Has Already Been Laid (2:6)

**"Behold I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone,
And he who believes in Him shall not be disappointed."**

We will look at four aspects of reconstruction in our lives. People who have suffered rejection are quite fragile. It does not take much heartbreak or hardship to bring their self-worth crumbling down. Their foundations are easily undermined. Quickly, their lives begin to resemble Highway 880, which collapsed in the earthquake. Soon, the entire structure of their lives begins to come apart, as the concrete crumbles and the twisted and broken reinforcement bars are laid bare. How can the mess be untangled and a fresh start made?

The Scriptures teach that the unregenerate man is powerless to do anything about this. He can make a few cosmetic changes, of course, but cleaning up the mess and rebuilding the foundation is beyond him. But the good news of the gospel is that God will not build again on your old foundation; he has already laid a new, perfect foundation, without flaw or blemish of any kind. That foundation is Jesus Christ, the living stone, the tested stone, the precious corner stone. On Christ, the solid, unshakable foundation, God carries out his reconstruction in people's broken lives.

Where do you begin the task of reconstruction? There is more good news here. Your first task is not to rebuild but appreciation for what

Christ has already accomplished. Look at what he has done and thank him for it. When God created Adam, the first man's first day on earth was a holiday, not a workday. It was sabbath. Man rested, and God took him by the hand and showed him the beauty of his perfect, completed creation. On that first day, Adam's only responsibility was to appreciate and enter into the perfect results of what God had done.

What was true of creation is also true of salvation and redemption. When Jesus hung on the cross and took upon himself our guilt, our shame and our mangled lives, he cried out, "It is finished!" With his life, God laid the new foundation of the new temple, and it, too, is finished. You don't have to begin reconstructing your life. Your job is to appreciate what God has already done in Jesus Christ. Then give God permission to rebuild your life, and sign the building permit. This is your first task in reconstruction.

There is a second task.

II. Secure Yourself To The Foundation (2:4, 5, 7)

Last week we heard from a couple who lost their home in the earthquake, not because the house did not have foundations, but because the builder did not anchor the building to the foundation. Being loosely associated with your foundation is of no value when the judgment comes. It does not pay to be loosely associated with Jesus Christ, either. You need the anchor bolts of faith to tie you to the rock, as Peter says in verse 7:

This precious value, then, is for you who believe.

Seeing the beauty and the perfection of the foundation, you then hang your life on Christ, trusting him fully.

But it doesn't end there, says Peter. You need to continue to have faith. You must come to Christ daily.

And coming to Him as a living stone...you also as living stones are being built up.

That is passive tense. It is not saying that God places you on the foundation and then expects you to build the building. It means that the new foundation is alive and, just as you first came to Christ by faith, so you continue to have faith in him; then the life of Christ the foundation builds you up. You are not even building yet. You are being built up.

It is very important to understand this. When Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, he rebuked them because they did not understand what the Scriptures said. He gave them a new hermeneutic, a new lens, to understand the Scriptures. Here is what he said,

"We were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel..." "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all the prophets have spoken! Was it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" And beginning with Moses and from all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures. (Luke 24:21, 25-27)

All of Scripture, he told them, the law, the prophets, the writings, were not given as principles, as guidelines that they should try to incorporate in their lives by their own efforts. Rather, all of Scripture was pointing to him, he declared.

The Old Testament is like an hourglass: Everything funnels down to one person, Jesus Christ, and then it all funnels down to believers as we place our faith in him. Everything that is his becomes ours. Do not read the Old or New Testaments as arbitrary principles for living life. They point to Christ. And because we are in Christ, his life is ours.

Last week, our pastoral staff studied Psalm 15 together. The psalm asks the question, "Who may abide on God's holy hill?" The answer

comes, "The man who walks in integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart." Ray Stedman commented: "This text can be taken in two ways. We can try to imitate it by our own self-effort and become self-righteous and arrogant; or we can see that we do not speak truth in our heart; we do not qualify to be on that holy hill." This is a description of Jesus. He walked in integrity, speaking truth from his heart. By faith we are in Christ, and we receive his life.

This is how we should read our Bibles. It takes continual faith to draw near and to appropriate the life of our Christ, our living foundation. We are placed on it by faith, and we are built up on it by faith as we come each day to Christ. The longer I live, the more I realize I never get any stronger. I keep living with my weaknesses and in them I keep crying out to God moment by moment. We grow in the knowledge of our own weakness, and this leads us to cry out every day to Christ to save us. That is the Christian life.

Having seen with the eye of faith the value of Christ, we must keep feeding on the Scriptures, and we must do this with the proper lens. If we allow the Scriptures to take us to Christ, not to ourselves and our own strength, then we will be built up in the faith.

Now that we are on the right foundation, and are viewing the Scriptures with the right lens, the actual construction can begin.

III. Being Constructed: Infinite Worth (2:7a, 9a, 10)

And coming to Him as a living stone, rejected by men, but choice and precious in the sight of God...This precious value, then, is for you who believe,...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession,...for once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Here, Peter gathers many of the glorious titles that speak of Israel's special relationship to God, and says that in Christ these are fulfilled. Now that our faith is in Christ, we are being grafted into the -people of God, and that special, unique relationship is ours. If you struggle with self-worth, try these terms on for size, for all of them refer to your uniqueness and the special intimacy you are to have with God.

We are "*a chosen race*." The two great doctrines of Judaism were monotheism and election: There is one God, and Israel is his people. "Hear O Israel, the Lord is your God, the Lord is one" (Deut 6:4). Since we have been adopted into this family, now we, too, become the elect people of God.

And we are "*a royal priesthood*"—a kingdom of priests. There are many significant tasks in life but none as privileged as the priesthood. Priests lead men into the very presence of God and build up the temple with his life.

We are a "*holy nation*," a people set apart totally to God (Exod 19:6). And we are a "people for God's own possession," a special treasure for God's own possession. The gold of an engagement ring is special, but the diamond set in the gold is a special treasure that says you belong uniquely to someone. This is what this term "a people for God's own possession" means. We are God's very own property, at his complete disposal, for his personal use. Every day we should see ourselves as God's personal property, available for his personal use in the world.

Deuteronomy 10:14-15 says, "Behold, to the LORD your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did the LORD set His affections to love them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day." If you are struggling with your sense of self-worth because you have been rejected, remember that to God you are unique. Nothing enhances our view of ourselves more than a feeling that we are special.

There were no fathers in Egbe, as I have said, but I determined to be a father to one high schooler. I noticed in particular one boy, James, who seemed keenly interested in what I was teaching. One of our ministry team said to me later, "I think James likes you." Next day I sought permission for James to be absent from school for three days to accompany me to a pastor's conference. I was told, "You don't want James. He's not a good student. Take someone else." But I insisted that James be the one. All during the conference he sat next to me as my personal emissary, and listened as I taught. He was greatly encouraged and felt really special because I had chosen him out of all the students in the school to relate to in a special way.

Peter goes on to say that this new relationship, this New Covenant, based on Jesus Christ, is better than the old. The old covenant, from Exodus 19, is a conditional agreement. Here are the words of Moses,

"Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My Covenant, then you shall be my own possession among all the peoples...and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exod 19:5-6)

"If you obey, then..." But there is no condition attached to the New Covenant, says Peter. "You are a holy nation, you are a kingdom of priests," he writes. Under the Old Covenant, this special relationship and privilege as the people of God would continue only if Israel kept the covenant; then she would become a special treasure to God. But Christ has already fulfilled the New Covenant for those who believe in him. Thus we are already a holy nation and a people for God's own possession, according to the apostle.

This New Covenant is better for another reason, as Peter goes on to say in verse 10:

Once you were not a people of God, but now you are the people of God, you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

In the New Covenant, the doors are thrown open to all comers from all nations so that all may become participants in this new community.

There is a wonderful illustration of this truth in the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8. This man had two strikes against him under the old covenant: he was a foreigner, and he was a eunuch. On his way home from worshiping in Jerusalem, he stopped by the road to read the text of Isaiah 53, the story of the Suffering Servant who would die for the sins of the nation. As he was reading, along came Philip the evangelist. Philip asked him if he knew what he was reading. "How could I know," replied the eunuch, "when no one will explain it to me?" Wouldn't you love to meet someone asking this question on your way to work in the morning? "Of whom was the prophet speaking?" asked the eunuch, "was it himself or someone else?" Philip knew the correct lens to use. Beginning from that point in the text of Isaiah he preached Christ to this man. How fulfilled the eunuch must have been to hear Isaiah's words just three chapters later, after the Servant had come to inaugurate the New Covenant,

**Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say,
"The LORD will surely separate me from His people."
Neither let the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree." ...
I will give them an everlasting name...
And make them joyful in My house of prayer. (Isa 56:3, 5, 7)**

We can only imagine the joy this Ethiopian man felt when he realized that not only could he enter the temple but that he was actually becoming the temple. This is true reconstruction.

Thus the foundation has already been laid. We come to Christ by faith, and we take on the precious value of Christ in this new temple.

We have all the unique privileges of the people of God. And this New Covenant is better than the old. It has been initiated in mercy, and made secure by Christ's faithfulness, not our own.

Finally, in this task of reconstruction we move from having infinite worth to having very special work to do in this temple.

IV. Being Constructed: Heavenly Tasks (2:5, 9b)

"They will declare My glory among the nations. Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the LORD...I will also take some of them for priests and for Levites," says the LORD. (Isa 66:19-21)

you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

Psychologists have discovered that it is impossible to restore someone's damaged self-worth unless you give him or her something significant to do. Older people struggle in this area. They feel insignificant because their work is done. But our text points out that God not only gives us infinite worth, he also gives us heavenly tasks—the task of being priests in this heavenly temple. In Hebrew and Greek, there is no distinction between the word for worship and the word for work. They are both the same. We cannot worship without giving service in God's temple. But here we see that as soon as we find our worth in Christ, he immediately puts us to work. As living stones, we are built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood. A couple of weeks ago I baptized a man who was a Catholic. Just before he went under the water I said to him, "Do you realize that when you come up, you are going to be a priest and you don't even have to go to seminary?" "Let's go!" he said, all excited. All the laborers in this new temple are priests.

There is no more significant occupation in life than this priesthood. What do you think is the most highly regarded occupation? A brain surgeon must study many years in medical school. His delicate hands work with scalpel and laser beam to remove a brain tumor. But the patient is still a fleshly, selfish individual who is destined to die anyway. A brain surgeon can remove a physical impediment and prolong life, but he cannot make lasting changes in the soul. A priest, on the other hand, moves among his community with his mind illumined by the word of God and the Spirit of God. He uses his skill in speech and hearing to bring an ailing soul into the very presence of God. He feeds him with a word or an act of love so that he changes for all eternity the very soul he ministers to. A priest permanently reconstructs life not in material things but in heavenly jewels. Can there be any more significant occupation in this world?

Every morning when you awake, think of yourself as a priest. In your closet are hanging the vestments of the Old Testament priest. Clothe yourself in the character of Jesus Christ. Put on the linen, the breast plate, with its twelve jewels representing Israel, and the holy robe. Go to work and there, in the power of prayer, bring the saints into the presence of God.

I have seen many people in our congregation doing the work of a priest. I took my daughter to a baseball game once, together with a friend named Jim. Sitting behind us were two young men who were drinking beer all evening. The more they drank, the more obnoxious and vulgar they became. I was becoming increasingly irritated with these guys and I wanted to cover my daughter's ears so she would not be corrupted by their speech. But my friend Jim leaned over and whispered to me, "I'm praying for them." Later, when I made a critical

comment about them, he said to me, "You know, every form of abusive speech is really a cry for help." My friend was a better priest than me. He had his breastplate on. He saw through the sham to the hurting hearts and was praying for the men. What a high calling it is to be a priest!

A young man in our congregation is the director of disaster relief for Santa Clara County. This was a rather insignificant title until the day the earthquake struck. Before that he had no power, no authority, no resources, only a team of two others who sat in a small office in a government building in San Jose. A number of weeks ago, however, he and his team planned the entire scenario for what they would do in the event of an 8.3 earthquake; how many buildings would collapse, where they would send relief, etc. He even talked to a geologist who told him that the next earthquake on the San Andreas Fault would not be 8.3 but 7.1—and it could happen any time, she said.

Then the earthquake struck. He was in his office on the 15th floor, and the building began to sway back and forth. While everybody around him was falling apart, my friend told me that his first thought was, "This is my hour!" He immediately drove to his headquarters, a bunker in San Jose, where he remained 20 hours every day for a week following the earthquake. He had telephone calls from all over the State of California, from the governor, state politicians and local officials. He had helicopters and warships, blankets, water and trucks at his disposal. He was thrilled about what he could do to help this area recover, but he told me that he lacked a sense of peace.

Then he began reading the Scriptures. He came to the words of Jesus, "To the degree that you have done it to the least of these, you have done it to me." He broke down and wept when he realized that he was not only directing the Bay Area relief effort, he also was a priest ministering to Christians who had suffered great losses. Though he could not see them or know them, he knew he was bringing relief to people and serving the Lord Jesus himself in his holy temple. He felt honored and privileged to be a priest in that situation, even more honored than his position as coordinator of relief.

What a high calling each one of us has! There is no more significant task in life than "to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." The earthquake exposed the materialistic sham of San Francisco and the Bay Area. The packed stadium at the resumed World Series held hands and sang "San Francisco," the song written after the 1906 earthquake. But as a prophet and priest, you can say that San Francisco is under the same judgment as Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Then you can talk about the new city which God is building, whose foundation is Jesus Christ and whose temple is unshakable. Invite people to become part of this new temple. San Francisco dwells in darkness; tell people about the light.

There are the steps to reconstruction. The new foundation is laid in Christ, and we are secured to it by faith. By faith the very same value that God gives to Christ is yours, as is his ministry as a priest. When you get up in the morning, put on your robes of royalty, your turban of authority, your breastplate of the saints. Then, your mind, illumined with light, your speech graced with the word of God, possessing divine wisdom, fulfills your calling as an ambassador of Jesus Christ.

Two Exhortations

Two common problems hinder us in this reconstruction. The first is procrastination. Many of us do not want to enter into our heavenly function until God has perfected us. I have noticed, however, that al-

though San Francisco airport was in the midst of a remodeling program recently, business there did not come to a halt. There were many inconveniences, but the airport functioned normally. Streets were tom up, there were temporary boarding areas, plywood ramps were in use, there was dust and debris everywhere, but the airport continued functioning.

In the same way, God's program with us is *on-site reconstruction*. Don't wait to start functioning in your priestly ministry. Get on with the work! Every year in our home we invite our neighbors and friends for a Fourth of July celebration. A few years ago, however, while we were in the midst of remodeling our home, I assumed we would not have a party that year. "What do you mean, we're not having a party?" said Emily. "Just because we're in the midst of a home building project doesn't mean we can't have a party." Well, we went ahead and had our celebration, and it wits the best one we ever had. It's the same with the Christian life. God is always engaged in remaking and remodeling various parts of our lives, but he wants to use us in our priestly ministry during the reconstruction.

The second problem that hinders us is blindness. We are blind to God's curriculum. Jesus epitomized what a priest should be. He had the ear of a disciple who awakened morning by morning to hear the Lord. His eye saw what the normal eye could not. When he spoke, he brought healing and life. He never said the same thing twice, but spoke directly to the soul of those in need. But what curriculum did he study to become so gifted as a priest? Our text puts it in one word: Rejection. "The stone which the builders rejected." Rejection was the curriculum that made Jesus a priest.

"I gave my back to those who strike Me,

And My cheeks to those who pluck out the beard;

I did not cover My face from humiliation and spitting." (Isa 50:6)

"He came to his own and his own did not receive him," says the Scripture. His own brothers thought he was crazy. He had no place to lay his head. He lacked the support of any branch of Judaism. He died alone, forsaken by his own disciples. He was rejected, but this is what made him such a wonderful priest.

In his book, *Orphans Lead The World*, Dr Pierre Rentchnick of Geneva writes that 300 of 500 world leaders were orphans. The curriculum that qualified them to be leaders was rejection and suffering. So many come from dysfunctional homes. So many have faced rejection. But this is no cause for self-pity. Let us thank God for it, for this is what qualifies us to minister as priests in the living temple. We hear hurts that we never heard before. We bring words of comfort to the weary.

We therefore find that we grow spiritually as we come to the living word which teaches us about Christ. This Christ came to build a new spiritual temple, with a new priesthood. And this new temple is not like the old one, which was built with hands. It is spiritual, built without hands, eternal in the heavens. As we embrace Christ, his identity and ministry in the new temple become ours by virtue of our being in him. What a glorious privilege to be part of God's eternal kingdom! Here is where we will dwell forever, basking in his courts of light and love.

Is reconstruction possible? Yes it is, but this time we are reconstructed in jewels.

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1 Peter 2:11-17

Eighth Message

Brian Morgan

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A SLAVERY THAT IS FREEDOM

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

One of my most enjoyable experiences this year was seeing the hit musical *Les Misérables*, the saga of a student revolt in France following the French Revolution. It is a story of the hunger for peace and freedom. One of the most inspiring songs in the musical score is "Do You Hear The People Sing?"

Do you hear the people sing?
Singing the song of angry men?
It is the music of a people
Who will not be slaves again!
When the beating of your heart
Echoes the beating of the drums
There is a life about to start
When tomorrow comes!

Will you join in our crusade?
Who will be strong and stand with me?
Beyond the barricade
Is there a world you long to see?

Then join in the fight
That will give you the right to be free!

Will you give all you can give
So that our banner may advance?
Some will fall, and some will live.
Will you come up and take your chance?
The blood of the martyrs
Will water the meadows of France!

As I listened to these lyrics I realized that this song could also be the world's theme song this year in its cry for freedom. Beginning in China, this cry spread to East Berlin, Hungary, Romania, and now Lithuania. People long to be free, to be slaves to no one.

The revolution in *Les Misérables* was a failure. The student leader ultimately sings of disillusionment. Their hunger for political freedom did not realize their dream, but instead ended in death and despair for the revolutionaries. Likewise, as the euphoria of freedom and peace wears off in our own world, it strikes me that we too are beginning to see disillusionment. What is happening in Eastern Europe anyway? Are people really free? We must remember that "freedom" brings with it freedom for abortions, freedom for licentiousness, freedom to import pornography. Some fear the uniting of the two Germanys. They remember the Holocaust. Similarly, freedom in Romania has resulted in oppression of the Hungarian-speaking minority. As C. S. Lewis once said, "No arrangement of bad eggs makes a good omelet."

In the text today, 1 Peter 2:11-17, the apostle writes about a different kind of freedom, a transcendent freedom that liberates and transforms the soul. He will tell us that true freedom is born in the most oppressive circumstances. Whether you are in a prison, a dysfunctional home, or an oppressive workplace you can find this kind of freedom. Enter into it and you will have an influence that will have a great impact for the Kingdom of God.

That is what the Christians of Peter's day were looking for. This little group, dispersed over the Roman Empire, was hardly organized, had few resources, and was treated like outcasts. Their question was, "The whole world hates us. How do we exert an influence for the cause of Christ?"

Typically, in our own environment when Christians face that kind of hostility our response is to go to extremes. We either wall ourselves inside of a Christian ghetto and hurl words of condemnation to the unbelieving world, or we go out into the world pushing Jesus on people. Peter suggests neither of those approaches, but rather a third way—true liberty of the spirit. He spells out the principle in verses 11-12, and then works it out in various forms of life, such as government, the workplace, and the home. Today, we will look at how to work it out in the realm of government.

1. Where Is Our Freedom Found? (2:11)

Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. (NASB)

A. By knowing our true identity: Citizens of heaven

Peter says that before we can find true freedom we must know our identity. Who are you? Today, we are being told that our identity is strongly related to our parents. If you are having trouble in life, go back and relive your old history, play the old tapes, and find that parental blessing. If you do not get it, we are told, your situation is hopeless. Peter says, however, that that is a false perspective because as Christians we are not citizens of this world. No one here can give us the freedom for which we long. We are God's beloved people, and thus citizens of heaven. While on earth, we are aliens, sojourners, pilgrims merely passing through. We are journeying by stages to our heavenly Zion, picking up our tents and moving on. Our citizenship, our freedom belongs in another land—in the new heaven and the new earth—so we should not expect to find life here. Therefore, as citizens of heaven Peter issues a call to purity, to abstain from fleshly lusts that wage war against the soul.

I picture my life as a pilgrim journeying with a backpack. Accompanying me is an ugly dog on a leash, and it is bent on my destruction. Though I have a new nature and a new heart, this dog—the flesh—still walks with me all the way home to Zion. The worst thing I can do is feed him. If I do, his appetite will grow, and thus I increase his arsenal to destroy my life.

Do you find that true? No matter how old you are this dog travels with you—and he has quite an appetite. If you give in to lustful appetites by feeding them, they grow greater. They ultimately consume you, and you become a slave to them. They shut the windows to heaven and wage war against your soul so that you have difficulty appropriating heavenly life. Thus, Peter says, "Say no to these fleshly urges. Do not feed the dog. Starve him, and feed the spirit with eternal life." As one writer says,

God insists on having the heart, which He cannot have if pleasure has it...if nature is pampered, grace must be starved...The earthly senses must be made spiritual; the sensual heart purified; the wandering mind fixed; the foolish imagination made sober.¹

B. Not from this world: Aliens and sojourners on earth

The way we act when we visit a foreign country as a pilgrim is how we are to live in this world. When I went to Romania last year, I carried my passport with me everywhere. Inside was a picture and information about me: "Name: Brian Gilchrist Morgan. Birthplace: California, U.S.A." I knew I was in Romania only temporarily. I was not there on a vacation or for pleasure. I was not there to find my life. I was there because I had a mission.

We discovered on our arrival that some of our bags had missed the connection, so we had to stay in Bucharest several extra days. One evening, I suggested that we go to dinner. I found a beautiful restaurant, and we were given the upper floor where a lovely table was spread with food. I started eating and enjoying myself, until I saw my friend Bill looking sullen and quiet. I asked him what was wrong. He said, "I can't eat." When I asked why, he said, "Because my friends can't eat. We are here to give them spiritual food and they don't have anything to eat. So I can't eat."

That is the essence of how we are to live as pilgrims. We are not here in Silicon Valley on a vacation, to pamper our lusts. We are here on a mission. Therefore, we have a call to purity as citizens of heaven.

Once we learn our true identity as free citizens of heaven, Peter tells us how to express our freedom.

II. The Expressions of Our Freedom (2:13-14, 16-17)

Submit yourselves to every human institution on account of the Lord, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right...Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves of God. Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king.

A. Obedience, not licentiousness

As free citizens of heaven, how should you express your freedom? Peter says, "Act as free men, and do not use your freedom as a covering for evil, but use it as bondslaves to God."

Remember the text in scripture about the IRS agent who asked Jesus to pay a tax? Jesus said to Peter, "What do you think, Simon? From whom do the kings of earth collect taxes? Do they collect it from sons or strangers?" Peter correctly answered, "From strangers." Jesus replied, "You're right. Consequently, the sons are exempt, or free. But lest we give him offense, go to the sea, throw in a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. When you open its mouth you will find a shekel. Take that and give it to him for both you and me."

So the sons are free. April 15th will come, and you are free. However, lest you give offense to the IRS, pay them what you owe. Jesus says that the expression of freedom is obedience, not licentiousness; submission, not lawlessness. We feel just the opposite in the process of growing up. When we are young, we yearn to be free. We do not want anyone telling us what to do. We cannot wait for the day when you are in charge.

When I was in third grade I had a French teacher, Madame Spencer, who taught the whole elementary school French. Since I hated French, I decided to exercise my freedom and chose not to study. Yet I found by exercising that freedom I did not liberate my soul but bound it up in a knot because the test was coming. To handle the situation

I decided to exercise my freedom some more. The morning of the test I told my mother I was sick, and she allowed me to stay home. I continued to exercise my freedom by doing what I wanted the whole day. The next day, however, I had to go to school and face Madame Spencer.

I realized that expressing my freedom did not liberate me, but wrapped my inner man in garments of pain, and gave me more bondage than if I had submitted to any human law. So in the fourth grade I decided to turn over a new leaf. I studied until I learned everything perfectly. I will never forget the liberty I had going to school to face Madame Spencer. She called me up to the desk, expecting me to fail. When I got 100% on my vocabulary, she was amazed and delighted. That was true liberty!

In college, I discovered that if I continued to be obedient and mastered two quarters of Italian, I had the freedom to study in Italy for six months. Students who were obedient were the most liberated in the Italian culture, but those who were not were enslaved because they were not at liberty to penetrate the culture and enter into conversations. That is the liberty of which Peter is writing. Act as free men but do not use it as a covering for evil. Use it as bondslaves to God. You become free to be who you are only when you are a slave to Jesus Christ.

George MacDonald, the great children's writer of the last century, wrote:

True liberty lies in obedience: ...a good dog does not bite because he is not inclined to bite. He loves you, but you do not say that he is high morally because he is not inclined to do anything bad. But if we, choosing, against our likeness, to do the right, go on so until we are enabled by doing it to see into the very loveliness and essence of the right, and know it to be altogether beautiful, and then at last never think of doing evil, but delight with our whole souls in doing the will of God, why then, do you not see, we combine the two, and we are free indeed, because we are acting like God out of the essence of our (new) nature, knowing good and evil, and choosing the good with our whole hearts and delighting in it.

That is the essence of true freedom.

B. Obedience across the board

Peter says that this kind of obedience is to apply across the board to governments and every human institution. So he says, "Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether to the king as one in authority, or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right...Honor all men; love the brotherhood, fear God, honor the king."

This issue is confusing to us at times, but the apostles were clear about the difference between church and state. They understood that God's Kingdom is forged through the interaction of a pagan, secular state and a spiritual kingdom. When God first planted the nation of Israel, they were both a spiritual and a political kingdom. In the New Testament, we see that when believers failed to discern the difference, they used the sword to further the kingdom, causing great trouble in the process. Because of her corruption God took the sword of the state away from Israel, gave it to unbelieving Gentile rulers (such as the Syrians, Greeks, Persians, and the Romans), and used that sword even against his own people to purge her.

The prophets predicted a new kingdom coming that would be birthed not with the earthly sword, but by the sword of the Spirit. There would be a King who would not coerce people, but win their hearts, and the kingdom would be a kingdom of the heart. The secular, unbelieving people in the state would still have secular authority,

but God would work in his sovereignty between the two to spread his kingdom on earth.

We can see an example of that when we open to the Gospel of Luke. Luke tells us of the Roman government's census, a greedy process to count the people and then increase taxation, that was opposed by the Jews. Yet it was God behind the census, changing all the wheels of Roman government and administration to get one little pregnant couple on their donkey from Galilee to Bethlehem to fulfill a 700-year-old prophesy! I can hear Joseph telling Mary, "Dear, we have to fulfill the prophesy. Just obey the king, the Lord knows what he is doing. I know it's troublesome, no hospitals or anything, but we have to go."

Men of faith have seen that principle at work ever since. God has given the state the sword, and he is sovereign. As we have seen in the last year, nations are a drop in the bucket. What did God do with Communism? It was his tool to create a spiritual appetite among nations. After 40 years in some places, it is now fulfilled, and Communism is finished. The full revival awaits us.

God is in charge, and that is why we do not have to fight the state. Therefore, we need to submit to the police, the IRS agents, and pay the electric bill on time. This time of year we ought to start water rationing because the city asks us to do that. If the city wants a permit when we build, we must obey the codes and file for a permit. We must not be an irritant, but be gracious in every way. We are trying to be good neighbors here in our church with our parking problem. It is legal for us to park on the street, but the city says there is a problem because the neighbors are upset. Therefore, we choose to come by shuttle to be gracious. We need to go beyond the laws so we are not an irritant.

The Christian is free, but that freedom should make him a better earthly citizen. Even though this is not our home, we are to be better than the real citizens. Peter says, "When you obey, don't just do it externally, but do it from the heart." That is why he uses terms like "honor," "love," "fear." Give the people in authority respect in their offices, even though they are unbelievers.

I got a letter last week from one of our missionaries in Africa. He describes how he learned the very truth of his own freedom on an outing he took from Kenya to West Africa. In West Africa he bought some cans of tuna fish, which is not available or allowed in Kenya. As he was crossing the border he had five cans of tuna wrapped unobtrusively in a white blanket. He writes of his encounter with an agent when he was asked, "Do you have anything to declare?":

"Nothing except my computer, and I have documentation for that." Silently, I added, "and five cans of tuna that you might like to know about, but it's such a small thing."

The agent waved me on, and I pushed the luggage cart into "safety," away from any more uncomfortable questions. I struck up a conversation with another agent while we waited for some fellow passengers to finish with formalities. As we prepared to leave, half the baggage fell off the cart, including my innocent-looking box with blanket and tuna. This second agent came up, asked if I had cleared everything, and wondered out loud what was in that box. "A blanket from Mali," I informed him, carefully telling the truth and hiding the truth at the same time.

"Are you sure?" he asked. I made motions to open it for him, and he declined. I was enjoying the proverbial cold sweat by then.

We got everything home safely. "Now I can relax," I thought mistakenly. But in the coming days I kept replaying the scene in the airport, and hearing the question, "Are you sure?" I repeatedly reminded God that it was just a small thing, not worth bothering about. But those five cans of tuna refused to be quiet. What made

it worse was my commitment to integrity in the small secret things as the foundation for integrity in the more visible public arena of leadership.

After three days of unsuccessful mental wrangling I agreed with God that he could bother me about my tuna and I would listen. The result? A phone call to the Principal Customs Officer at the airport to explain what I had done. "You violated the law," he informed me. "But don't bring the tuna back here or it will only create confusion. I am a Christian man like yourself, and I encourage you to ask God to forgive you. In the future, we expect you, as a resident of Kenya, to follow our laws."

True freedom liberates the soul. We express it not in license, but in obedience. Christians should be the best citizens.

If we are pilgrims going to Zion, our new heavenly destination, what is the goal of our freedom in exercising this kind of freedom and obedience? Peter tells us that of all people in the world we have the highest of callings.

III. The Goal of Our Freedom: Winning Hearts (2:12, 15)

Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may on account of your good deeds, as they observe them, glorify God in the day of visitation....For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.

A. The setting: unjustified slander

The apostle says that the goal of our freedom as Christians is to win the hearts of evil and angry men who oppose us. In Peter's day, just having the name "Christian" subjected one to immediate scorn, ridicule, abuse, and unjust slander. Christians were accused of cannibalism because they "ate" the body and blood of Jesus. They were accused of incest because they greeted brothers and sisters with a holy kiss. They were charged with boycotting and interfering with trade, setting slave against master, child against parent, and wives against husbands. The most serious charge of their alleged disloyalty, however, concerned Caesar and the Roman government.

B. The method of winning hearts

What were these Christians to do about these unrighteous accusations and slander? Peter says, "When you are a victim of unjust suffering, make no defense through speech. Do not open your mouth." That is not explicit here, but in the examples that follow, the apostle first cites Jesus' response to his trial on trumped-up charges: He said nothing in his defense, he was silent as a lamb before the shearers. Peter next uses the example of a wife with an unbelieving husband, telling her, "Win the husband to the word without a word." Thus, when you are the subject of unjustified slander or abuse, do not defend yourself. Rather, your defense is continued righteous behavior.

People who are silent really have nothing to defend. Peter shows that unjust suffering lifts you up to a stage where the lights are turned on to a high intensity so the pagan world can observe you. Observing your continued good deeds, their mouths, which were once open wide to slander, are now closed in silence. They have nothing to say. If you follow that with even more good deeds and say nothing, good deeds are not only a proper defense, but they become an offensive weapon as well. They move the hearts of those attacking you, and they actually have the power to convert the heart. Instead of the accuser's mouth being open wide in slander, it shuts in silence when you do good. The next time it opens, rather than uttering slander it opens to glorify

God. The text says that it is open wide in praise for the day of “visitation.” That is a word play, since “visitation” is from the same root as the word “observe.” The world observes you, and behind the world is the Lord observing them. On the day of visitation they turn from your stage and they face outward on the same stage to glorify God with you. What a day that will be!

After Peter wrote this letter, these words had an impact on Christians for about 100 years. A wonderful document by an unknown author of the second century describes the behavior of these believers. It is wonderful because it describes the very thing that Peter says. This author writes:

The Christians are not distinguished from other men by country, by language, nor by civil institutions. For they neither dwell in cities by themselves, nor use a peculiar tongue, nor lead a singular mode of life. They dwell in the Grecian or barbarian cities, as the case may be; they follow the usage of the country in dress, food, and the other affairs of life. [What he is saying is that the Christians did not wall themselves in a Christian ghetto; they walked as full citizens of the culture in every single way. You could not tell them apart by any physical attributes.] Yet they present a wonderful and confessedly paradoxical conduct. They dwell in their own native lands, but as strangers. They take part in all things, as citizens; and they suffer all things, as foreigners. Every foreign country is a fatherland to them, and every native land is foreign. They marry, like all others; they have children; but they do not cast away their offspring. They have the table in common, but not wives. They live upon the earth, but are citizens of heaven. They obey the existing laws, and excel the laws by their lives. They love all, and are persecuted by all. They are unknown, and yet they are condemned. They receive scorn, and they give honor. They do good, and are punished as evil-doers. When punished, they rejoice, as being made alive.

May that be our legacy!

To me, *Les Miserables* is a production about the gospel—a gospel of deed, not a gospel of speech. After the revolution fails, another story is written about a greater freedom, a freedom of the soul that the hero finds while he is in prison. He is liberated to a new spiritual freedom and becomes a man of integrity. Now he is willing to suffer the loss of earthly goods, and he gives the rest of his life to caring for the oppressed. In the last scene he is received into heaven by an army of believers welcoming him to the place of freedom. That is the freedom Peter is sharing with us.

For the last eight months our Wednesday morning men's group has had the privilege of being in the presence of a man like this. His name was John Van Deist, and last week he died at the age of 38. He was with us as a pilgrim in a foreign land for only eight months. During that time he was imprisoned by a brain tumor, but his whole life was dedicated in obedience to Jesus Christ, loving his wife and children, and doing good for others. His whole desire was to take others to Zion with him.

His memorial service last Wednesday was a moving time. There were several hundred people with their mouths open wide at the day of John's visitation, giving praise to the God of John Van Deist. The most powerful testimony was that of an orthodox Jew, Avron —. In Poland at the age of seven, Avron was hidden underneath the floor boards of a synagogue to protect him from soldiers, otherwise he would have been killed for his faith of Judaism. The scars of persecution are so deep that Avron would never set foot in a Christian church, even

to attend his son's wedding after his son had converted to Christianity. Last week, however, he stood in front of a pulpit of a Christian church with his mouth open wide.

His first words were, “I am Jewish, but I loved John Van Deist. John used to take me to the bus stop, and he would describe his brain tumor to me and what he was going through. I don't know how he got through it.” Then he gave John the greatest compliment a Jew can give a Christian. He said, “John was a religious man.” As an orthodox Jew, what Avron meant was that John was devoted to God. Then he sang out a beautiful Hebrew prayer. The last words he had shared with John were, “Trust in God.” This is the true freedom, born in oppression, that liberates the soul. It carries the pilgrims with it, and converts the heart.

In honor of John, I would like to read to you the finale of *Les Miserables*, the song of freedom, true freedom:

Do you hear the people sing
Lost in the valley of the night?
It is the music of a people
Who are climbing to the light.
For the wretched of the earth
There is a flame that never dies.
Even the darkest night will end
And the sun will rise.

They will live again in freedom
In the garden of the Lord.
They will walk behind the plowshare
They will put away the sword.
The chain will be broken
And all men will have their reward.

Will you join in our crusade?
Who will be strong and stand with me?
Somewhere beyond the barricade
Is there a world you long to see?
Do you hear the people sing?
Say, do you hear the distant drums?
It is the future that they bring
When tomorrow comes!

Because we live as aliens and sojourners in a hostile world, we must not fall into the temptation of befriending the world so as to have influence. We must not allow our roots to grow too deep. This not only damages the soul, but it destroys our impact upon the world. On the other hand we must not err on the other extreme and isolate ourselves from the world, feeling that our temporary stay here on earth is insignificant. Rather we have the highest of callings, that of winning the hearts of men and women, boys and girls, even our enemies, through our good deeds. Seeing our proper identity as aliens and sojourners allows us to have a lasting impact upon the world without being stained by it.

1. John Fletcher in David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Burning and Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 354-5. This is a fascinating book, rich in doctrinal readings from ages past.

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Catalog No. 769

1 Peter 2:18-25

Ninth Message

Brian Morgan

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A SLAVERY THAT REDEEMS

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

In our study today the apostle Peter will answer a question that many of us have difficulty with: How should we relate to unreasonable people?

As a new convert in my freshman year at Stanford University, I wanted to be God's spokesman and be used by him to help lead the campus to Jesus Christ. But I got a rude awakening in an English class that I was assigned to for three quarters. On the first day of class, my professor attacked Christianity and Christians. I made the mistake of naively raising my hand to counter his attack, and from that day forth he did not spare me and my beliefs. I was faced with an unreasonable situation that I had to endure for months. How would I cope with this person?

As Peter develops his theme of how Christians should live as aliens and pilgrims in a hostile world, he now shows us how to relate to unreasonable people, using as his example Christian slaves in the first century and how they should respond to unjust masters. In the Roman Empire, slaves had few if any rights. Thousands were forced into slavery as the Roman armies conquered new territories and expanded the boundaries of the Empire. The historian Josephus tells us that 10,000 people in the Jewish War alone became slaves. They were sold as cheaply as horses, and treated as property. Even the noble philosophers of Rome thought that slavery was natural, and so ingrained in Roman society that it would be impossible to live without it.

Imagine the slave's response to Christ's message of redemption! "Redeemed" was a common term used in the slave market. How they must have gloried in the message that the Son of God had shed his blood to set them free! As they entered into that freedom they joined a new society where there was neither master nor slave. Evidence found in the catacombs of Rome testifies that there was no class distinction in Christian worship; all were brothers and sisters in Christ. But most slaves still had unrighteous masters. How could slaves have influence when they had no freedom, no rights, and no status?

Peter offers them a radical solution. Their status, says the apostle, far from being dishonorable, is the very role the Messianic King took on in order to redeem the world. Jesus, the King of Kings, did not wear his royal garments, but rather assumed the role of a bondservant so as to accomplish his earthly task. In this text, Peter sets out how slaves too can bring redemption to others, despite their lowly circumstances.

This is a radical word in our day and age. Many people will not be able to receive it. Those of you who can, however, will enter into a transcendent life that will liberate you from your difficult circumstances.

I will begin by reading the complete text. 1 Peter 2:18-25:

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are

unreasonable. For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return, while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls. (NASB)

I. The Call To Submission (2:18)

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable.

A. Knowing Who You Are: A "House-Slave"

Peter begins by issuing slaves a call to submission (verse 18). He addresses them with a title used rarely in the New Testament, a word that I would translate "house-slave." In the ancient world, this word was used of any member of the household, whether wife, child or slave. By implication, Peter says they have responsibility as members of a household to cultivate life within the home rather than damage it by an unsubmitive spirit.

B. Knowing whom you serve

Peter then says, "Know who you are, and also know whom you serve. Submit to your masters, fearing the Lord. The Lord is behind the master; serve the master as if he were Jesus Christ." This is how we should behave in the work place, where irresponsibility is common, or in the private arena, where no one can see our behavior. When we go to public restrooms, for example, we usually find them a mess. As a Christians we should have the attitude that the next person who will use the facilities will be Jesus. That is how a slave is to do his work, fearing the Lord.

C. Without condition

Peter then says that the slave should submit without condition, not only to people who are good and gentle, but also to unreasonable people. Some of these slaves had reasonable masters, just as some of us have employers who are tolerant, gentle and equitable. Charles Biggs says, "Law is the hard and fast rule which equity modifies according to circumstances." It is a blessing to have an employer who is tolerant and wise in his implementation of the rules. If he is flexible, he will adjust the rules to fit circumstance.

By contrast, Peter says that some people are “unreasonable.” They are intolerant and unapproachable, but slaves must still submit. The Greek word for “unreasonable” is the word from which we get the English word “scoliosis.” They are bent, perverted, and unjust. Here is what an Egyptian slave owner wrote concerning his runaway slave: “I commission you by this writ to go to the famous city of Alexandria and search for my slave about 35 years of age, whom you know. When you have found him, you shall place him in custody, with authority to shut him up and whip him, and to lay a complaint before the proper authorities against any persons who have harbored him, with the demand for satisfaction.” How different from what the apostle Paul wrote about Philemon’s runaway slave, Onesimus! He converted him, sent him back to his master, and rebuked his master for his unreasonableness.

Thus, the first century slave (and the twentieth century worker) must take seriously the call to submission in the work place. Christians have an extremely important part to play in a household (or a business), and have an obligation to serve the Lord. And we must submit without prior conditions.

II. The Reasons for Submission (2:19-21)

For this finds favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a man bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God.

A. For what it does to God: “This Finds Favor With God”

Peter asks slaves what credit is due them when a master (or, in our case, an employer), punishes them for doing wrong and they endure it graciously. There is no credit due. But when we do what is right, and suffer for it, and endure graciously as unto the Lord, this finds favor with God! This expression “This finds favor with God” comes from the Old Testament idea of the favor or goodwill felt by God to man or man to man.

**Do not let kindness and truth leave you;
Bind them around your neck,
Write them on the tablet of your heart.
So you will find favor and good repute
In the sight of God and man. (Prov 3:3-4)**

The point is, our lives as Christians should be lived on a higher plane than those around us. When we do this by appropriating God’s life, it produces something in us that inspires his favor. How amazing, to think that our righteous responses can bring delight and praise from the heart of God!

God wants us in our difficult circumstances to make his transcendent life visible to the world around us. Jesus said, “What credit is it to you if you love people who love you?” There is no credit due, and no transcendence apparent, in that. When we do right and someone wrongs us in return, however, their sin is made manifest “in living color,” as it were. When we continue with a good response, the redemptive life of God sits side-by-side with the evil response. One reason God allows unjust suffering is to enable people to see their own corruption in contrast to the redemptive love of Christ. In the gospels, our Lord’s consistent forgiveness toward his disciples made them aware of their own depravity, so much so that at one point Peter cried, “Depart from me, for I am a wicked man.”

When our first child was born in 1975, my wife and I prayed that the Lord would use our children to lead our parents to Christ. When our son died a few days later, I wondered if this would result in their salvation. That was 15 years ago, but our parents never responded to God’s call. When we lost our daughter a year later, Elaine Stedman’s words were to us, “God must really love you.” Then I realized that our motives for responding graciously must not be directed toward getting other people to respond to the Lord. It is enough that the transcendent God takes pleasure in us and we are able to share his life.

We miss this step if our responses are contingent on getting an unreasonable person to respond positively toward us. If we are guilty of this, then we become slaves to circumstances and people, and we will not enter into this transcendent life. Peter says it is enough that God loves and delights in us; we must obey because it is right, regardless how others respond. Otherwise, we will not enjoy God’s love and his transcendent life in a difficult situation.

B. For it is your calling

Secondly, says Peter (verse 21), “For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps.” Why should we submit to suffering? Because when we decided to follow Christ, that became our calling. We must understand that the cross is not extraordinary, it is the norm. We too have been called to suffer for doing what is right, in order to bring redemption to the world.

The word “example” means model, or pattern. In classical Greek it was used of the “outline” of a sketch which the artist filled in with detail. Other ancient writers use it for a “copyhead” in a child’s exercise book. This was a perfect piece of writing which the child was to imitate as exactly as he could. In this sense Christ is the “pattern” which we are to reproduce in every stroke of every letter, until our writing is a facsimile of the Master’s.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” He was faithful to that word. In 1939, when trouble was brewing in Nazi Germany, he was working in New York as a theologian and lecturer. Friends encouraged him to stay, saying that his gift of scholarship could be used to unite the church, but Bonhoeffer would have none of it. “It is not my calling,” he said. “I am called to go home.” He went home to the confessing church and joined in the resistance against Nazism.

It was in prison following his arrest in 1943 that Bonhoeffer’s greatest work was accomplished. There he wrote all the material for his *Letters and Papers From Prison*, and his great work, *The Cost of Discipleship*. During this time the guards were friendly to this strong pastor and secretly took him to the cells of despairing prisoners to minister to them. They preserved his papers, essays, and poems and even established a complete courier service to his family and friends outside. One English Army officer wrote of him:

Bonhoeffer always seemed to me to spread an atmosphere of happiness and joy over the least incident and profound gratitude for the mere fact that he was alive...He was one of the very few persons I have ever met for whom God was real and always near...On Sunday, April 8, 1945, Pastor Bonhoeffer conducted a little service of worship and spoke to us in a way that went to the heart of all of us. He had hardly ended his last prayer when the door opened and two civilians entered. They said, “Prisoner Bonhoeffer, come with us.” That had only one meaning for all prisoners—the gallows. We said good-bye to him. He took me aside: “This is the end,

but for me it is the beginning of life.” The next day he was hanged in Flossenburg... The text on which he spoke that last day was “By His stripes we are healed.”

Why should Christians submit? First, for what it does to God; and secondly, because it is our calling to follow Christ. To help us understand, Peter illustrates by reminding slaves of the beautiful example of Jesus.

III. The Example of Submission: Christ (2:22-23)

Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in his mouth, and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.

A. Christ an example of doing good and suffering for it

Slaves, says Peter, should not try to escape their captivity because they were in the best position—the very position that Jesus himself took. Isaiah 53:9 says,

**His grave was assigned with wicked men,
Yet He was with a rich man in His death,
Because He had done no violence,
Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.**

This quote is a poetic way of expressing perfection. One phrase speaks of external acts (“Who committed no sin”); the other speaks of the heart (“nor was any deceit found in His mouth”). In Hebrew, one combines opposites to express the totality of something. The point is that Christ, though perfect, suffered at the hands of evil men.

B. Christ an example of enduring suffering

During his trial, Christ did not come to his own defense. He was reviled, but he did not revile in return, nor did he utter any threats. I believe his severest pain was not physical, but emotional. Verbal abuse can be far more painful than physical abuse. He endured blows to the back, his beard being pulled, and being spat upon, yet the cruel words uttered against him that mocked his identity as the Christ must have grieved his heart. His accusers questioned everything he had said and done, but he allowed himself to be misunderstood. He had presented himself to Israel as their Messianic King, saying, “Everything I do is from the Father. I speak his words; I do his deeds,” yet they mocked him. They gave him a reed, crowned him with thorns, put a purple robe about his shoulders and heaped scorn on his claims. Being misunderstood is painful, isn’t it? But Jesus said nothing in reply. And neither should we when we are unjustly treated. Augustine said, “Heal me of this lust of mine, of always vindicating myself.”

Jesus refused to speak at his trial because it was a kangaroo court. Although the deck was stacked against him he looked beyond the mockery of the earthly trial to the heavenly trial that would be enacted a few days later. He saved his testimony for that time and refused to defend himself before the chief priests. Likewise, we should never justify our behavior, because this life is not the court. One day we will stand before the Judge of all things and all the evidence will be revealed.

Jesus knew that his Heavenly Father would eventually vindicate him. And at the cross that vindication began. The moment Jesus died the Father allowed no unholy hand to touch his Son’s body; only those hands that loved him were allowed to handle him. Jesus was not placed in a pauper’s grave, but was buried in the virgin tomb

of a rich man. That was the Father’s way of saying, “This is my Son. Keep your hands off of him.” God ultimately exalted him in the resurrection, and placed him in the seat of power. He is the Lord! Despite his silence at his trial he was vindicated at last.

There is an interesting twist in the story of my English professor. At the end of the English course he asked the students to write a paper on our philosophy of life. Based on my study of Francis Shaeffer’s work, I presented a paper on Christianity as a philosophy of life. I was surprised to see that he gave me an A-. He said it was a good, thoughtful, methodical paper. Most of all, he said, I had managed not to preach. He wrote, “But for me, life has no meaning, no order. It is filled with random chance. I may be hopelessly lost. Have a nice summer.” When I worked on campus after graduation, I met him occasionally. It was apparent that he was still hopelessly lost. One day, however, he said to me, “It wasn’t what you said about Christianity that made me think, it was your life.”

We ought to be keenly instructed by the example of Jesus who did what was right and suffered for it. He did not come to his own defense, but allowed the Creator-Judge to defend him, knowing that his vindication would come in the resurrection.

IV. The Value of Christ’s Submission (2:24-25)

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

A. Sin was abolished on the cross

Christ did what was right. He suffered for it, and he patiently endured it so that he might intercede for the transgressors. He bought our redemption by abolishing sin on the cross. The Old Testament book of Leviticus uses this terminology when it talks of the priest bearing the sacrifice to the altar. But in the New Testament, the cross replaces the altar. Now Christ carries the sacrifice, but he carries it to the cross instead of the altar. Thus, he not only fulfills the role of the priesthood, he also fulfills the role of the sacrifice. Consequently, the power of sin has been broken, righteousness is attainable, and slaves can enter into transcendent freedom.

Through Christ’s perfect sacrifice, God’s Spirit now writes his law on our hearts so that we have a heart that responds to him. Nothing can keep us from this freedom except ourselves. We cannot blame any unreasonable person with whom we live or work, nor can we blame our circumstances, because no person or circumstance can rob us of eternal life. No one can rob us of eternal, transcendent life but ourselves. This freedom is born in oppressive circumstances, and it transforms people as they suffer.

B. We were healed

Peter tells the slaves, “You were straying like sheep, you were naive and aimless, but you came to the cross and found a Shepherd for your soul. You were made whole. Will you now do for somebody else what Christ did for you?” We too must respond to Peter’s question. Will we now fill up the afflictions that are lacking in the body of Christ and be wounded for somebody else?

Church history tells us that these slaves took these words to heart, and they became the most effective witnesses in the Roman Empire. They realized that indeed God had placed them in a strategic location—as slaves they were the very ones who tutored the wives and

children of their masters. These slaves were effectively doing their work as schoolteachers!

There is a fascinating story written about one family, the household of Narcissus. Narcissus was the private secretary to Emperor Claudius. He had tremendous wealth and power, and a very large family. His whole estate

passed into the hands of Nero when, after the murder of Claudius in A.D. 54, Narcissus was driven to suicide at the instigation of Agrippina. It was apparently some of this household who were among the Christian recipients of the Epistle to the Romans...it was largely through their agency that the aristocratic families were eventually reached with the gospel.¹

One of those converts was Acilius Glabrio who as consul with Trajan in A.D. 91 was charged with having atheistic and Jewish ways, a revolutionary [a common accusation against Christians]. He was forced to fight with a lion by Emperor Domitian. Glabrio killed the lion, was released, but wisely went into voluntary exile. Still the Emperor had him executed. He was buried in a family vault which later became one of the famous Christian catacombs.²

How did these heads of state come to Christ? It was through slaves who had submitted to beatings, but who lovingly shared the gospel with the Roman households.

Now think about that unreasonable person in your life and do two things. First, glory in your role as a slave and servant. Stop trying to become upwardly mobile, isolating yourself from ministry, and instead become a servant where you can have influence.

Isaac Watts wrote,

Thus it fared with our Lord Jesus Christ Himself in the days of his flesh. For the most part He lived unknown among men; he did not cry, nor make his voice to be heard in the streets...Let us imitate our blessed Lord, and copy after so divine a pattern. Let our works bear a bright and growing witness to our inward and real Christianity...It is a more sublime glory for a prince to be found among the common poor in undistinguished raiment, and by his superior conduct and shining virtues force the world to confess that he is the son of a king, than to walk through the rabble with ensigns of royalty and demand honor from them by the mere blaze of his ornaments.³

Secondly, out of appreciation for what God has sacrificed, won't you willingly suffer for someone else? Take to heart the words of George MacDonald,

make me into a rock which swallowed up the waves of wrong in its great caverns, and never threw them back to swell the commotion of the angry sea whence they came. Ah, what it would be actually to annihilate wrong in this way!—to be able to say, it shall not be wrong against me, so utterly do I forgive it!⁴

By implication, the apostle is saying that us as aliens we must not only suffer, but by responding to it rightly as Christ did, our suffering will have redemptive value in a hostile world. Although we cannot add anything to Christ's work, since his atonement is perfect and complete, Paul says that he did his part through suffering in "filling up that which is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Col 1:24). Through our suffering the life of Christ in us is released into the hostile world.

It is the means by which the world is won to the Father. Viewed this way, what a privilege it is to suffer for his name's sake!

PILGRIM SONG

Charles Wesley

Who still your bodies feel;
Awhile forget your griefs and fears,
And look beyond this vale of tears
To that celestial hill.

Beyond the bounds of time and space
Look forward to that heavenly place,
The saints' secure abode;
On faith's strong eagle pinions rise,
And force your passage to the skies,
And scale the mount of God.

Who suffer with our Master here,
We shall before his face appear,
And by his side sit down;
To patient faith the prize is sure,
And all that to the end endures
The cross, shall wear the crown.

Thrice blessed bliss-inspiring hope!
It lifts the fainting spirits up,
It brings to life the dead;
Our conflicts here shall soon be past,
And you and I ascend at last
Triumphant with our Head.

That great mysterious Deity
We soon with open face shall see;
The beatific sight
Shall fill heaven's sounding courts with praise,
And wide diffuse the golden blaze
Of everlasting light.

1. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 212. This is an excellent treatment of evangelistic methods and strategies in the early church.

2. Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 212-213.

3. Isaac Watts, "Meditations: The Saints Unknown in this World," in David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Burning and a Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 64.

4. George MacDonald, *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*.



Catalog No. 770

1 Peter 3:1-7

Tenth Message

Brian Morgan

April 22, 1990

THE LIBERATION OF MAN IN MARRIAGE

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

We have been studying the apostle Peter's model of submission and servanthood in the person of Jesus Christ. What an amazing influence our Lord had and continues to have because he submitted to his Father's will for him! Today, in chapter 3 of his first letter, Peter will demonstrate how servanthood is worked out in the arena of marriage.

Martin Luther once said, "The Christian is free from all and slave to none by virtue of grace, but bound to all and servant of all by virtue of love." There is nothing more beautiful to behold than a Christian couple submitting to each other in love. Tertullian, an early church father, wrote these words at the close of a book which he dedicated to his wife:

How can I paint the happiness of a marriage...of two believers—one hope, one vow, one discipline, and one worship! They are brother and sister, two fellow-servants, one spirit and one flesh. Where there is one flesh, there is also one spirit. They pray together, fast together, instruct, exhort and support each other. They go together to the church of God, and to the table of the Lord. They share each other's tribulation, persecution, and revival. Neither conceals anything from the other; neither avoids, neither annoys the other. They delight to visit the sick, supply the needy, give alms without constraint, and in daily zeal lay their offerings before the altar without scruple or hindrance. They do not need to keep the sign of the cross hidden, nor to express slyly their Christian joy, nor to suppress the blessing. Psalms and hymns they sing together, and they vie with each other in singing to God. Christ rejoices when he sees and hears this. He gives his peace. Where two are together in his name, there is he; and where he is, there the evil one cannot come.

Many of us had dreams that marriage would be a L'Abri, a safe haven from life's storms where we would have shelter and repose, but we woke up to discover that marriage itself can be a storm. Mike Mason, in his book, *The Mystery of Marriage: As Iron Sharpens Iron*, gives a counterpoint to Tertullian. He says:

It [marriage] is not a little bastion of tenderness designed to soften the blows of fate. It is not a clever system of protection in which another person is interposed between ourselves and the pain of living. On the contrary, the person interposed may actually become the source or focus of more suffering than we ever bargained for, the very vessel from which our own humiliation is poured. Is it not a bitter and ironic truth that the very person we love most in the world may appear to us, from time to time, to be the only thing standing between ourselves and our happiness?

The fact of the matter is that holy matrimony, like other holy orders, was never intended as a comfort station for lazy people. On the contrary, it is a systematic program of deliberate and thoroughgoing self-sacrifice. A man's home is not his castle so much as his monastery, and if he happens to be treated like a king there, then it is only so that he might be better enabled to become a servant. For marriage

is intended to be an environment in which he will be lovingly yet persistently confronted with the plainest and ugliest evidence of his sinfulness, and thus encouraged on a daily basis to repent and to change.

Marriage is not a comfort station, it is a crucible. But I believe it is a crucible that leads to freedom. According to Scripture, the best way to discover whether a man is godly is to examine his home. We are concerned about the state of many marriages in our congregation. There is hardness of heart, duty without affection, service without dying to self, activity without romance. Thus, I have decided to devote two weeks to these verses from 1 Peter 3. Today I will deal with the husband's responsibility. I have entitled this message "The Liberation of Man in Marriage," or, "Three Steps to Acquiring Your Liberty." My desire is that each husband will determine one area in which he is to die to his own desires for the purpose of serving his wife.

1 Peter 3:1-7 says:

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. And let not your adornment be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered. (NASB)

I. Destroying Misconceptions of Authority (3:1-7)

Men, the first step to becoming free in a marriage is to destroy any misconceptions you may have about authority. Verses 1-6, which are addressed to wives, are often misinterpreted by husbands to mean that the husband is the boss, the authority figure. The wife is called to submit to this authority figure, to become a doormat, in effect, and not express herself, even when he is wrong. This incorrect view often leads to verbal and physical abuse, damaging the dignity of both husband and wife. I believe that much of the women's liberation movement is, in fact, a right reaction to a wrong interpretation of this text. The man who follows the counterfeit model, however, will not enter into freedom; he will remain a slave to his own immaturity.

A. Mutual Submission

I would like to point out two things about the first six verses of the text. First, whenever the scriptures teach on marriage, they talk about mutual submission. The key here is the word “likewise,” in verse 7. This suggests that Peter’s instructions to wives applies equally to husbands. The model we are given to help us here is our Lord himself. Just as Jesus submitted to his Father, so husbands are to die for their wives. The scriptures are not concerned about who has control in a marriage; rather, they always address the heart and the attitude. Mike Mason writes, “Who wins the battle of wills and whims is not the point; the point is that each tries to surrender as much as possible for the sake of the other so that the love between them may be honored and built up in every way.”

B. Commands Applicable to Both

Secondly, the description of godliness in these verses is addressed to both husbands and wives, and it applies to both. The exhortation to women to adorn themselves with the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit are the very words used of men elsewhere in scripture. For example, in 1 Timothy, Paul instructs men that in order to further God’s rule on earth they must learn to be men of prayer so that they might “lead a tranquil and *quiet* life in all godliness and dignity.” It is the Spirit who leads people to Christ. This is not accomplished by husbands asserting their rights.

In the Greek world of Peter’s day, “gentleness” was exalted as the highest virtue of humanity. The word was used of someone with a quiet, friendly composure who did not become embittered or angry because of unpleasant circumstances. It is quite the opposite of harsh, rough, contentious, or bitter. Gentleness in Greek thought was to possess an *active* attitude and a deliberate acceptance. We are not talking about passive compliance. This superior acceptance exhibited the greatness of the soul.

The Greek translation of the Old Testament uses this same word to depict the ministry of Jesus. Zechariah 9:9 says:

**Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion!
Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem!
Behold, your king is coming to you,
He is just and endowed with salvation,
Humble (gentle), and mounted on a donkey,
Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.**

The apostle Peter’s words are addressed to women in order to elevate them, for even in a submissive role in marriage they can further God’s rule exactly as Christ did.

Thus, men should first throw off all false conceptions of authority. True authority does not come from dominance but from dying—dying to self and becoming a servant. Men, abandon any idea that you are king in your home. Throw down your crown and instead up the towel of servanthood.

In practice, this means that when you go home after work, follow the example in the parable Jesus told of the servant coming home from the fields. The servant did not expect to be served by his master, but instead cooked dinner for him. He did what he was supposed to do because he was a servant. Men, when you come home, do not expect to be waited upon as you sit in your easy chair reading the newspaper. Help your wife in the kitchen. Wash the dishes. Put the children to bed. Then, at the end of the day, you can say, “I only did what is required of a servant.”

I have asked a couple from our congregation to share with us this morning. Dave is an example of a man who learned through hard experience that the best way to lead his wife, Lainy, to Christ was without a word.

Dave: When I became a Christian seven years ago, I felt a division between Lainy and me. I saw her looking at me when I was studying the Word, but I didn’t know what to do about her. So I started praying. I looked enviously at other Christian couples’ relationships. Once when I asked my boss why he was yawning at work, he said, “My wife and I couldn’t sleep last night so we had a wonderful time reading the Word together.” I realized I wanted that kind of a relationship. I thought my wife would become a believer through me so I took every opportunity to share what I was learning. But nothing seemed to work.

Lainy: Last year when we started coming to church, I could tell that there was something different about the people here, and I wanted that in my life. In July, I put in a prayer request to know the Lord. A few weeks later we started helping out in the kindergarten class for the summer. I told Dave that it would be great for our daughter, and maybe we would meet some new friends. Little did I know that I would meet the best friend I could ever ask for. Many things have happened to me that week. I had a bad weekend, and then I had an even worse Monday. When Dave came home from work, I was ready to unload. I said, “I can’t handle it.” I wanted comfort, but what I got was “You’re a big baby. That’s life. It’s just too bad.” I went to sleep that night feeling so alone. I felt like I didn’t even have my husband. I had nothing.

The next day I picked up a paper that our daughter had brought home from her high school Sunday School class. On it was a person who had the Holy Spirit. He had mercy and peace, quiet gentleness and goodness. The person who had Satan in him had jealousy, selfishness, earthly concerns and unspiritual thoughts. I knew where I stood, and knew I had to do something about it.

The next Saturday we went to a Christian wedding. I had never been to one, and was touched by the couple’s willingness to share their love for the Lord in front of unbelievers, co-workers, friends and family. When the bride promised to submit to her husband, there were nudges and looks in the church. I knew many people there did not like what they were hearing. I went away from that wedding wishing Dave and I could have that because it was so special.

A week to the day of my feelings of aloneness, Dave was looking for a paper on our desk, which is cluttered with every paper in the house. After I found it for him, he left, and I picked up some of the kindergarten curriculum for the next week’s lesson. In it I found a little booklet about Mary Ann, a five-year-old girl who gave a witness of her faith in Christ to a doctor. On the way to the hospital after an accident Mary Ann prayed to Jesus to take away her pain, and he did. The doctor on duty commented on how brave she was; she was just a little girl and yet she was not crying. She said, “It’s not me, it’s Jesus. I asked him to take away my pain.” Then she asked, “Do you know Jesus?” He said, “No, I haven’t really had a lot of time for that.” She said, “Oh, it’s so important! We’re all sinners and we have to ask Jesus to take away our sins, or we’re going to go to hell and pay for our sins here on earth.” The doctor thought about it, and Mary Ann led him to Jesus that night. When Mary Anne’s mother got a call from the doctor the next day, he said, “Last night was the last night that I

am practicing medicine. Without Mary Anne's accident and her willingness to share with me, I wouldn't have come to know the Lord. A nurse who was helping also accepted the Lord.'

I shut that booklet and asked myself why it was so hard for me when it was so simple for them. These people did not even think about it five minutes before it happened. They didn't even put in a prayer request at PBC! So I said a prayer asking Jesus into my heart. I opened my eyes and knew he was there.

The first thing I wanted to do was tell Dave. I said, 'Dave, something happened. I am different!' He said, 'You're pregnant?' I said, 'No, I've changed!' He said, 'You're going through the change?' I finally convinced him that I had become a Christian and told him how. Then I remembered my prayer request. I got it out and said, 'This is what did it.'

I was afraid to go to sleep that night because I worried that it would be gone when I woke up. The minute my eyes opened in the morning, however, I remembered the song we learned in the kindergarten class, "I've Got That Joy Down in My Heart." I knew that it was still there! I want to thank Jesus for loving me, Dave for being patient with me all those years, and everyone who prayed for me at that time. In addition, our daughter accepted Christ in Mexicali last week.

II. Cultivating Sensitivity to Differences (3:7a)

You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel, since she is a woman.

As we have noted, the first thing a husband should do so as to experience freedom is to take off his crown and take up the towel of a servant. Secondly, he should live with his wife with greater sensitivity than he is inclined to exhibit when he is dealing with men. What does Peter mean by "love with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker vessel"? Does the word "weaker" refer to the mind or the body, or is it spiritual in nature? I put this question to Elaine Stedman, and she replied, "That's easy. It's hormones."

The very contribution wives bring to a marriage, their ability to nurture life (and all the increase in hormonal activity that go with it), also makes their emotions subject to greater vacillation. A husband must treat his wife "according to the knowledge" of these matters, with skill and sensitivity. Far from hindering his effectiveness, this gives him greater depth and sensitivity in dealing with all people. A man cannot treat his wife like a man. He must have sensitivity, and must learn not to react to things at face value. When I sense there is a problem and I ask my wife what is wrong, she often replies, "Nothing." To understand her, I must continue probing beneath the surface. It is not my job to react, but to listen and not try to fix what I perceive to be the problem. Instead of taking up my time needlessly and making me ineffective, this makes me into the man that God intends me to be. Men need this increased sensitivity to others that living with a wife teaches them.

If a towel is the first symbol that will lead to a husband's freedom, the second symbol is a box of Kleenex. By being sensitive to his wife, a man may learn to weep as well.

III. Glorifying in Equality (3:7b)

But lest this be taken too far, as most ancient cultures did, Peter balances it with a command that husbands honor their wives, since "being a weaker vessel" does not imply that women are inferior

spiritually. The apostle exhorts men to glory in their wives' equality, granting them "honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered." Not only do women need sensitivity, they need appreciation for their contribution. It is significant that Adam's first words celebrate his wife's equality with him:

**"This is now bone of my bones,
and flesh of my flesh;
She shall be called Woman,
Because she was taken out of Man." (Gen 2:23)**

When Adam named the woman, he implied that he was her head (in the Ancient Near East, to name something implied dominion over it), however, he explicitly states that she is his equal. It is a wonderful balance to say, "I am your head, but you are my equal."

Marriage unites differences together in three areas: male/female sexuality, personality characteristics (which have nothing to do with gender), and spiritual giftedness. Although the devil seeks to use the differences between them to cause division between husbands and wives, God wants to bring about a complementary ministry that is unique to the world through each one's gifts, personality, and sexuality. As men we need to celebrate and glory in those differences.

Peter says, "If you don't grant your wife honor as an equal heir of the grace of life, God will not hear your prayers." He draws his analogy from Genesis 18:9-15, in the story of Abraham and Sarah:

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Behold, the tent." And he said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah denied it, however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh."

The angel of the Lord came to announce the promise that Abraham and Sarah would have a child. Since they both were past the age of child-bearing it would require a miracle on both their parts to conceive. First, the prophetic word of God came to Abraham supernaturally, and that word brought the miracle of life. Later, the angel returned to speak the promise directly to Sarah, not through Abraham. When she heard the word of God, a creative miracle occurred in her life, and she was able to conceive. Peter comments, "Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear."

We can see the physical analogy in this story. In order to give birth to a son, an heir, the promise was heard by both parties, not just Abraham. This is highly significant. It teaches that both are equal spiritually though they may have different functions. Just as a man cannot bear physical life by himself without a woman, so also a man must not bypass his wife in his efforts at cultivating spiritual life in others. If a husband attempts to do this without his wife's involvement and participation, the result will be as barren as if he tried to attempt childbearing on his own. This can be disastrous, as the physical analogy of Abraham and Hagar aptly demonstrates. Abraham's attempt to father the child of promise through Hagar resulted in the

birth of Ishmael, the father of the Arab nations, and the resultant conflict with Israel that is still the cause of Middle Eastern tensions down to this day.

So husbands, take up your towel, and your Kleenex, and third, take a photograph of your wife to work with you. Place it on your desk or on your work bench to signify that you include her as you cultivate your life as a man.

IV. Jacob and Rachel

I would like to take a few moments to explain how these principles have worked out in my own marriage. My marriage is more like Jacob's and Rachel's than Abraham's and Sarah's. I am very much like Jacob, a dreamer and an idealist. And my wife Emily is beautiful and practical, like Rachel. Jacob had to wait for his wife for seven years, and I had to wait for Emily for five years. My head was in the clouds the entire time!

When God called me to die to myself on behalf of my wife, I found freedom and fulfillment as she has become "an equal heir of the grace of life." The first important issue on which we differed involved children. As an intern at Peninsula Bible Church I had great plans for the future. I planned for Emily to get her teaching credential while I was an intern, and then she would work while I went to seminary. Then, after I graduated, we would start a family. But when I completed my internship, Emily told me that she would rather have children right away. I didn't see how that would work if we were to follow my timetable.

I prayed, walked the streets in distress, and went to see my friend Elaine Stedman once again. She said, "Brian, why do you think God gives us children when we can least afford it, and have no experience as parents? It is to teach us to trust him." After walking the streets some more, the Lord convinced me that I had put my career ahead of the needs of my wife. I told God that day that I would die to my career plans. "If you want me trained for the ministry," I said, "then I'll get trained. But I will submit to my wife." So we had children.

That led to tragedy. Like Rachel, we were barren. An enzyme deficiency resulted in the pain of losing two children within days of their birth in two consecutive years. However, the Lord ultimately gifted us with one adopted child and two natural children. The experience has given me far better training than any seminary education I could have anticipated—and greater fulfillment besides. Also, by God's grace I was given a superb theological education over the next seven years while I was a pastor at this church. And God picked up the bill!

Shortly after we adopted our first daughter, we bought a home. I walked the streets again, praying and dreaming. My vision was to share our home with our neighbors and to lead them to Christ. When I shared my dream with my wife, however, she did not encourage my scheme. Emily is shy, and not spontaneous by nature. She would not choose to do things on such a grand scale. So it appeared that my dream would not be fulfilled. I continued to talk to neighbors, but there was not the response that I had hoped for. I thought, "Maybe my dreams are futile."

When our children reached school age, Emily volunteered at their school, where she exercised her spiritual gifts of wisdom and helps. Five years later she became vice president of the PTA. I tagged along into her setting, served on committees, helped build a miniature golf course, etc. As a result, many close relationships have been established through these outreach opportunities at school.

For instance, at a dinner party we attended recently the hostess spontaneously asked me to tell them about my trips to Romania. I recounted the details and was able to share my faith in Christ. I went home praising God because my vision had come to pass, yet not through my plans or my gifts. The highway I walk has been paved by my wife. We were invited to a Jewish couple's house during the Christmas holiday season, and were allowed to enter into their life. There we enjoyed listening to the Los Altos High School choir singing Christmas hymns on the stairwell of the home. At another party a couple played carols on harpsichords. I am blessed to have these relationships, which have developed through my wife expressing herself in the community.

I agree with Martin Luther: "The Christian is free from all and slave to none by virtue of grace, but bound to all and servant of all by virtue of love." Dying to myself has given me great freedom. I no longer have to be confined by my own plans. I do not have to be in control, and that brings tremendous freedom. I have discovered, however, that the greatest freedom I enjoy is that by submitting to my wife I can enjoy her unique contribution. Life to me is a symphony, and I am only an oboe, an unexciting instrument. When I submit to those around me, however, and other instruments play in harmony, the result is a wonderful symphony of love, and a freedom that can open us up to freedom in all relationships.

I will conclude by reading a poem to my wife which I wrote a few months ago:

O Emily, you are my Rachel,
Your beauty and radiance captured my heart,
Five years was nothing to work for you,
It seemed like a few days because of my love for you.

Then a voice was heard in Ramah,
Rachel is weeping for her children because they are no more,
But the Lord said, "Keep your eyes from tears,"
"There is a hope, and your children shall return."
His loyal love was true, and I loved you more.

Now I am your Jacob, that dreamer of dreams.
While my mind is in heaven,
And my head lay on the stone,
You build the ladder,
That brings heaven home.

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1 Peter 3:1-6

Eleventh Message

Brian Morgan

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GLORY IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL HOME

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

In 1 Peter 2, the apostle used the person of Jesus Christ to illustrate his model of Christian submission, and demonstrated the wonderful influence of salvation which our Lord's submission brought to the world. In 3:1-6, Peter reveals how choosing the role of a servant will determine the quality of a marriage and the environment in the home.

Oswald Chambers said, "Marriage is one of the mountain peaks on which God's thunder blasts souls to hell, or on which His light transfigures human lives in the eternal heavens." Similarly, I would liken marriage to two great mountains of the Bible, Mount Sinai and Mount Hermon. On Mount Sinai, there are only holy demands, for which you have no adequacy in yourself, and it seems as if you are constantly under the holy wrath of God. On Mount Hermon, however, you are transfigured as you see the light and glory of Jesus Christ. Between those two mountain peaks is a vast wilderness, a valley of humiliation, which I call "mutual submission." In order to move from Mount Sinai to Mount Hermon there is no other alternative but to walk that path.

Mike Mason writes in *The Mystery of Marriage*, "Who wins the battle of wills and whims is not the point; the point is that each tries to surrender as much as possible for the sake of the other so that the love between them may be honored and built up in every way!"

Since this is Ray Stedman's last Sunday at Peninsula Bible Church, after 40 years of faithful service, I thought it would be appropriate to quote his wife Elaine regarding their journey from Mount Sinai to Mount Hermon. Elaine writes:

When we married I was a biblically illiterate, Bible-reading, church-going activist. I was squeaky-clean in my moral self-righteousness, knew all the answers but none of the questions. I could have used some help. My new husband had been enculturated with a view of women as emotionally unstable and somewhat lacking in sound judgment. His perception of men was quite different. They were generally stable, good fellows, equipped for taking charge. He was sure I needed help.

Ray had been vaguely indoctrinated with a view of headship-submission which placed the husband in command-responsibility to the wife...and tried to instruct me. Problems developed when his father-to-child stance encountered my notable lack of humility and patience. Our communication was so unfruitful that we each took silent vows to study separately, which spilled over into our prayers as well.

Providentially, I believe, we knew so little about various and sundry views of biblical teaching on marriage that we could attribute neither our successes nor our failures to them. We were dealing the "the flesh," pure and simple, and the Scriptures to which we were both committed had plenty to say about that.

The good news is that as we individually committed ourselves to the integrity of the Scriptures we became thoroughly convinced of their harmony and viability for life. As we allowed the truth of the Word of God to indict our carnal and selfish attitudes and behavior,

the barriers they created began to diminish. Now we could begin to share our insights and appreciate the nuances and dimensions which come from hearing it through one another. As we began to apply gracious principles learned from our encounters with Biblical truth we learned to appreciate the privilege of praying together.

Learning to hear and appreciate one another opens us up to others, and we gradually are becoming more willing to be transparent and vulnerable toward truth expressed through God's other people. This continues to be a process, one to which the Apostle Peter refers as growing up to salvation.

A husband and wife who are willing to humble themselves and submit to mutual vulnerability of praying together, will find that the mutual confession of failure and weakness which is part of all true prayer is perhaps the best of all ways to truly know one another. Two people on their knees together in shared humility and dependence upon the grace of God for forgiveness and power to love and obey, can experience beautiful vulnerability unique to united prayer.

Just as Peter exhorted husbands to mutual submission in last week's passage, today we will see how a wife's submission to her husband will affect the marriage relationship. 1 Peter 3:1-6:

In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands so that even if any of them are disobedient to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior. And let not your adornment be merely external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God. For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear. (NASB)

I. The Model of Submission: Jesus Christ (3:1a)

Peter begins by telling us that our model of submission is Jesus Christ. This is found in the words, "In the same way, you wives, be submissive to your own husbands." (3:1a).

By submitting to his Father with a gentle and quiet spirit, Jesus Christ brought salvation to the hostile nation of Israel. "In the same way" as Christ submitted to his Father's will, wives also are to submit to husbands. "The same way" includes the same *motive*, "for the Lord's sake" (2:13); the same *breadth*, whether your husband is a "good husband or the unreasonable" (2:18); the same *manner*, being silent rather than reviling (2:23); and the same *trust* in the one who judges righteously (2:23). That phrase confirms that the role of submission is not a position of weakness, but one of unqualified strength. It is the very role Christ took to establish the kingdom of God.

II. The Goal of Submission: Winning Hearts (3:1b-2)

The apostle now tells us the goal of submission in 3:1b-2:

...so that even if any of them are disobedient [unbelieving] to the word, they may be won without a word by the behavior of their wives, as they observe your chaste and respectful behavior.

In Peter's day, as in ours, there were many marriages where wives had come to Christ, but their husbands were unbelievers. I would translate the word "disobedient" in verse 1 as "without faith," or "unbelieving." What does a wife do in that situation?

A. Holiness in the Old Testament

To answer that question, we must first understand the teaching of scripture about the importance of holiness and purity. The Jews were to be a holy people, achieving purity by separation from anything unclean. In the Old Testament, if something unclean came into contact with something holy, the holy thing did not sanctify the unclean. Rather, the unclean thing defiled what was holy. Haggai tells us in chapter 2 of his prophecy,

"Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Ask now the priests for a ruling: If a man carries holy meat in the fold of his garment, and touches bread with this fold, or cooked food, wine, oil, or any other food, will it become holy?'" and the priests answered and said, "No." Then Haggai said, "If one who is unclean from a corpse touches any of these, will the latter become unclean?" And the priests answered and said, "It will become unclean." Then Haggai answered and said, "'So is this people. And so is this nation before Me,' declares the LORD, 'and so is every work of their hands; and what they offer there is unclean.'" (Hag 2:11-14)

Thus, there had to be walls of separation to maintain holiness. When a woman had an issue of blood during her menstrual period, she was separated from the temple and could not worship. Since a leper was considered unclean, he could not go into the temple. Touching a dead body defiled a person, and therefore kept him from worship.

B. Holiness in the New Testament

In the New Testament, an amazing thing happens regarding holiness and purity. When Jesus Christ comes from heaven to earth, he is the heavenly reality of all of Israel's worship. He is the heavenly temple come to earth, the priest and the sacrifice. Holiness and purity is intensified, for we see Jesus Christ in situations that would normally have defiled an Old Testament saint. He eats with tax collectors and sinners. A woman who has a flow of blood touches his robe, while he himself touches lepers. He interacts with the dead when he resurrects Lazarus. Yet miraculously, Jesus is not defiled. The greater wonder, however, is that his holiness is so great that he sanctifies everything with which he comes in contact! He heals the leper, forgives sin, and cleanses people's lives. He makes holy what he touches.

Applying this principle to marriage, the apostle Paul says, "If any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, let him not send her away. A woman who has an unbelieving husband, and he consents to live with her, let her not send her husband away. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified through her believing husband; for otherwise your children are unclean, but now they are holy" (1 Cor 7:13-14).

After the cross, the resurrection, and the pouring forth of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, holiness has been intensified. Unfortunately, I think many Christians are living as if Pentecost has not happened. They view holiness and purity as if we were living in the days of the Old Testament. They are fearful of living in the world, and want to

separate from it. The New Testament, however, says that when a Christian and a non-Christian interact, the Christian brings holiness to the relationship. Thus, Peter tells the Christian wife that her holiness is more powerful than her husband's idolatry, and her good influence on their children is greater than his evil. Even in a submissive role, a wife can win her husband without a word by her righteous behavior, just as Christ achieved great influence upon an unbelieving world.

This text has often been misapplied to say that wives do not have the freedom to disagree or argue with their husbands regarding righteousness. But that is not what the text teaches. In Acts 5, for example, Sapphira is judged as an equal heir to the grace of life when she goes along with her husband's hypocrisy. Rather, "without a word," means that a wife is not to preach to an unconverted husband. She should not leave books by his bed-stand, drag him to church, or coerce him to Christian fellowship. She is to live her life and say nothing, for the husband will not be converted by what he *hears* with the ear. He will be converted by what he *sees* with the eye—the beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit.

A beautiful example of this is Bob Roe, one of our former pastors. Although Bob rejected his faith as a young man and married an unbeliever, God fooled him by bringing his unbelieving wife to Jesus Christ. Believing the truth in the text, she said nothing to Bob for two years, but lived a quiet life before him. When the pressure of her goodness was too great, he came back to Christ. He became, in my mind, one of the greatest pastors PBC has ever had. His marriage is a wonderful model of how a man and woman are to submit to each other in love.

Therefore, wives, the reason to submit and the model for submission is Jesus Christ. Secondly, understand the great power submission brings, even to an unbelieving heart.

III. The Value of Submission: It Beautifies (3:3-4)

Peter now tells us the value of submission in verses 3-4. It beautifies the soul, says the apostle.

And let not your adornment be external—braiding the hair, and wearing gold jewelry, or putting on dresses; but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God.

A. Do not invest in external beauty

In the Greek and Roman world of Peter's day, women gave much attention to the art of externals. They plaited their hair, wore expensive gold ornaments and nets in the hair, and gold bands on the fingers, arms or ankles. The Old Testament prophets often denounced wealthy women in Israel who attained wealth through injustice to the poor, and then flaunted their wealth in their worship. Isaiah said to the wealthy women of his day,

**Because the daughters of Zion are proud,
And walk with heads held high and seductive eyes,
And go along with mincing steps,
And tinkle the bangles on their feet,
Therefore the Lord will afflict the scalp of the daughters of Zion
with scabs,
And the LORD will make their foreheads bare.**

**In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of their anklets,
headbands, crescent ornaments, dangling earrings, bracelets, veils,
headdresses, ankle chains, sashes, perfume boxes, amulets, finger
rings, nose rings, festal robes, outer tunics, cloaks, money purses,
hand mirrors, undergarments, turbans, and veils.**

**Now it will come about that instead of sweet perfume there will be putrefaction;
Instead of a belt, a rope;
Instead of well-set hair, a plucked-out scalp;
Instead of fine clothes, a donning of sackcloth;
And branding instead of beauty. (Isa 3:16-24)**

The wealth of these women resulted from oppression of the poor. In recent years, two wives of world leaders have been judged in a similar way. Imelda Marcos brings to mind 3,000 pair of shoes bought at the expense of the poor. Elena Ceaucescu of Romania robbed an entire nation to maintain her opulent life style.

Since many first century women who gathered for worship were very poor, a woman flaunting her external wealth at worship was intimidating to the poor women, as it is today.

Secondly, primping takes excessive time in front of the mirror that ought to be invested in good deeds. For a woman's beauty is not what she puts on, it is what she gives out. So Peter says, "Wives, don't get caught up with externals, but invest in the secret beauty of the heart, with a gentle and quiet spirit."

Again, the analogy alludes to Jesus Christ. As Jesus brought salvation to an unbelieving nation, so the wife is to bring salvation to a hostile husband. Jesus did it with a gentle spirit. He came to Jerusalem in humility, the King of Kings riding on a donkey the size of a Great Dane. He was quiet, not boisterous, and did not coerce his power. He did good deeds and gave no justification. At his trial, he said nothing in his defense.

Men and women alike should learn to be quiet, at rest, and open to God's word, so that they will walk humbly before him. This is contrasted to the undisciplined life of busybodies, who create a stir by meddling in others' business. We must learn to be silent so we can hear God's word. Then when we speak, our words are few but they are full.

Thomas Merton observes, "It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. The more solitary I am the more affection I have for them...Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for what they are, not for what they say."

Many of us are like the busy Martha, eager to serve the Lord but distracted by so many things that we create a stir. Mary, in contrast, sat at the Lord's feet, gazing into the beauty of his face. Her self-worth came from what he said about her. Since Martha's self-worth depended on her ability to serve, she laid her expectations on Mary and rebuked the Lord. Jesus responded, "Martha, you are distracted about too much. Very few things are necessary. Look at my face and get your worth and beauty and dignity from me. Then you will serve out of a quiet sense of worth."

Peter says this spirit is "precious" (translated "expensive" in Greek) in the sight of God. Thus, the most expensive garment you can wear is a gentle and quiet spirit because it took the blood of Christ to purchase it.

This spirit can be seen in the example of Sarah Edwards, the wife of Jonathan Edwards, the great preacher of the 1700's. It was through his ministry that the Great Awakening came about in North Hampton, Massachusetts. Sarah was noted as a beautiful woman who raised 12 children. Samuel Hopkins, a young seminary graduate who came to intern with Mr. Edwards, testified to her beautiful character. Her spiritual speech and demeanor so uplifted his state of dejection and gloom that he doubted "the cordiality and ready conversation of Mrs. Edwards was capable of being matched by her husband."

Her beauty resulted from the time she spent undistracted in the scriptures. Even when she was in bed, she would meditate on the scripture in her heart, and would dwell in the presence of God all night long. She writes about one occasion in her journal:

I felt more perfectly subdued and weaned from the world and more fully resigned to God than I have ever been conscious of before. I felt an entire indifference to the opinions, and representations, and conduct of mankind respecting me; and a perfect willingness that God should employ some other instrument than Mr Edwards in advancing the word of grace in Northampton. I was entirely swallowed up in God, as my only portion, and his honor and glory was the object of my supreme desire and delight. At the same time, I felt a far greater love to the children of God than ever before...

Thursday night, Jan. 28, was the sweetest night I ever had in my life. I never before, for so long a time together, enjoyed so much of the light, and rest, and sweetness of heaven in my soul...The great part of the night I lay awake, sometimes asleep, and sometimes between sleeping and waking. But all night I continued in a constant, clear, and lively sense of the heavenly sweetness of Christ's excellent and transcendent love, of his nearness to me, and of my dearness to him; with an inexpressibly sweet calmness of soul in an entire rest in him...So far as I am capable of making a comparison, I think that what I felt each minute, during the continuance of the whole time, was worth more than all the outward comfort and pleasure which I had enjoyed in my whole life put together. It was a pure delight, which fed and satisfied the soul. It was pleasure, without the least sting, or any interruption. It was sweetness, which my soul was lost in. It seemed to be all that my feeble frame could sustain, of that fullness of joy which is felt by those who behold the face of Christ, and share his love in the heavenly world...

I had a deep sense of the awful greatness of God, and felt with what humility and reverence we ought to behave ourselves before him.¹

Although George Whitefield had taken a vow of celibacy, his testimony of Sarah reveals how her example changed his mind:

Northampton, Sunday, October 19, [1740]. Felt great satisfaction in being at the house of Mr. Edwards. A sweeter couple I have not yet seen...Mrs. Edwards is adorned with a meek and quiet spirit; she talked solidly of the things of God, and seemed to be such a helpmeet for her husband, that she caused me to renew those prayers, which for some months, I have put up to God, that He would be pleased to send me a daughter of Abraham to be my wife.²

Thus, the value of submission is that it beautifies the soul. To help you wives, I am giving you a "beauty" kit that will help create a beautiful spirit. First, take a pillow to the altar to kneel before God in humility. While kneeling at the altar, focus on your face, because your face is the most beautiful thing about you. However, instead of seeing your face in the mirror, I will give you the scriptures so you will see the face of Jesus. That is not enough, however, because they are merely words on a page. You need a lamp, a symbol of the light of the Holy Spirit to reflect the glory of Christ's life in the pages so that you see beyond the page to his beauty, which reflects into your face. When you behold that image you become beautiful, like Sarah Edwards.

The one impediment to this beauty kit, however, is the telephone. If you pick it up to tell somebody about your concerns instead of getting down on your knees at the altar, you will cause a stir. You will give up your priesthood. You should be taking your concerns directly to the throne and meditating on Christ, rather than spreading them around. I suggest that you unplug the phone and talk to the Lord first. If you spend uninterrupted time pursuing the Lord, I promise you

will become beautiful, having a gentle and quiet spirit. So take these beauty tips!

I thought it would be appropriate to have a husband who is in the process of learning these principles of submission, share his thoughts with us this morning:

Brad: After Brian married my wife and I five years ago he challenged us to take a weekend a month as a sabbatical during our first year of marriage. Like newlyweds in the Old Testament, it would give us time to get to know each other and establish our marriage on the right foundation. We did this religiously for 12 months, getting away to do something special. The first time, we stared at each other across a table and said, "We really have to work at communication." It was a stretching time, and we grew from the experience. We found that marriage is a partnership. I believe it is important for us as husbands to express our life-long dreams in a number of areas, to share them, and confer with our wives to work out the plan. Wives need communication with their husbands, and submission on the husband's part is allowing a wife to delight in his dreams.

One evidence of submission on Janice's part occurred two years ago after I got back from a missionary trip in Romania. Janice could see that I had been changed by the experience, and she expected that the next year I would ask her to go with me. She dreaded it because our daughter was young, and she did not want to leave her. Yet when I expressed my desire she join me the next summer, she submitted to me and said she would go if I really wanted her to. What a freeing experience!

It always hasn't been easy for me in this regard. Fifteen years ago I had a failed marriage, and was in despair. Six years later I married Janice. God has shown me such beauty in her that I really appreciate what I have now. I would like to encourage you husbands to do preventive maintenance by spending time with your wives. Our submission is manifested in caring and gentleness towards them by sharing our lives. It is based on the fact that we must know where God wants us to be and know what his desires are.

Another important part of the marriage is the headship of man. While I am an easy-going person, Janice is pretty independent, decisive, and often intense. Yet she is submissive because she knows God's desire for our marriage. If you husbands try to understand your wives, share with them, and provide headship, I think that a good marriage will result. I know there are many marriages in this congregation that are not doing well, and I would encourage you to seek out for advice people who models what the scriptures teach about submission.

IV. The Example of Submission: Sarah (3:5-6)

Peter concludes by saying that the result of giving yourself to Christ is the birth of new life. In verses 5-6 he gives us the example of Sarah:

For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn themselves, being submissive to their own husbands. Thus Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, and you have become her children if you do what is right without being frightened by any fear.

The apostle uses three themes in Sarah's life as an example: the desire for a son, calling Abraham "lord," and her fear. I expected this text to refer to when Sarah accompanied Abraham to Egypt, but it is

actually the text where the angel comes to the elderly couple and announces the birth of a son in Genesis 18:

Then they said to him, "Where is Sarah your wife?" And he said, "Behold, in the tent." And he said, "I will surely return to you at this time next year; and behold, Sarah your wife shall have a son." And Sarah was listening at the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. And Sarah laughed to herself, saying, "After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?" And the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh, saying, 'Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?' Is anything too difficult for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." Sarah denied it however, saying, "I did not laugh"; for she was afraid. And He said, "No, but you did laugh." (Gen 18:9-15)

A. The expression of submission: Calling Abraham "lord"

The expression of Sarah's submission is that she calls Abraham "lord." Although her words are very ordinary speech, they demonstrate the high esteem in which she holds Abraham. Even though she found it difficult to believe that his dead body could be the source of new life, she did not disparage him.

B. The impediment to submission: "Being confronted with fear"

Fear is the impediment to submission. In Sarah's case, she is confronted by the angel with her unbelief in God's promise and denies it because of her fear.

C. The result of submission: New life

We see the result of her submission, miraculous new life, for she does indeed give birth to a son although she was beyond her childbearing years. Therefore, you wives with unbelieving husbands, see yourselves like Sarah. In this case, you are barren of spiritual seed, which happens to be your husband. He is spiritually dead. You may be tempted to laugh like Sarah, saying, "Can spiritual life come from this man's dead body?" The truth is, if your husband is to be won to Christ, it will happen in the exact manner that Isaac was born. God can speak the gospel of promise to the husband without a word from his wife, but through her submissive spirit. That word once spoken by God brings life to his soul, and it is life from the dead.

Wives, rather than viewing submission as stifling, it is an honorable role. It is the same role that Christ took to bring about man's salvation. It is the only role that spreads the kingdom of God. You can have tremendous influence with it, even with unbelieving husbands, because a "gentle and quiet" spirit is a rare and powerful force that exhibits a woman's true beauty.

Finally, my prayer for you wives is that in submitting to your husbands, your marriages will go from Mount Sinai, where you have holy demands and no resources, into the wilderness of mutual submission. Then you can ascend to the Mount of Transfiguration to see the glory and light of Jesus Christ.

1. Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 195-196.

2. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards*, 178.

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1 Peter 3:8-12

Twelfth Message

Brian Morgan

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THE BOMB SQUAD: DISARMING EVIL

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

Four thousand years ago, God called Abraham to leave his land of idolatry in the Ur of the Chaldeans and journey to the new land of Canaan. An ancient Egyptian document of the mid-twentieth century B.C. describes Canaan as a land closely resembling the Garden of Eden: "It was a good land, named [Araru], figs were in it and grapes, it had more wine than water. Plentiful was its honey, abundant its olives. Every [kind of] fruit was in its trees. Barley was there and emmer. There was no limit to any kind of cattle. Every pleasant tree was mine."

Abraham dreamed of entering the Promised Land to find a Garden of Eden. In reality, though, he walked into a mine field where he experienced one explosion after another, especially in terms of relationships. John Calvin writing of the turmoil that Abraham experienced in the Promised Land, said,

[W]hen he is first called by God's command he is taken away from his country, parents, and friends, considered by men the sweetest things in life, as if God deliberately intended to strip him of all life's delights. As soon as he has reached the land in which he has been bidden to dwell, he is driven from it by famine. Seeking aid, he flees to a place where he has to prostitute his wife to save his life, an act probably more bitter than many deaths. When he has returned to the land of his abode, he is again driven from it by famine. What sort of happiness this—to dwell in a land where you often have to go hungry, even perish from hunger, unless you flee from it? ... While in uncertainty he wanders about hither and thither for many years, he is compelled by the continual quarreling of his servants to dismiss his nephew whom he cherished as his own son. Doubtless he bore this separation as if he had undergone the amputation of a limb. Shortly thereafter, Abraham hears that his nephew has been taken captive by enemies. Wherever he goes, he finds terribly barbarous neighbors who do not even let him drink water out of the wells that he had dug with great labor... Now when he has reached a worn-out old age, he finds himself childless—the most unpleasant and bitter feature of age. Finally, beyond all hope, he begets Ishmael, but the birth of this son costs him dear. For he is wearied by Sarah's reproaches... Finally, Isaac is born, but with this condition—Ishmael, the first-born, is to be driven out and forsaken almost like an enemy.¹

Have you ever dreamed that life would be like a garden, but instead discovered that it was like a mine-field? In the apostle Peter's day, Christians were maligned and slandered for the gospel. They found themselves walking in mine-fields in almost every sphere of life—the workplace, government, and the community. Their homes, which should have been shelters from the onslaught, were like the eye of a storm, since many new converts were married to unbelievers. How, then, were pilgrims to journey through life's mine-fields?

Peter's hope is that Christians do more than merely survive evil in life. He wants us to disarm the mine-fields and turn them into gardens. In our text today, he will show us four steps that will halt

the spread of evil: we must know the territory, enter the mine-field, disarm the detonator, and return to the garden.

I. Knowing the Territory (3:8-12)

To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. For,

**"Let him who means to love life and see good days,
Refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile.
And let him turn away from evil and do good;
Let him seek peace and pursue it.
For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous,
And His ears attend to their prayer,
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil." (NASB)**

One of Peter's assumptions in the text, which is explicit in chapter 5, is that pilgrims cannot be naive about the territory they are entering. As Christians, we are to live in the midst of two worlds. One world is a garden where we are to cultivate our relationship with God, developing solitude, peace, and an openness to God's word. The Lord can walk with us there and work on our spirits.

But then we are to leave that garden and go out into the world. Peter says that out in that world life is like a battle zone, strewn with mines ready to explode. Our enemy, the devil, prowls in every sphere of life seeking those whom he can devour. He sows seeds of division—the destructive work of lies, slander and hatred. We are called to work in the midst of these mine-fields, but unless we understand that there is danger there we will be defeated. We must not be naive.

Regardless of its moral implications, one of the great tragedies of the Vietnam War was the strategy we employed in fighting there. It was fought by men who knew little about jungle warfare. It took each contingency a year to acclimate themselves to the conditions, and then they were sent home and replaced by other naive youths who had to learn on their own. In the process, many young men were killed.

This is similar to the experience of many Christians. We want to live in a garden, but we are killed when we go out into the world because we are unfamiliar with the enemy's tactics. So Peter warns that we must know our surroundings.

II. Entering the Mine-field: Caution! (3:8)

To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted, and humble in spirit.

Stepping out of the garden, we find that life is a mine-field. First, Peter says, "Caution: Danger! Work on your attitude." Bernard Baruch once wrote, "Whatever failures I have known, whatever errors I have committed, whatever follies I have witnessed in private and

public life, have been the consequences of action without thought.” Likewise, Peter says that before we step into the mine-field we must make sure we have the right attitude. If we are to be peacemakers in this danger zone, we need the five character attributes he lists in the text.

A. Harmonious

First, Peter says we are to be harmonious. We are to be of the same mind with one another, intent on the same purpose and disposition. That does not mean that we have the same opinions, but that we respect each other’s perspective. We are not to view ourselves as the center of the universe, as if everyone should submit to our way of thinking. Peter says there is a greater meaning to life than our small causes. It involves a King and his kingdom, and we must reflect his life if we are to fulfill his purposes. Therefore, we are to live without causing friction.

B. Sympathetic

Second, he asks us to be sympathetic. We are not to go through life unaware of others; we must enter into their experiences. In the Greek world, this word was used to describe the affinity and concord of the heavenly bodies. Notice that the heavens present an order. No star is independent of others; they all orbit in relation to one another. Likewise, if we are to be used of the Lord, Christians need to be in relationship with others, not orbiting in isolation. We must enter into the experience of those around us. This takes time—and humility. Do not be aloof, but feel the hurt and struggle that others endure. We must mourn with those who mourn, weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice.

C. Brotherly

Thirdly, we are to be brotherly. Others should find it easy to relate to us regardless of the degrees or titles we have. We must allow ourselves to be approachable, and not feel removed by our status. Ray Stedman has been a good example of this throughout his 40 years of faithful service at Peninsula Bible Church. In my 16 years on staff, I have never seen Ray, despite his genius and notoriety, use his position to be the senior pastor. He never operated with sole authority, but was instead was one brother among brothers.

It was a delight to see Ray retire last week in the same way he ministered—without fanfare, and giving glory only to God. His last act as pastor was not receiving honorific titles or degrees, but dedicating his youngest grandchild to the Lord. During the staff’s farewell dinner with him previous to the retirement service, I think it was symbolic that our present to him was not the traditional gold watch. Instead we presented him with a Mickey Mouse watch! What a fitting for a man who is unimpressed with his status!

As part of the retirement festivities, I read a short poem that I wrote in honor of Ray. In part, I said,

O Ray, you are that bright illumined star,
The Luther of our generation, new visions for the church,
This earthy genius removed that Papal Scepter,
And fearing none, returned it to the saints.

Who am I that I should sit at his feet,
Let alone travel in Elijah’s chariot,
Seeing the Divine gifts play their symphony,
Across the four winds.

And in the end, when he could have had it all,
When all others were playing the role of King,
He arose and said, “It shall not be so among you.”

And taking his towel, he sat down as a brother.

Friends, we are to be harmonious, sympathetic, and brotherly. Fourth, we are to be kind hearted.

D. Kindhearted: Tenderness

“Kind hearted” literally means to have “healthy bowels.” In the ancient world, this was regarded as the seat of the emotional life. The point is that it should not take much to move our heart into action, but we should easily respond to the needs and hurts of others. We must not be cold, hard-hearted, or so objective that we lack tenderness. We are to be easily moved by another’s pain, and easily touched by those around us. In our valley, we have many engineers and other professionals who are very objective, but they need to grow in this area of tenderness.

E. Humble In Spirit

Finally, Peter concludes with the greatest character quality in scripture—being humble in spirit. We are to think lowly of ourselves. The term was used of Jesus Christ “who although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death of a cross” (Phil 2:6-8). This quality suggests that we must never allow our experience, gifts, or status to distance us from others. Rather, we must be willing to serve, appreciate and love the people whom God has placed in our lives.

George MacDonald, a Scottish storyteller of the last century, was a great example of one who manifested all these virtues. A man who went to him for counsel at a time when he was especially fearful and hurting wrote about what it was like to be counseled by George MacDonald:

I went with no little nervousness, but his reception put me at ease at once. I was struck by his appearance, of course — that beautiful, kindly, shrewd face...It seemed to me (I may reverently say so) as if I were talking to St. John the Apostle. I never think of Dr. MacDonald without instinctively thinking of St. John. There was in him that gentleness of humanity and strength—a depth of fire below the surface in spite of all his sweetness—that I fancy were characteristics of the disciple Jesus loved.

Well, we sat in the library...And then I opened my heart to him as I had hardly ever opened it to any stranger before. Doubts and fears—some burdens just then—were bluntly put before him, and he sat and listened with the utmost patience. It was strange—and yet it was not strange—to find myself talking to him so freely. I saw, I felt, his holiness and nearness to God, and yet I should not have been afraid to confess to him my most secret sins. There was a humanity about him, and a searching honesty, which, along with his sympathy, made me feel that he would understand me. He would not cast me out.

I suppose men and women felt like this when they talked with our Lord. His holiness attracted them, and His love and pity encouraged them to come and open up their hearts, sure that He would not drive them away.

I forgot much of his reply, but I remember this: ‘I should not be surprised,’ he said, ‘if God has not some special work for you to do.’ I cannot describe the comfort those simple words gave me. Then this tension of mind was a discipline, and meant good. I could bear it, and perhaps one day thank God for it.

Then just before I left he said, 'But after all, whatever help or comfort any one may try to give you, it is but to follow the advice of Jesus. "Enter into thy closet, and shut to the door, and pray to thy Father in secret"—pour out your heart to God—get down on your knees—He will help you as no one else can, and will give you an answer in peace.' I left him with 'uplifted head,' and thankful heart—but only years unfolded to me the depth of his words."

May God give us the same spirit.

It is evident from media reports of violence that we are living in an increasingly hostile world. It is easy for Christians to be so fearful of the mine field that we separate ourselves from evil, pointing fingers at others in a spirit of self-righteousness condemnation. Peter tells us, however, that though the world may constantly reject us, we must not allow this rejection to harden our hearts or give us cynical spirits. Rather we must continue to foster the same spirit of reconciliation demonstrated by Jesus and reach out with a gracious smile, even to our enemies.

Now that we are in the midst of a mine-field with a quiet spirit, Peter goes on to tell us how to disarm the detonators.

III. Disarming the Detonators (3:9a, 10, 11)

As Peter writes, he is aware of changes that Christians were facing between the church and the state. In the book of Acts, Paul confidently looked to the imperial administration to protect his legitimate activity in proclaiming Jesus as the true fulfillment to the hope of Israel. As the gospel spread, however, Christianity became a whole movement unto itself and thus was no longer under the legal umbrella of Judaism. The economy was adversely affected since the new Christians no longer frequented the idolatrous temples. Business income went down for many Roman classmen whose livelihood depended on making gold and silver for these idols. Since Roman law prohibited interference with a Roman businessman's work, Christianity was seen as a threat to the community's economic health. It was the straw that broke camel's back. The imperial state declared open war on Christianity, and the persecution began. Peter knew that the climate had changed, and many Christians would suffer the same fate as Jesus.

A. Absorb the Blast: Silent in Speech (3:9a, 10b)

Not returning...insult for insult

"Let him...refrain his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking guile."

Once in the mine-field, how do we disarm the detonators? First, we are to guard our speech. When others explode in anger at us, we are to absorb the blast of their words and say nothing. Peter says that we must not return insult for insult, but keep our tongues from evil and speaking guile. When someone blows up, we are to say nothing and listen patiently, just as Christ modeled for us.

B. Disarm the Detonator: Loving in Our Actions (3:9a, 11)

Not returning evil for evil...but giving a blessing instead.

"Let him turn away from evil and do good;
Let him seek peace and pursue it."

After absorbing the blast, Peter tells us how to disarm the detonator. Do it with a blessing, says the apostle, not returning evil for evil, but turning away from evil and doing good. We are to seek peace and give a blessing instead by our loving actions.

And our blessing must not be like the rabbi's blessing in the movie *Fiddler on the Roof*. When a Jew comes to him and asks if there is a blessing for the Czar, the rabbi strokes his beard and says, "Oh, yes. May God bless and keep the Czar...far away from us! Amen." That is not how Peter exhorts us to give a blessing. On the contrary, we are to get close to the people who irritate us, take the explosion of their speech, and love them. Therefore, go to work in the mine field and plant a garden. As we plant seeds of love and sow acts of kindness, we will be able to give flowers of grace.

A great example of this kind of disarming occurs in the sixth chapter of the book of Acts. There, a complaint arose by the Hellenistic Greek-speaking widows against the leadership of the church. They said they were being neglected in their daily food rations. This complaint was so explosive it could have split the whole church along racial lines. But in the wisdom and grace given to the leaders, they disarmed this explosive situation by choosing all Greek-speaking men to serve as deacons. Thus the deck was stacked in love. No one could possibly complain again.

IV. Returning to the Garden (3:9b, 12)

Peter says there is one more step after we disarm evil. We are to return from the mine-fields back to our garden to enjoy the intimacy of Christ.

For you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing...

"For the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous,
And His ears attend their prayer,
But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."

This is a quotation from Psalm 34:15-16a which continues,

To cut off the memory of them from the earth.
The righteous cry and the LORD hears,
And delivers them out of all their troubles,
The LORD is near to the broken hearted,
And saves those who are crushed in spirit.
Many are the afflictions of the righteous;
But the LORD delivers him out of them all.
He keeps all his bones;
Not one of them is broken. (Ps 34:16b-20)

Abraham hoped to enter a Garden of Eden, but instead stumbled into one mine-field after another. His nephew's herds grew so great in number that it created division and hatred with his herdsmen. Abraham responded by disarming Lot, graciously offering him his choice of land. It seemed as though Abraham was jeopardizing God's salvation program because God had pledged the Promised Land to him. Yet he placed his future at the whim of an individual, and gave up his rights.

Lot looked with the eye and chose the well-watered region near Sodom and Gomorrah because it looked like the Garden of Eden. After he separated from his uncle, the Lord appeared to Abraham and they had a garden experience of intimacy:

And the LORD said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, 'Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your seed forever. And I will make your seed as the dust of the earth; so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your seed can also be numbered. Arise, walk about the land through its

length and breadth; for I will give it to you.’ Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the LORD. (Gen 13:14-18)

What gave Abraham the strength to give Lot the choice? Hebrews says, “By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, fellow-heirs of the same promise; for he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.” Abraham knew the real inheritance was not merely turf, it was a heavenly reality of which the land was only a shadow. What he saw was the new heavens and the new earth. Thus, Abraham could freely give up his rights, his land—even his offspring. He knew that if God willed it would be a gift for him to receive. He did not have to strive to attain whatever he had.

In conclusion, let me exhort us in three areas. First, expect that this world is a mine-field, and be ready for it. Whether it be at home or in the community, we must be willing to take the blows of others.

Secondly, our hope is in a new garden being created by God. In an encouraging word to a woman who had just lost her husband, George MacDonald wrote,

Yes, dear, it is a hard time for you, but he is drawing you nearer to himself...We are in a house with windows on all sides. On the one side the sweet garden is trampled and torn, the benches blown down, the fountain broken; you sit and look out, and it is all very miserable. Shut the window. I do not mean forget the garden as it was, but do not brood on it as it is. Open the window on the other side, where the great mountains shoot heavenward, and the stars rising and setting, crown their peaks. Down those stairs look for the descending feet of the Son of Man coming to comfort you. This world, if it were alone, would not be worth much—I should be miserable already; but it is the porch to the Father’s home, and he does not expect us to be quite happy, and knows we must sometimes be very unhappy till we get there.

These words express our hope.

Finally, we are called to disarm the mine-field. We know that this world is a dangerous place, and we are the only ones who can stop the spread of evil. Therefore, I would ask you to spend time in your own garden alone with God to work on your attitude so that you will be able to extend love to a hurting community. Then the mine-fields which once threatened to blow us up can be turned into a garden through the power of the Spirit working through us. At last, when we leave the mine-fields for the last time and enter our eternal garden, the King will welcome us, and say, “Blessed are you, O peace-makers, for you shall be called sons of God.” Amen.

1. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.10.11 (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1:437-438.

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Catalog No. 773

1 Peter 3:13-18

Thirteenth Message

Brian Morgan

May 13, 1990

THE BOMB SQUAD: AFTER THE EXPLOSION

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

Recently I browsed through a diary my wife Emily had prepared for me when we studied in Europe 20 years ago. It read:

Saturday, July 18, 1970—The sun finally came out after a fashion and shone its glory down on us. We headed back across the border into Northern Bavaria from Austria to the town of Oberammergau. The Passion Play was being presented, but we didn't get a chance to see it...

In 1633, the village of Oberammergau was spared from a plague that threatened the area. In deep appreciation to the Lord, the community vowed to reenact the Passion Play every ten years. With a cast of 700 villagers, it takes eight hours to perform this historic drama. In 1970 there were nearly 100 performances with a total audience of 500,000 people, but we were not among them. How disappointed we were that we could not get tickets!

But the apostle Peter tells us that there is a way to share in the "passion play" as participants rather than spectators. Our focus during the past several weeks has been on how a pilgrim behaves in a hostile world, using examples such as a Christian's relationship to government, the workplace or the home, etc.

Peter says that the Christian can exert tremendous influence and win others to Christ through godly conduct and a servant's heart. The text today establishes how we are to behave when matters escalate and lead to persecution for Christ's sake. Using the analogy of the mine-field from last week's study, what are we to do after we take the explosion from the enemy?

A righteous action can often provoke hostile reactions from the unbeliever. To encourage believers who were persecuted for their faith in his day, Peter gives unjust suffering a new orientation. He declares that God is lifting the Christian onto a stage to reenact the drama of the cross before the world. Thus, when we are afflicted, we have a position of privilege, as we assume the role that Jesus took to redeem mankind.

And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong. For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit. (1 Pet 3:13-18 NASB)

I. A New Orientation (3:13-14a)

A. Righteous Behavior Eliminates Much Suffering (3:13)

Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good?

First, Peter gives us a new orientation about suffering for righteousness sake. Righteous behavior eliminates much suffering, says the apostle. He understands that God is behind government, and that he created it to punish evildoers, while giving praise to those who do right (1 Pet 2:13-14). Therefore, people can expect to receive good treatment if they live in harmony with the world and are zealous, ardent lovers of good (1 Pet 3:8-9). Proverbs 16:7 says, "When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him." Unfortunately, I think much of the suffering Christians experience today could be eliminated if we were righteous. Often we suffer in the workplace not because of our good character, but because we are hard to live with, uncooperative, gruff, arrogant, lazy or unprofessional. Doing what is right eliminates much suffering, says the apostle.

B. Righteous Behavior Imparts New Meaning to Suffering (3:14a)

Even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness [and you probably will!], you are blessed.

When we suffer for the sake of righteousness, rather than for sins committed, our suffering is profitable. On stage, where the spotlight will be cast on us alone, we are blessed with the opportunity to act out the passion of Christ before the world. Verse 13 cites Isaiah 50:9, which speaks of the servant of the Lord who will suffer for the nation Israel: "Behold the LORD helps me, Who is he who condemns me?" The Greek translates it, "Who is there to harm me?" Jesus likewise spoke those words at his trial. As the righteous Son, he knew that if anyone was to harm him, it was not to punish him for his sin. Rather, he was to receive the unjust punishment meant for others in order to redeem the world. His suffering, therefore, was raised to a higher level.

Thus Peter says that we are blessed when we are in a similar position. In 1 Peter 4:14, he expands this idea, saying, "If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and God rest upon you." This idea of the Spirit resting on someone and being blessed comes from the Old Testament. It is used of special people whom God uses as instruments in a significant moment of history to take the kingdom and multiply it to others. In Numbers 11, for example, Moses faced unjust suffering when the nation murmured against him. God took a portion of his Spirit and put it on 70 elders, who prophesied. Moses was blessed, because his suffering caused the ministry of the Spirit to multiply from one to 70. Likewise, Isaiah 11:2 describes the Messiah upon whom the Spirit of God will rest:

**And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him,
The spirit of wisdom and understanding,
The spirit of counsel and strength,
The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.**

Peter might also be recalling his own experience at Pentecost. When he was brought before the Sanhedrin for healing a lame man, his righteous suffering gave the Spirit opportunity to bring 5000 men to faith (Acts 4:4).

When we suffer for righteousness sake, it is an opportunity for God to use us in a unique way to further his kingdom. Therefore, we must not cower in fear because it is God who has placed us on the stage. It is a privileged position and a blessing indeed!

The kingdom multiplies, I believe, because the depravity of the world's heart is revealed on stage. I think one reason God allows unjust suffering is not to play games with the world, but to demonstrate how sick the human heart is. When a person sins in the face of righteousness, his sin is revealed to him in black and white. Faced with his own inadequacy, he is in a humble position to hear the gospel and turn to the Lord in repentance.

Thus we are to look on suffering with a new orientation. Righteous behavior eliminates much suffering, but if we suffer now it is a high calling. We are God's unique instruments to spread his kingdom. Rather than shrinking back now, Peter would say that we must step onto the stage and witness boldly to the hope that is within us.

II. A Renewed Courage (3:14b-16)

And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled, but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; having a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

A. Do Not Fear Those Threatening You (3:14b)

Peter recounts the message of Isaiah 8:11, when the prophet tells the righteous in Israel not to fear the threat of the Assyrian invasion:

You are not to say, "It is a conspiracy!"
In regard to all that this people call a conspiracy,
And you are not to fear what they [the Assyrians] fear or be in dread of it.
It is the LORD of hosts whom you should regard as holy.
And He shall be your fear,
And He shall be your dread.
Then He shall become a sanctuary. (Isa 8:12-14a)

Isaiah exhorts the righteous not to fear Assyria, but to fear the Lord, because he is using the Assyrian army for his sovereign purposes. If Israel *sanctified* the Lord (set him apart as Lord in their hearts), he would become their refuge in the midst of the Assyrian judgment. Jesus confirmed this when he said, "Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt 10:28). Thus we are to fear God, not man.

B. Fear the Lord (3:15a)

Sanctify Christ in your hearts always being ready to give an account, of him who asks, concerning the hope that is in you.

How do we fear the Lord? Peter says that we must take the witness stand and give a testimony. Up to this time the Christian has been silent, letting his righteous acts do the talking and perhaps suffering as a result. But now he is invited to speak. From the Greek word "account" we derive the word "apologetic," to give a defense. This word is used in the context of a court room. When he is invited to speak in court, a person gives a defense. In the Greek culture, every sensible person was expected to be prepared "to give and receive a reason," to discuss

questions of opinion or conduct intelligently and temperately. Thus Peter wants these Christians to eagerly defend their position in Christ and the hope that is in them.

When a Jehovah's Witness or a Mormon missionary comes to the door and says, "I don't think Jesus was God," can you tell them why you do believe that he is? When your boss is upset because your priorities clash with your job, can you tell him why you believe what you believe? We must give an account when asked. Jesus said, "Before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. It will lead to an *opportunity for your testimony*" (Luke 21:12-13). Therefore, we must remember that we are not on trial when we are called to defend our position in Christ. The opposition is on trial before God. God is conducting court, giving us an opportunity to talk about the living hope in Jesus Christ.

Perhaps Peter's darkest moment was when he denied Christ to those who charged him with being a follower of Jesus. Three times he was asked by the lowliest members of society, including a slave girl, to proclaim Jesus as his Lord. But Peter refused to speak in his defense, and in fact denied the Lord. At that moment, Jesus looked at him, and Peter wept bitter tears.

I had a similar experience when I worked in construction before Emily and I were married. The construction workers on the job did not hold marriage in high regard. When they heard that I was about to get married, all of them took me aside and strongly exhorted me not to do so. They related disastrous marital experiences, and many of them told me, "If it is sex you want, go look for it on the street." I was too intimidated to speak about the hope that was in me and God's plan for marriage. I determined then that I would be ready to speak for the Lord at the next job I had.

After Emily and I were married, I got a job working as a carpenter's helper. This time I was ready. God allowed me to share Christ with every carpenter on the job. The difference in my life between being a secret Christian on my old job and putting myself on the front line in my new job was like night and day.

Jesus said, "So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves, for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute" (Luke 21:14-15). It might seem curious that on the one hand Peter says to prepare, while Jesus says not to prepare. Peter says we must be *ready* to speak, while Jesus says that we must not take a script with us when we speak. What makes a testimony powerful is that its boldness and passion come from personal experience. Solicitors who confront me with rehearsed speeches that sound like a recording have no impact on me. I know that they are not talking directly to my needs, but are following a generic script. It is the same when religious workers witness like wind-up dolls. Written testimonies that are read may be polished, but they are flat. They do not have the passion that comes from stepping into the presence of the living God to give account in faith. When the Lord supplies the words, the passion will be obvious to those who hear the message.

Jim F. is an excellent example to me of a believer who has trained himself to speak for the Lord. I have asked him to share with us:

Jim: When I was 12-years-old, my parents divorced and our family was split up. I experienced many emotions, including insecurity and fear, and did not have much hope in my life. Looking for anything that would give me stability, I decided to do whatever was necessary to fill the void in my life.

I became a person who compromised to get along. I was the class clown, the joker who would be whatever it took to be accepted and liked. This carried on into my adult life, and I found the effects emotionally devastating. I was searching for identity, who I was and why I was here, and wanted something I did not see much of in the world—integrity. It was one thing I desired, but I did not know how to get it. I finally found the man who owns the market on integrity, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he has filled the void in my life. He has taken me from wandering, and has given me a position and a stage to speak for him. In the work place, I am no longer one of the guys. I am a spokesman for Jesus Christ.

I had many opportunities to express my faith in Jesus Christ at the car dealership where I worked as an auto mechanic for several years. One time I walked into the lunch room and found a picture of Jesus upside down over the microwave. I was infuriated, knowing that someone was trying to provoke me. I knew that I did not have the correct words or attitude at that moment to respond. I could not think properly because of my emotions. So I spent much of the night in prayer, and decided that the proper way to respond was in love. I asked the Lord to show me who the man was so I could explain my position as a Christian, and he gave me that opportunity. Instead of being slandered by an unrighteous response, Jesus Christ was the victor because I could show the power of his love to the man.

Through this newly found integrity in my life I have also come to love an elderly woman named Addie who is 100 years old. Every Saturday for the last four years I have had the privilege to serve her by doing such tasks as trimming her toenails, cutting her hair, grocery shopping, and working in the yard with her. My greatest joy is that we have spent many hours studying the Bible together. This is not something I would have done before I was a believer, and I can only thank the Lord Jesus Christ, who is my Savior. He is the one who has given me integrity.

C. Be Gentle (3:15b)

...with gentleness and reverence.

Peter says that when we speak about the hope we have, we are to be gentle and treat the unbeliever with respect. So often Christians are argumentative when trying to persuade the world. When we become argumentative, we may win the battle, but we will lose the war. If the whole objective is to convert hearts, bathing our speech in gentleness is evidence enough that we have the truth and have nothing to defend. When we speak, we must always show respect and love, giving the person the same grace that Christ extends to us.

The apostle Paul learned this principle through humbling circumstances. As a young Christian in Damascus he was gifted with a great knowledge of the Old Testament and its relationship to the incarnation. From Acts 9:22-25, we see that "Saul kept increasing in strength and confounding the Jews who lived at Damascus by proving that this Jesus is the Messiah." Paul won the arguments, but he did not win a soul because he was argumentative and arrogant. So the brothers sent him out of town hidden in a basket to break him of his overbearing ways.

Years later, when Paul writes to his young friend Timothy, he says, "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they many come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will" (2 Tim 2:24-26). It is love and gentle-

ness that disarms the enemy. So without the spirit of grace, all of our arguments, regardless of merit, will only strengthen the enemy in the person's life.

D. Be Pure (3:16)

...and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

It is important when we stand in the spotlight of the courtroom that our character matches our testimony. Otherwise, there is no power in what we say. This does not mean we will do everything right as Christians. What it does mean is that we clear up our wrongs and are committed to righteousness so that when we speak there is weight behind the testimony. Unfortunately, immorality among Christian leaders in recent years has reduced their message to insignificance, and has tainted others' testimony. We must keep a clear conscience so that when we go into battle, our conscience is not an obstacle to our message. It is difficult for me to go into battle against idolatry if I am carrying an idol in my own heart. When we go to battle with a clean heart, however, we can speak with authority, in purity and gentleness. Then our enemies will be put to shame.

Acts 4:7-14 recounts an event from Peter's own life when the authorities brought him to court after he had healed a lame man. They asked him,

"By what power, or in what name, have you done this?"

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for the benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you, the builders, but which became the very corner stone. And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved."

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John, and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were marveling, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus. And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they had *nothing to say in reply*.

Something similar to this happened to me when I was a sophomore in college. Our college pastor, Dave Roper, used to meet with me once a week to prepare a Bible study I led at the fraternity house. One day as we were working together two Mormon missionaries interrupted us. They had been sent by my uncle, who was also a Mormon, to convert me. I let them in, but did not know how to deal with their beliefs. Dave, however, responded in gentleness, saying, "We appreciate many things that you folks do, your priority on family life and your love for morality. But I have one objection with your religion. When Jesus said, 'It is finished,' you say it is not finished." The men did not know what to say, and it was an education for me on how to disarm the enemy with a gentle spirit.

Just then my roommate, whom I had led to Christ the night before, walked in the door. Dave said, "Brad, tell these men what happened to you last night." Brad said, "I'd love to! I was in the dregs of sin, getting my self-worth from basketball. Now I have accepted Christ, and I feel cleansed and redeemed to new life. The Spirit resides in me. It is wonderful!" The missionaries had nothing to say in reply. Dave's response

and Brad's testimony was all done with boldness, gentleness and grace, as they depended on the Spirit for the right words.

In summary, Peter tells us that suffering unjustly puts us on a stage for the world to see. When asked to speak in the courtroom, we must speak in dependence on God, in gentleness and purity. The first step in handling unjust suffering is to renew our perspective that it is the very avenue God uses to spread his kingdom. Therefore the focus should not be on our enemies, but on him as Lord. With courage we can then step forward to speak.

III. A Unique Privilege: Playing the Role of Christ (3:17-18)

For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right, rather than for doing what is wrong. For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.

A. The Nature of His Suffering (3:18a)

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God.

Here Peter sets out the nature of Jesus' suffering. He was the one just person suffering on behalf of all the unjust so as to bring atonement. In the ancient world, the concept that someone else's suffering would bring cleansing to another was difficult to accept. One philosopher named Plotinus said of Christianity, "For men who have become evil to demand that others should be their saviours by sacrifice of themselves is not lawful even in prayer." Another philosopher admitted, that "my suffering makes me better," but thought it absurd to suppose that the suffering of another could do so.

B. The Value of His Suffering (3:18b)

...having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit;

The scriptures teach that Christ's suffering for the unjust was an atonement for the world. Peter says that Jesus was the sin offering that was needed to restore man to relationship with the Father. Thus, he died for our sin. It was unlike the Old Testament sacrifice that had to be done repeatedly. In contrast, Jesus was the heavenly sacrifice, done once for all, to give us access to God. We all are now to be priests in the very presence of the Holy God (see Exod 29:4). How miraculous it is for a holy God, without sin, to be able to dwell with us and not consume us! The sacrifice of Jesus made us priests in the kingdom.

When we suffer, Peter says that we have the privilege of acting out Christ's role in the drama of redemption. Although we do not add anything to Jesus' work, by following his example we are able to enter into God's plan. The world then can choose to appropriate his life that we have released into the community. We do not add anything to what Christ has already done, but we reenact it.

To conclude, we must remember that the stage we have been looking at is the world, not the church. This world is dangerous, and is filled with mine-fields. To reenact this drama of the passion play, God wants the Christian on stage to disarm the mine-fields. In Act 1, our role is all action, *no speech*. The world speaks and is filled with slander, enmity and hatred. The spotlight is on the world, not on the Christian.

Then the curtain drops, and the world feels the weight of its sin. It is left alone to see its sin in contrast to the righteousness on stage. When the curtain opens to Act 2, the spotlight is now on us as Christians. We are invited to speak, and the world has nothing to say in reply. Then the curtain drops, and conversion can take place.

Unfortunately, there are three tragedies that can replace the passion play if we are not obedient to God's calling. The first one occurs when the world is on stage alone, but the Christian refuses to participate. Thus, there is no drama. The church tries to impress the world that it has its own stage, and says, "Come watch us." But the world is not impressed because the spotlight is not on the church and its world; the spotlight is on the world's stage. The drama was meant to be played out of the passion on stage. For us to play our privileged role, we must get on the world's stage.

Secondly, it is tragic when the spotlight is supposed to be on the world during Act 1, but is instead on the Christian who is speaking slander and enmity. He is supposed to be silent, but instead is causing more explosions. So the whole scene is confused, and there is so much dust in the air that the world cannot see the difference between the world's sin and the Christian's sin. So righteousness is not evident to the world.

A third tragedy can occur in Act 2 if the Christian is asked to speak at his turn, and yet does not say anything in his defense of the gospel. Thus, all the unbeliever knows is his own depravity, without anyone telling him about the glory of Christ.

So Christians, the good news is that you do not have to go to Oberammergau every 10 years to see the the Passion Play reenacted. God has set the drama in our own community. Instead of watching from the balcony, we are allowed to play the lead role of Jesus Christ. This was the very truth I learned 20 years ago in Oberammergau.

My wife wrote in her diary,

Saturday, July 18, 1970 – The sun finally came out after a fashion and shone its glory down on us. We headed back across the border into Northern Bavaria from Austria to the the town of Oberammergau. The Passion Play was being presented but we didn't get a chance to see it...but we did get a chance to share with our friend John about Jesus.

RE-ENACTMENT OF THE PASSION PLAY

The stage: The world (not the church)

Actors:

1. The world, playing itself
2. You, playing the role of Christ

Act 1: Spotlight on the world:

1. World speaks—slander, enmity
2. You—silent

Intermission

Act 2: Spotlight on you:

1. You speak—testimony to Christ
2. World—silent

Curtain drops

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1 Peter 3:19-4:6

Fourteenth Message

Brian Morgan

May 20, 1990

THE DAWN'S EARLY LIGHT

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

Today, May 20, 1990, is a significant day in the history of Romania. After a generation of Communist rule, the first free elections are being held there. When a member of our body was in Romania in January, the Christian brothers there gave him a memento of the freedom they now enjoy—a Romanian flag with the symbol of communism cut out of the middle of it. What a difference the last five months have made to an oppressed people!

I received a letter from a friend named David, a 33-year-old Romanian doctor, telling me about the newness of everything in that country. The last time I was with him we had to part in tears and haste because the security police had discovered our campsite. The tension was so great that it was difficult to enjoy your fellowship. Nevertheless, our love relationship was deepening.

When we discovered that the police had set up a roadblock outside the camp, our team decided it was necessary to leave immediately without our brothers. Before we left the fellowship meal to hike out, I taught them our American symbol, the victory sign. As the four of us left the hill, we were deeply moved when the whole crowd of Romanians raised their hands in victory, a symbol that some day vindication would come for their suffering.

Vindication is Peter's theme in the text we will study this morning. The apostle declares that if we as pilgrims live righteous lives, that will eliminate much suffering. He tells us, however, that if we suffer for the sake of righteousness, we have the privilege of reenacting the passion play before a hostile world. It is a drama that has no minor parts. We all have the great privilege of playing the lead role, that of Christ in his suffering.

Yet, we wonder, will God vindicate his people? And if so, when? And how can we be certain?

In answering these questions, Peter shifts his focus from the cross to the resurrection of Christ. In verse 18 he wrote, "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust..." His was the perfect sacrifice, unlike the Old Testament sacrifices that had to be repeated if the sinner was to be justified. Jesus is the King from heaven, the perfect sacrifice, the Redeemer who has secured victory over evil.

Peter now goes on to tell Christians about their vindication. The resurrection inaugurates a new age in time. It is as if the dawn has come, and the light has broken into the darkness. As the sun becomes brighter over the horizon, we not only see the light with our eyes, but we begin to feel the heat and the warmth. Our understanding moves from the mind to the heart; and our heart is enlarged to embrace the resurrection life of the age to come.

I. The First Rays of Light: The Resurrection (3:19-20)

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that he might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water. (1 Pet 3:18-20 NASB)

Will God vindicate his people? In the resurrection, Jesus is proclaimed the victor over evil, and to demonstrate that victory, Peter focuses on the

two great world judgments: the flood of Noah's day, and the great judgment to come.

The Interpretive Problem

This text contains several interpretive problems which scholars and commentators have wrestled with through the centuries. The problems center around three questions in the text. First, who are the spirits that Christ made proclamation to? Are they the spirits of men who died in the days of the flood? Or are they the angels of Genesis 6 who left their proper abode, cohabited with women and created a demonic race of human beings?

Secondly, when did Christ preach to them? Augustine, among other scholars, thought that this happened in the days of Noah. First Peter 1 says that the spirit of Christ was preaching through the Old Testament prophets, and Noah himself was a preacher of righteousness. Thus, the idea is that the spirit of Christ was in Noah and God was giving his generation a chance to repent through his preaching of the gospel. I believe there is weight to that argument. On the other hand, the apostolic creed says that Christ in his disembodied state between his death and resurrection descended into hell to preach to these spirits. The creed says that Jesus, having died, "descended into Hades." A third alternative says that the expression "being made alive in the spirits" refers to his resurrection life. Having been put to death in the flesh, Jesus was raised, and in that state he preached triumph to the demonic rebels of Noah's day.

The third question revolves around the issue of what did Christ preach. Did he preach repentance through Noah, or a second chance of salvation to men (or spirits) of Noah's day; or thirdly, a proclamation of victory over the demonic rebels of Noah's day?

With these three questions one can come up with more than a few possibilities of interpretation for the whole passage. With so many possibilities Martin Luther said of this text, "This is (such) a mysterious text and dark saying—as only one of a kind in the New Testament—that I am not sure what St. Peter means." Five hundred years later, I too have to say that I am not sure what St. Peter means.

Interpretive Method: Challenge to Think!

As students of the Bible, we should be like scientists in the way we approach a text that is unclear. I will present the method I use to interpret such texts to develop a theology. First, we must gather all the data so that our conclusions will be as accurate as possible. A common mistake people make is that they gather only part of the data, become excited about what it appears to be saying, and then they build a system on half-truth. It may fit a presupposition, but it does not do justice to the author's intent since it does not utilize all the data. The second thing we must do is analyze the information. In this particular text, the data can be read differently. The problem is, how do we take the data to build a coherent system? In order to do that, we must make assumptions about the data. We must weight the data differently, and from that build a system of theology.

In this study, I will give you my assumptions and how I weight the data. Since there is no pope in the Protestant tradition, I will give you the evidence and let you decide. From the outset, I must tell you the discovery process is fraught with difficulty. I worked on this passage for several months, and published my findings in a study book. I was not convinced that my point of view was correct however, so I read another study that I knew would speak to a different perspective. The author's argument is

quite good, and I see that I may have to rethink my premises. However, I will explain how I came to my conclusions.

First, I give clear text priority over unclear texts of scripture. It is not right to build a doctrine on an unclear text and use that to overrule what is clear in the scriptures. For instance, there is no evidence in scripture that anyone can receive a second chance in hell to repent. Thus, I do not think that Christ preached a second chance to people. The clear text states that if sinners did not believe Moses they would not believe a man if he were raised from the dead. So first, allow clear text to rule over unclear text. Additionally, we must not build a doctrine on one verse of scripture. All important doctrines in scripture come from many texts so they can clearly lead the believer to maturity. Therefore, do not use this passage exclusively to build a doctrine.

Secondly, I allow context to be a determining factor. Regardless of what Peter means by these angels and Jesus' preaching, it is important to determine the meaning in this context. How does this affect the pilgrim who suffers and hungers for his vindication? Context will help us come to a more accurate understanding. Thirdly, to find coherence, I look for grammatical clues in the text which hold the theme together. In this text, there is a grammatical clue I will disclose later. Finally, if in following this method one is able to find a coherent interpretation for an unclear text, we must not be dogmatic about our conclusions. In this case good expositors end up with what I think are two valid possibilities because they weight the same data differently.

Grammatical Structure Provides Unity and Coherence

I believe the key expression in this text is found in the verb "*he went*." It is used three times, twice regarding Jesus. First it says he went in his resurrection state and preached (v. 19); and secondly, "*having gone* into heaven" (v. 22). It is then applied to us in 4:3, translated "*having pursued*." Putting these verses together, Peter points out that though man rejected Christ in his suffering, and the devil tried to destroy him, when Christ's suffering is complete ("It is finished"), God vindicates him. This is demonstrated in the resurrection. In the Spirit, Christ proclaims victory over the darkest angelic hosts who were kept in bondage after the flood. Finally, in the ascension, he is seated above all powers, dominions and authorities. The present reality is that as believers embrace this new life we too overcome evil because we no longer travel down the same wicked road we once *went*. That is the common thread that ties the text together. Regardless whether Christ is preaching to men or spirits in prison, victory has come and it transforms our lives from evil to righteousness.

Context and Clear Texts: Identify the Spirits

Regarding these spirits, let me summarize what I think are the clearer texts that identify these spirits. A passage from 2 Peter 2:4,5,9 gives us all the themes mentioned in this text, and with more detail:

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly...then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment. (2 Pet 2:4-5, 9)

From this passage it is clear that there are angels who have sinned and have been cast into a pit reserved for judgment. Likewise, Jude 6 says, "And angels who did not keep their own domain but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day."

There are also parallels in the Jewish writings of Peter's day with which Christians would have been familiar. Genesis 5:24 says, "And Enoch walked with God, and was no more, for God took him." The Jews speculated about what happened to Enoch after God took him. The book of 1 Enoch proposes that he went to the place of the fallen angels of Genesis 6 that were kept under judgment: "Beyond that abyss I saw a place which had no firmament of the heaven above, and no firmly founded earth beneath it: there was no water upon it, and no birds, but it was a waste

and horrible place" (18:12). The book of 2 Enoch describes it as being up in the second heaven.

Perhaps the apostle uses that same language to say it is Christ, not Enoch, who has a mission over evil. His mission far outstrips and transcends the journey tradition gives to Enoch: "Christ is the true Enoch: he walks with God and is taken up to be with his heavenly Father. Not Enoch, but Christ, is the one who confronts the angelic and demonic forces of evil."¹

These pieces of information are the evidence I use to identify the spirits. I reiterate that my conclusions are not free of difficulty. There are others who say these spirits are the men to whom Noah preached, and it was the spirit of Christ preaching to them in the days of the flood. Regardless of which route you take, the outcome is sure—Christ is vindicated over all evil!

The Flood in the Days of Noah

Peter reminds these Christians of the days before the flood when evil was overwhelming, it was a time of such wickedness that demonic hordes intermarried with women and produced a race of half-god, half-human, demonic beings. The author of Genesis comments on the state of mankind's heart, saying, "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." (Gen. 6:5)

Here were the darkest days of human history, when all was evil and the demons had their way. And the remnant was much smaller (only eight!) than Peter's day. In his sovereignty, God preserved a tiny remnant of eight people in the ark, so when judgment destroyed mankind, eight were saved. That is the vindication that salvation brought. Peter brings us to the present reality by saying that the physical judgment of water is a *type* of the judgment to come. It is truth for our day as well. Are you fearful of evil, wicked men or demons? Are you fearful of the flesh in your own life? Or are you fearful of corrupt governments? Peter tells us not to fear because God has pronounced victory, and judgment is coming.

II. The Glory of the Morning: The Ascension (3:21-22)

And corresponding to that, baptism now saves you—not the removal of dirt from the flesh, but an appeal to God for a good conscience—through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who is at the right hand of God, having gone into heaven, after angels and authorities and powers had been subjected to Him.

A. The Judgment to Come

The reason for judgment is the same as when the first judgment was given: "The intent of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen 8:21). This time the means of judgment will not be flood, but fire. Then, the Lord will destroy not only the earth, but heaven as well. As with Noah's judgment, however, there is a delay. We must not interpret the delay to mean that God has lost control. On the contrary, it is to demonstrate his compassion. Peter says,

...by the word of God the heavens existed long ago and the earth was formed out of water and by water, through which the world at that time was destroyed, being flooded with water. But the present heavens and earth by His word are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. But do not let this one fact escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. (2 Pet 3:5-10)

Like Noah's day, there is a way of escape—through baptism. When we are placed into Christ as believers, we are preserved in the real ark. We are placed into Christ by an appeal to a "clear conscience," which is the individual's choice to make Jesus Christ Lord. We can then enter the real

ark (Christ) and be saved through his resurrection, which is the eighth day (just as there were eight people preserved in the ark).

B. The Vindication of the Suffering of Christ

While this passage has presented interpreters with major problems, it is apparent that opposition from man or demon cannot thwart God's vindication of his servants. We see evidence in the resurrection of Christ when he is sent in his resurrected state to announce victory over these demons. Evidence is also seen in the ascension when he is given authority over all powers on earth.

In America, our freedom has been taken to such extremes that it has become licentiousness, and that is opening this nation up to more and more activity of demons, worldly thinking, and the false philosophy of the New Age. Even in our own church I know of a family whose relative was abused by a demonic cult many years ago when she was a young girl. Although this woman and her husband are Christians, this demonic cult has vowed to kill her in a ritual sacrifice because she knows too much. The FBI agents, who are not even Christians, believe the threats and in the power of demons. To harass this couple and display their power, the cult stole their dog, sacrificed it, and sent the animal parts back to them in the mail. Imagine the fear this couple lives in!

Yet the text takes us to the truth that Christ is victor for all time, as he triumphed over the demons and the evil forces that would ruin us. The blood of Christ sets us free. As he has been vindicated, we too are vindicated with him. Thus, we must not fear, but continue in prayer for endurance so we can enter into the life of the dawn. Although justice may delay, it is not because God has lost control, but because he desires repentance from those who oppose him. Count his slowness as love.

The key to this passage is that the dawn has come and we are to live in the light of that dawn. Elizabeth Rowe wrote in 1737,

One glance from thee, one piercing ray,
Would kindle darkness into day,
The veil of night is no disguise
Nor screen from thy all-searching eyes;
Thro' midnight shades thou find'st thy way
As in the blazing noon of day.²

The dawn has come, so live in the light. See not only with the mind's eye, but allow it to fill the soul and warm the heart with its heat.

When our team gathered together in Romania, we wanted to give the denomination there a gift. We thought that the most meaningful present we could give them was a book of poems by Traian Dorz, a Romanian believer who was imprisoned 16 years for his faith. There, in the darkness and gloom of evil, the fight broke into his cell and the resurrected Christ lived with him. In the light of God's glory, he composed ten thousand hymns to Christ. We watched and listened as these people sang these poems in our times together, and it reminded us of King David's psalms. In their depression over their evil circumstances, their hearts responded to the truth, and they were transposed to the heavenly reality. So we smuggled these poems out of the country, and printed five thousand copies. We did not know how to get the books back in the country until the revolution took place in December. What joy to be able to hand them to these people without smuggling them in! One of our men is convinced that God started the revolution so we could get our hymnals into the country!

Thus, Peter tells us to live in the light of the dawn, and it will change our souls. Resurrection life will dispel the darkness.

III. The Warmth of Noonday: Resurrection Life in the Soul (4:1-6)

Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose [insight], that 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. For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of

the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you; but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.

A. It Purges the Pilgrim of Sin

How does the light that I see with my eye get into my heart to warm my soul so that the resurrection life of the age to come permeates my being? To the Christians in Peter's time who endured in the midst of persecution and great trial under the Roman Empire, the apostle discloses the secret that shines light into their hearts—it is unjust suffering. The thing they feared would destroy them, says Peter, is the very thing that puts this light in the heart.

The apostle declares, "Arm yourself with this insight, that he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin." Dead men do not sin. Christ suffered in the flesh, died and was resurrected to a higher plane, and now he lives to the will of God. Resurrection life is now in our hearts, and suffering in the flesh causes us to appropriate that new life. That which we fear and hate is the very thing that gives us life on a higher plane and purges us from sin.

The phrase "has ceased" does not mean that suffering delivers us from the power of sin or its guilt, for Christ accomplished that on the cross. Rather, suffering unjustly and responding rightly causes the believer to appropriate what Christ has already done for him, and reduces the power of temptation in his life to do sinful acts. This is not the teaching of perfectionism (a position that says it is possible to do away with the presence of sin), but it is saying that loving one's enemies through the power of the Spirit transforms the believer's soul. It so enlarges the heart to embrace the love of Christ, that the world's allurements seem insignificant in comparison.

B. It Sets the Pilgrim on a New Road with New Affections (4:2-3)

...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. For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries.

As Christ "*went*" to the spirits in prison to proclaim victory, and then "*went*" to heaven after his suffering, so now the pilgrim is set on a new road through his suffering. We are now following after Christ, and therefore we are no longer traveling on the road we once "*went*." I believe the Lord must view the world and its affections much like we view tag-team wrestling. There is melodrama and excitement, but not much substance. Likewise, our affections are all idols, and yet we love them. But God designed us to live on a much higher plane—to love that which is eternal. When we sacrifice the reality of heavenly gifts for idolatry—drunkenness, drugs, pornography, sexual immorality—our affections are revealed as shallow self-indulgence.

I experienced two momentous events in 1975 that contrasted worldly and eternal affections. First, Emily and I became homeowners in this valley, where it takes an absolute miracle to do so. Starting with \$500 in the bank, God handed my wife and me \$9,000 in just two days for a down payment on a brand new condominium. What joy we felt as we walked through this new place that smelled of new carpeting and paneling! Shortly thereafter, however, we had a son who died soon after his birth. The change in my affections toward that condominium was dramatic. In the death of our son I experienced God's compassionate love so deeply through the saints of this church that my affections were now directed totally toward God, and my affection for the condominium dwindled. As a result, we saw a new capacity for the love of God.

Suffering not only quickens the soul to life, but it also sensitizes the soul to death. Old ways now appear for what they are—empty and

vain—and there is a revulsion to old practices. William Law wrote astutely in 1726, “For when we are at the top of human attainments we are still at the bottom of human misery...ask why should you enter such a rat race,” reflection causes you to “leave the broad way and let the wise and learned, the rich and the great go mad by themselves.”³ What we once held in high regard no longer has much meaning when it is compared to the love of Jesus Christ. Elizabeth Rowe wrote, “I have waited for thee as they that wait for the morning.’...How undone was I without thee! In vain, while thou wast absent, the world hath tried to entertain me; all it could offer was like jests of dying men, or like recreations to the damned.”⁴

After a Super Bowl victory a few years ago, a Christian athlete on the winning team was interviewed as part of the post-game festivities. Bubbling with enthusiasm, the newsman asked, “Isn’t this the greatest moment in your life!” The football player said, “No, I wouldn’t even rank it among the top three.” What an example of renewed affections for Christ!

C. It Gives the Pilgrim a New Focus (4:4-6)

And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you; but they shall give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead. For the gospel has for this purpose been preached even to those who are dead, that though they are judged in the flesh as men, they may live in the spirit according to the will of God.

When we suffer for righteousness, our new affections enable us to live on a higher plane. No longer are we the marionettes of men, because our focus is no longer on men. From childhood on, we strived to please our parents, and then our spouse or our boss, but we never knew if we had done enough to deserve their love. But when we suffer for righteousness sake, all the strings are cut and we are no longer pulled in a hundred directions. We are released to look only toward, our heavenly Father to obtain absolute freedom in the light of his love. The world slanders us when we live this way because we do not run with them in their dissipation.

In the first century, it was difficult for a Christian to socialize with the Gentile world because everything the world did was absolute wickedness and idolatry. One writer says, “The Christians were compelled to stand aloof from so much of the social pleasure of the world, that the Gentiles bitterly resented their puritanism, regarding them as enemies of all joy and therefore of the human race.” In those days, for example, if your friend had season tickets to the “games,” it was more likely than not that you would witness Christians being thrown to the lions. If a Gentile said, “Let’s go to the temple to worship,” that was actually an invitation to a sexual orgy. There was no joy in their activity, only revulsion and greater darkness. So the Christians had to remain aloof from these wicked activities, and therefore they suffered slander. These pilgrims were sustained because they no longer focused on the world, but on the God who ultimately judges. It produced fear in their hearts while giving them hope for the future. Looking beyond the veil of history they saw a table set for a feast. There saw all their friends who had been martyred, forever vindicated in glorified bodies, serving to the will of God. They looked to that new party in heaven, and continued to grow in hope.

The great contrast between pagan despair and Christian hope may be seen in their graveyards. J. B. Lightfoot contrasts the inscriptions on the magnificent tombs of the heathen and the poor graves of the Christians who were buried in the Christian catacombs. He writes, “On the one hand there is the dreary wail of despair, the effect of which is only heightened by the pomp of outward splendor from which it issues. On the other the exulting psalm of hope, shining the more brightly in ill-written, ill-spelt records amidst the darkness of subterranean caverns.” The early Christians had nothing materially, yet they lived in the light of the dawn, and the dawn so warmed their hearts that the heat of it expanded their

affections and purged them of sin to love God. Set on an entirely new road, they no longer traveled on the course they once went.

Is there vindication? Absolutely! It is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. So live in the light, for it is dawn.

I would like to close by reading a very special letter from my Romanian, friend, David. It summarizes this wonderful theme of affections in a way that only one who knows vindication could:

April 8, 1990

Dear Brian, Arthur, Judy, and Wendy,

From summer till now have happened so much events that I do not know with which to begin to tell you. Because I write so badly English, I can’t tell you too many.

We are living now in a more free country, but not completely freely, although many people are dead for liberty.

I hope although the communism which kept us like in a prison will be soon completely destroyed. By the hands of the people, God killed Ceaucescu but behind him our country is really a ruin. I am afraid that after God [has caused us to] escape from the Babylon of communism the people will forget that God did it. I pray God to help our people to understand that we must glorify Him all our life for this escape.

At the beginning I believed the revolution will clean all bad things. But perhaps I claim too much from this world. I had forgotten that in this world God sent us as lambs in the midst of wolves, and for us only in heaven will we be really well.

I was deeply moved in my heart when I received from you the envelopes [of pictures, poems, and teaching materials]. This reminded me of those dangerous days when we were together, but which remained in my heart the best days in that summer. At our departure your lifted hands in the sign of victory and your eyes fill of tears shining of God’s grace remained forever in my soul. In the days of the revolution [December 1989] the sign of the victory returned to me from all our people and I saw in all of them your hands. This was too much for me.

Arthur and Judy, we miss you so much. If I can, I want to visit you in America. I want so much to see your country and your home, and your church. For I have heard much about your country. We thank you and all the brothers who have contributed to send us the book of poems which are the best present for our church.

Let us hope that in this summer we will be again at the Gamaliel’s feet and God will bless us all.

Greet all the brothers for us with a Holy Kiss.

David.

What encouragement in the midst of unjust suffering! May God smite us with it so that we might indeed enter into this higher life, to be purged from our sinful pleasures, set on a new road with new affections, and focused on our one Supreme Judge. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

1. Edmund Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 161. See this for an excellent treatment of the different views of this passage.

2. Elizabeth Rowe, *Devout Exercises of the Heart* (1737), in David L. Jeffrey, ed., *A Burning and a Shining Light: English Spirituality in the Age of Wesley* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 105.

3. William Law, *A Practical Treatise Upon Christian Perfection* (1726), in Jeffrey, *Burning and Shining Light*, 123-124.

4. Rowe, *Devout Exercises*, 106.



Catalog No. 775

1 Peter 4:7-11

Fifteenth Message

Brian Morgan

May 27, 1990

FIRST PRIORITIES IN THE LAST DAYS

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

I was privileged to attend a dinner last week with Dr James Dobson of Focus on the Family as a speaker. He addressed the demise of the American family in the last thirty years and the pressures that our children face in the world today. It is as if an adolescent is forced to walk down a long, dark corridor that has many doors, he said. Behind each of these doors is a monster of addiction that threatens to ruin his life—premarital sex, drugs, pornography, etc. In the old days, society kept the doors locked, so a person had to work on his own to find a key. Now, says Dr Dobson, the doors are not only unlocked, but society has flung them open. As a young person goes through the hallway, he or she is able to look through these doors to see their friends indulging in these perverted activities and beckoning them to join. It is a rare individual who can get through that corridor unscathed.

Dr Dobson was followed by Gary Bauer, a former aide to President Reagan, who is now president of the Family Research Council. He began a ministry in Washington D.C. called the Washington Watch, which reports on the political climate in our nation's capital. He warned that there is a war of values in our nation, and we are rapidly losing that war. American institutions such as the media, government and school systems are no longer guided by Judeo-Christian values, and the only two institutions left, the family and the church, are under severe attack.

Although I came away discouraged by the state of our society, I am grateful that we have people such as these men who are speaking to the crucial issues facing us. Many Christians are asleep. Their children are turned loose, unprepared to walk these corridors, and consequently pay a tremendous price. We must ask hard questions about how we as Christians should respond to this growing threat. What should our priorities be?

In the same way, the apostle Peter exhorted the Christians of his day to set priorities in their daily walk. Writing from Rome, the center of social and political change, he essentially says, "I am doing a political watch. I am taking the empire's temperature toward Christianity." Peter observes that the climate towards Christianity was changing from one of tolerance and openness to an organized hostility against believers. He sees on the horizon dark clouds gathering for a fierce storm to be unleashed against the Christian community. It is so menacing that he tells the brethren, "the end of all things is at hand."

Understanding the Nature of the Age (4:7a)

The end of all things is near.

A. "The End is Near": The Theological Significance

We must understand this statement on two levels, the theological and historical. Theologically, Jesus taught the disciples that there was a biblical order to salvation history. Referring to the prophets, he showed a certain sequence of events that had to be fulfilled before the Day of Judgment (with all the events that incorporates—the tribulation, etc.). Those events included the coming of Messiah, his crucifixion and resurrection from the dead; the pouring out of the Spirit

upon all nations at Pentecost; and finally the great Day of Judgment. Between Pentecost and the Day of Judgment there are no other events to occur in salvation history. Thus the apostles labeled the present era "the last days" (see Acts 2:17-21), because the next event in history will be the Second Coming—the "end of all things." It is the gift of the Spirit, through the resurrection of Jesus, that has brought the Judgment Day right to the door of history. Therefore, the end is near.

B. "The End is Near": The Historical Significance

Secondly, Peter attributes historical significance to this statement. Although the government encouraged Christianity at first, the climate had changed at the time of Peter's letter. In A.D. 64 the Christians were so hated in Rome that Nero was able to use them as the scapegoat for a fire he set that destroyed half of Rome. Tacitus, a historian of that time, said of the fire:

...to scotch the rumor, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled as Christians. Christus, from whom they got their name, had been executed by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate when Tiberius was emperor; and the pernicious superstition was checked for a short time, only to break out afresh, not only in Judaea, the home of the plague, but in Rome itself, where all the horrible and shameful things in the world collect and find a home.

First, those who confessed themselves Christians were arrested; next, on their disclosures, a vast multitude were convicted, not so much on the charge of arson as for hatred of the human race. And their death was made a matter of sport: they were covered in wild beasts' skins and torn to pieces by dogs; or were fastened to crosses and set on fire in order to serve as torches by night when daylight failed. Nero had offered his garden for the spectacle and gave an exhibition in his circus, mingling with the crowd in the guise of a charioteer or mounted on his chariot.

Nero used the people's common hatred of Christianity and set a precedent for official policy towards them. With this awareness, Peter tells these Christians that the end is coming. In our nation, the end may be near as well. We may be losing this country to corrupt values and philosophies. What can we do?

In Peter's day, Christians facing this question observed how the Jewish community responded to a similar Roman threat towards them. Some Jews, such as the Essenes, isolated themselves in the desert and built their own community as protection. Others, like the Zealots, who were tired of waiting for the Messiah, organized themselves politically and militarily. They gathered arms to fortify Jerusalem and formed guerilla bands to harass the Romans, using outposts like Masada. The Sadducees, on the other hand, were wealthy landowners who got involved in the political process. They became as corrupt as the Roman world around them. Christians faced the same dilemma—how to respond to the situation. They wondered if they should follow suit, or was there another response.

Peter plots a fourth course for them to follow. Because the end is near and we are at the door of history, he tells them to treat these days as a precious time to do God's work on earth. In 1 Peter 4:7-11, the apostle sets four priorities for the last days:

The end of all things is at hand; therefore, be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer. Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

I. Priority #1: The Pilgrim's Mind (4:7b)

Be of sound judgment and sober spirit for the purpose of prayer.

The first priority Peter establishes deals with the mind. Writing these words, the apostle refers to Jesus' words of warning to the disciples regarding an hour of testing: "Be on guard, that your hearts may not be weighted down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of life, and that the day come upon you suddenly like a trap ...But keep on the alert at all times, praying in order that you may have strength to escape all things that are about to take place, and to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:34, 36). To meet the trials that would befall them, Jesus cautioned his disciples not to be drunk with anxiety or fear, but to be sober so they could pray. In prayer, they would escape temptation, and intercede for others as well.

There was a time in Peter's life when he failed to follow this exhortation. In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus said, "Watch and pray." But, drunk with anxiety, Peter slept when he should have been praying. When the soldiers seized Jesus, Peter was so drunk with anxiety and confusion that he lacked sound judgment. Thinking the Roman soldiers were the enemy, he grabbed a weapon of the world, the sword, and cut off the slave's ear. In the flesh, Peter responded as the world would against the wrong enemy. Later, at Jesus' trial, when Peter was waiting outside, he was given the opportunity to do battle with the spiritual weapon of speech and love to bear witness about the Messiah. Drunk with fear, he again failed when he denied the Lord. Out of this bitter experience Peter teaches that we must guard our mind.

I learned a similar lesson when I was a freshman at Stanford University in the late '60's. Stanford was under siege from the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), a political group that organized against the university administration. As an idealistic young Christian opposing this movement, I joined the Young Americans for Freedom and organized counter-demonstrations against the demonstrators. One time, I tried to rally the strongest flesh on campus—members of the fraternities and the football team—to counteract a sit-in we heard was planned. I told them, "There's a war on, and you have to come. We'll stand in front of the building and protest the protest." Not one of them came. I was able to gather only twenty-five freshmen to stand in front of the building. We thought we would be able to stop the onslaught of the SDS, but when we were confronted by five hundred students running at us I was gripped with fear. My friend turned to me and said, "Morgan, if you're scared, you'd better leave!" I left my friends to face the SDS alone, and a riot broke out that resulted in much destruction.

I learned a lesson that day. Like Peter, I accomplished nothing when my response to pressure was to be drunk with anxiety. Instead

of being a man of prayer, I used the weapons of the world to fight an enemy. In contrast, Jesus prayed in the garden and learned that he was to be passive before the enemy at his hour. Later, when the Romans crucified him, he prayed for his enemies' forgiveness. God granted his prayer, and people began to see the King of Kings for who he was. The first pagan to confess Jesus as the King was a Roman soldier who testified, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt 27:54).

To illustrate each priority that Peter lists I have brought symbols to remind us of how to handle the last days. A symbol of this first priority is a wonderful gift I received from a Romanian family with whom I stayed the first year I visited that country. It is a needle-point picture of praying hands. I have this next to my bed so when I wake up in the morning I am reminded to be of sober spirit all day so I can pray for people.

II. Priority #2: The Pilgrim's Heart (4:8)

Now Peter moves from the intellect to talk about the pilgrim's heart. Verse 8:

Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins.

A. The Lack of Love in the Roman World

The Roman world was cold, dark and loveless. Historian Philip Schaff wrote:

[S]elfishness was the soul of heathen morality. The great men of antiquity rose above its sordid forms [only by] the power of ambition and love of fame. It was for fame that Miltiades and Themistocles fought against the Persians; that Alexander set out on his tour of conquest; that Herodotus wrote his history, that Pindar sang his odes, that Sophocles composed his tragedies, that Demosthenes delivered his orations, that Phidias sculptured his Zeus. Fame was set forth in the Olympian games as the highest object of life; fame was held up by Aeschylus as the last comfort of the suffering; fame was declared by Cicero, before a large assembly, the ruling passion of the very best of men. Even the much-lauded patriotism of the heroes of ancient Greece and Rome was only an enlarged egotism. In the catalogue of classical virtues we look in vain for the two fundamental and cardinal virtues, love and humility. The very word which corresponds in Greek to humility signifies generally, in classical usage, a mean, abject mind...[F]riendship itself rested, as was freely admitted, on a utilitarian...basis, and was only possible among persons of equal or similar rank in society. For the stranger, the barbarian, and the enemy, the Greek and Roman knew no love, but only contempt and hatred.¹

Plutarch wrote that even friendship in families had died out. For brothers and sisters to love each other in the same home was thought to be an idealistic virtue of the past. It sounds very much like our world today. In our affluent society, where we are on the cutting edge of intellect and finance, few homes have any evidence of sacrificial love.

B. The Intensity of Love

Keep fervent in your love for one another.

In the context of these end times, Peter says that we must commit ourselves to love in two ways. First, we must keep fervent in our love, which means extending it without sparing expense or effort. The early Christians were great examples of this principle, evidenced in a description three hundred years later by an opponent named Lucian: "It is incredible to see the ardor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legisla-

tor has put into their heads that they are all brethren.” When Julian the Apostate was Roman emperor (A.D. 331-336), he tried to check Christianity’s influence and revive the Roman religions. To give his movement credibility, he imitated Christianity by initiating the first welfare system. It was a shame, he said, that the heathen should be left without support from their own while “among the Jews no beggar can be found, and the godless Galileans [i.e., the Christians] nourish not only their own, but even our own poor.” Thus, several centuries after Peter wrote this letter, the believers continued to follow his teaching.

C. The Description of Love

First, then, love spares no expense or effort. Secondly, on the negative side,

...because love covers a multitude of sins.

Peter quotes Proverbs 10:12, “Hatred stirs up strife, but love draws a veil.” We must not drag the faults of others into the light, constantly confronting them with their weaknesses. Instead we must cover them up, seeing them as Christ sees them. This will build strong bonds of brotherhood in the body of Christ and further Christ’s atoning work. A smile of grace and thoughtful words will affirm the Lord’s love for people, encouraging them to live out the righteousness that is free in Christ.

A symbol of this priority is another gift I received in Romania. On my second trip, a family hosted me at great expense to themselves. Although they were being watched by the police, they said, “We want Brian in our home.” On the last day, the police came to get me, but I was not there. As we were being pursued by the secret police, instead of being concerned about himself, the only thing on my host’s mind was to give me a handmade bedspread from his wife. Although I had jeopardized his family, his main concern was giving me a gift. So to me this bedspread is a symbol of love not sparing effort or expense.

For those of you with children in school this is a very important principle. As parents, we are often so passionate about our children’s needs that we become advocates for them and neglect ministering to those in the school system. The principal in our elementary school, for example, is under great pressure from parents who lobby for their children’s interests. Every fall when he publishes the list of class assignments, unhappy parents beset his office, looking for him to fulfill their requests. I doubt if those people are concerned about the principal and his needs apart from how he affects their own interests.

Last week I was encouraged that one of our pastors who volunteers in the school system and has a good reputation for his work there received the Parent of the Year Award. When the principal introduced my friend at the ceremony, he broke down and wept. He said, “This is the man who brought the love of God into my life.” My friend took an interest in this man, apart from his children’s welfare, and it gave the principal the freedom to drop his role as administrator. He was released to pour out his heart about his divorce and problems in his new job, and ultimately my friend led him to Christ. Likewise, if we are to free people to live out the grace that Christ gives, we must look for opportunities to love those around us.

III. Priority #3: The Pilgrim’s Home (4:9)

Having talked about clear minds for prayer and hearts filled with love, Peter now discusses the pilgrim’s home, saying,

Be hospitable to one another without complaint.

A. The Need for Hospitality

The word “hospitality” does not refer to entertaining, an activity that is often motivated by the desire to impress important people.

Rather, hospitality means to love *strangers* by integrating them into the home as part of the family. In the first century, hospitality was an important ministry as there were few inns for lodging, and the ones that did exist had an unsavory reputation. Traveling teachers and evangelists required lodging from the body of Christ to do the work of the ministry. Thus hospitality was a major factor in spreading Christ’s kingdom, since missions would have been impossible without it.

A second motivation for hospitality was evangelism. By opening their home, the Christians’ lifestyle and character would be on display to the stranger. Many non-believers came to Christ through this witness. In our day, the church must recover this practice of hospitality so we might be instruments to reveal Jesus Christ to a watching world. Our future leaders will come from this generation, and their values are being formed right now. We have great opportunities for influence because our children go to school with these young people, and they enter our homes through those relationships. I pray that we can be a righteous contrast to the world’s values by showing God’s redemptive love in our homes.

I myself was a recipient of such hospitality, and came to know Christ as a result while in high school. I was a pagan, raised in a wealthy home, wanting for nothing materially, but hungry for love. I fled from my affluent home to poorer homes looking for love from those who would offer it. Finally, a Christian teacher opened her home to me, and allowed me to sit at her table as part of her family. What a blessing that was! I thrived on our conversations, and arranged it so I could be with her whenever possible. She is the example I followed that led me to Christ.

Opening up our homes in love does not require elegant place settings and exotic food. We simply need to set another place, and include someone in our lives. This is not a complicated procedure; it happens naturally in the family. To symbolize this principle I brought a plate that my youngest daughter made. It may seem crude when compared with expensive china, but it is a gift made by someone who loves me.

Frankly, friends, I am thankful we have a space problem at our church. I would rather have us spend money on hospitality than devoting it to a building project at this location. It is more valuable that we do Backyard Bible Clubs in individual homes than if we have a big program here. Our home fellowships are more important than having big group meetings in a fancy church building. One reason God may have constrained our building is to keep the ministry pure. Quiet homes opening up for evangelism will always be more effective than an organized program. It is tragic when ministry becomes committee meetings and bureaucracy, taking something simple and making it complicated. Moreover, hospitality will enrich our lives as well as those of the non-Christians to whom we minister. One very hospitable family in this church told me that their children got an invaluable education through the people who passed through their home. The evidence is in their children’s lives.

Since the time is short, we need to have our minds clear for prayer, our hearts full of love, and then we are to have homes filled with strangers, welcoming them as if they were Jesus Christ, giving them the best of what we have, especially our relationship with the Lord.

IV. Priority #4: The Pilgrim’s Service (4:10-11)

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances [the oracles] of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which

God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

To those pilgrims who are fearful about the destruction of the earthly Jerusalem, Peter gives new hope. He tells them that God is building something wonderful, a heavenly city, and it will outlast history. The prophet Isaiah gives us a beautiful description of the restored city of Jerusalem. He says,

**“Behold I will set your stones in antimony.
And your foundations I will lay in sapphires.
Moreover, I will make your battlements of rubies,
And your gates of crystal,
And your entire wall of precious stones.” (Isa 54:11-12)**

This is a beautiful, radiant city that reflects the life of God. Peter says in chapter 2 that it is already under construction. Jesus is the cornerstone and we are the living stones of sapphires and rubies being built to God’s glory.

A. Gifts Provide a Freedom to Focus

Besides being the building materials, we have the privilege of doing the construction by taking a place on the city wall or in the temple. God has given each of us spiritual gifts to contribute to the building process. There is great freedom to focus because each of us has at least one gift to contribute in the area that we are gifted. As we all use our gifts in concert we will display the manifold beauty of God’s grace. Peter says that the end is near, and therefore we do not have to do everything. We must find our place in the wall, be a gem cutter with the materials God provides, and work where he places us, to his glory.

The symbol for this principle is my dulcimer. When we play in God’s symphony, we play only one instrument. We can focus on the best and neglect the good. Many of us do not realize that by doing too much we neglect the best. There is no shoddy workmanship allowed in this temple. We must focus on the best, and neglect what is secondary. That is a freedom that the spiritual gifts give.

B. Gifts Lead to a Freedom of Simplicity

Peter divides the gifts into two types, speaking gifts and serving gifts. Approximately eighteen out of twenty-one or so spiritual gifts are speaking gifts, and the rest are serving gifts. This may be an indication that the apostles did not expect the supernatural sign gifts of miracles and healings to be normative throughout the church age. They appear sporadically, but never to the extent as in the first century when they authenticated the apostolic ministry. We now have the written word of God to serve as the same testimony that these gifts displayed.

To discover our gifts, the process is quite simple: we must be available to show God’s glory by speaking or serving. To do this, we do not need organizational meetings, manuals, or seminars. We need to start by loving people and by using our particular gift. I am sure when some people go to choir for the first time, they do not know if they are an alto or a soprano, a tenor or a bass. If we are singing in a choir of believers who sing to God’s glory by our good works, we must start by singing. I guarantee that we will find our range quickly!

C. True Freedom Comes Only to the Disciplined

Whoever speaks, let his speak, as it were, the utterances [oracles] of God.

Just as it takes discipline to find freedom on an instrument, it takes discipline to use our gifts. Peter says, “If you have speaking gifts, you must speak the oracles of God.” Speaking gifts require Bible study and prayer to prepare our hearts. Peter raises Christians to the level of the Old Testament prophets who spoke the oracles of God. They did not have a choice about what they said. God spoke through the ear, illumined the image of God in the mind, changed their heart, and then set their tongues free to speak his words. Peter affirms that in some sense all Christians are prophets. When we speak, we must ask the Spirit to give us illumination so that our words may be few, but they will proclaim the word of God.

I take these words seriously when I prepare a series of messages. I work through the text a year ahead of time with a team made up of ten people, students and lay people, because I want to speak to you what the text says, not what I think it means. (I can’t tell you how rewarding it is to study with a group of people who are all learning together!) This group studies the passage for two weeks, and then we write it up. For three months I meditate on it, then I speak it. I am commanded by the Word to speak with accuracy, and it takes a team of people to help me towards that goal by correcting me and giving me balance. That is the seriousness with which we are to speak in life. Only the words of God can build this temple, not the opinions of men.

Peter then says,

Whoever serves, let him serve, as by the strength which God supplies.

Serving gifts must be done in dependence upon Christ, so that it is his life that gives aid, not our self-effort. Serving gifts cannot be done in the flesh any more than speaking gifts can. When we serve, it is the life of Christ in us that edifies, not our own strength. The first deacons chosen in the early church were to be men filled with the Spirit because waiting on tables was more than merely serving a meal; they were imparting the life of Christ. Therefore, they were to be filled with his strength and life (see Acts 6:3). That is what builds the temple into glory. As we depend on him to work through our speaking gifts or serving gifts, the whole city is built up for the glory of God in a symphony conducted by him.

This text speaks of a balanced life. Although the end is near, we do not have to be drunk with anxiety. Instead, we can have clear minds, loving hearts, open homes, and ministries that are focused. This will manifest the perfect harmony that God intends. Peter wrote to a generation under intense suffering, and indeed for them the end did come. Most of the apostles were martyred for their faith. Seven years after Peter wrote this letter, the Roman legions under Titus totally destroyed Jerusalem, just as Jesus had prophesied.

Peter’s words offer hope to a generation under pressure: We do not invest in an earthly Jerusalem. We are building the city whose foundation will endure forever and outlive history. It is a city that we build to God’s glory, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Although times are getting worse for us as well, I pray that we will respond to Peter’s words with a single eye and encouraged heart. Amen.

1. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Scribner’s, 1910) 2:370-371.

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1 Peter 4:12-19

Sixteenth Message

Brian Morgan

June 3, 1990

THE SONG OF THE WOUNDED

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

Today, the San Francisco Bay Area is celebrating the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev, *Time* magazine's Man of the Year in 1989. A lottery was held for Stanford University students and staff who want to participate in the festivities surrounding President Gorbachev's arrival on campus, since the audience must be limited. What a difference a generation makes! I grew up under the lingering shadow of the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Cold War. Back then, the phrase "The Russians are coming" meant either nuclear holocaust or KGB agents. Now their leader, Mr. Gorbachev, is welcomed as an honored diplomat and statesman. He even used the word "friend" in his vocabulary describing the relationship between our nations. The one we thought would destroy us is now saying he wants to be our friend and wants to work with us toward a common goal.

In some ways this is how the prophets depicted the coming of Jesus Christ into history. Malachi 4:1-3 envisions the fire of his coming in these words,

"For behold the days is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evil doer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze," says the LORD of hosts, "so that it will leave them neither root nor branch." But for you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. And you will tread down the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing," says the LORD of hosts.

In the same way, the apostle Peter wants Christians to be prepared for the second coming of Jesus. No one will need a winning lottery ticket, but everyone will have a personal encounter with the Lord and will respond in one of two ways: there will either be dark gloom, and his consuming fire will destroy, or there will be inexpressible joy, full of glory so great that it cannot be put into words. Peter desires that his readers prepare for that day, and ready their hearts accordingly to meet the King.

How does the heart prepare itself so that this coming fire is not a day of gloom but of joy? Peter says that is accomplished by putting the fire of God, through the Spirit, into our hearts now, so that it will purify and consume all that is evil in us. As it burns through the lamp of the Spirit, it purifies with his life so that on that day his glory will be revealed to all. Surprisingly, this process is enhanced through the unjust suffering of the believer.

In a previous section of his letter, Peter declared that the resurrection of Christ resulted in victory over his enemies. The apostle now responds to those who question the reason for suffering: If Jesus was victorious over evil, why should those who bear his name be abused, mocked and arrested as criminals? The apostle says that understanding God's intent will replace fear with rejoicing because our suffering is a sign that God's judgment has begun. Suffering purifies the heart, preparing it for the great joy we will experience at Jesus' return. First Peter 4:12-19 explains how to approach unjust suffering in our lives,

describes our attitude and the way we should suffer as Christians, and reveals the significance of our suffering. May the Lord make us attentive!

I. Attitudes to Approach Suffering (4:12-14)

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

A. Not Surprise but Expectation

Christians are about to face a fiery ordeal, says the apostle. History shows that the cause of their troubles was the change of government policy toward them from encouragement to intolerance. Christians became the scapegoat for every mean thing in the culture, and Nero gave official sanction to persecution of the believers in A.D. 63. A year later, when Rome was destroyed in the great fire, Christians were unjustly blamed and killed by the hundreds for their alleged treachery. Thus, the "fiery ordeal" Peter refers to is a change in government policy.

I believe that a similar hostile attitude toward Christianity is growing in our nation. Last week I was commiserating with a friend, who is a respected doctor in the community, about the process of writing an AIDS curriculum for sex education in the school district. Although AIDS leads to death—there are no exceptions—our liberal community is reluctant to teach abstinence as the only foolproof method to prevent the disease. Whenever my friend suggested that choice, or any other absolutes, he was branded a "fundamentalist Christian" and ignored. Even as a doctor who is a recognized expert in this field, he must be careful about what he says since people who preach absolutes are accused of having a Christian bias. He was perturbed at this group's antagonism toward his stand and the way they are arranging the curriculum.

When we are maligned for Christ's sake, Peter says we should not be surprised, we should expect it. The word "strange" is used as a word play; it is the same Greek word as "surprise." I would translate this sentence, "Do not feel inwardly strange, as if some strange thing were happening to you when you face unjust suffering." Peter encourages us to expect it because a fiery ordeal is necessary to test our faith. "Test" is a word which refers to the process of purifying metals by fire. When metal is heated, the dross which comes to the surface is skimmed off. Similarly, when we first embraced Christ, our faith was a mixture of our trust in him, tainted by reliance on our own resources (i.e., talents, wealth, position, etc.). A fiery ordeal of suffering removes the impurity of trusting ourselves so that it is Christ alone and his life that floods through us.

Surprise is often a natural response to suffering, but it indicates that we do not understand the curriculum in the process of sanctification. Hebrews 2:10 and 5:8-9 demonstrate that even Jesus was perfected through suffering. As the Son of Man, he needed to experience suffering in order to mature his faith. If Christ, who had no sin, needed to suffer, how much more do we need it? John Stott wrote that these verses speak of a process in which Jesus was “made perfect” through his suffering. He was not imperfect as far as sin is concerned, but he needed the experience to mature him: “If suffering was the means by which the sinless Christ became mature, so much more do we need it in our sinfulness.” Therefore, do not be surprised by suffering, but expect it.

B. Not Sorrow But Rejoicing (4:13-14)

Secondly, Peter says that our attitude must not be one of sorrow but of rejoicing:

...but to the degree you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation.

The phrase “to rejoice with exultation” is used in the scriptures to describe the increase of our appetite for joy when God has delayed an act of salvation. When it finally comes, our joy is so full that it cannot be expressed (see Matt 5:12; Luke 1:47; 10:21; John 8:56; Acts 2:26; 16:34; 1 Pet 1:6, 8; 4:13; Rev 19:7). Suffering with Christ will clearly increase our capacity for joy on the great day of his return. It enlarges the heart in the same way as when one receives a gift.

This brings to mind the story of Elijah and the widow in 1 Kings 17. While Elijah resides in her home, the widow is devastated by the death of her only child. She says to Elijah, “What do I have to do with you, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my iniquity to remembrance, and to put my son to death!” Elijah takes the lifeless boy upstairs to his room, prostrates himself on the child, and prays three times. Through the prophet’s prayer the child is revived and presented to his mother. Imagine how her joy was enlarged through the suffering she experienced!

We are to view the resurrection of Jesus from the same perspective. Every loved one who has been lost will be presented by Jesus, the new Elijah, and handed back to the family at the banquet feast that God has prepared for believers at the end of this life. For those of you who have lost children, think of the joy you will have when you welcome them back through Jesus Christ. If a beloved husband or wife has preceded you in death, the Lord will be pleased to present this one to you. If you are childless in this world, the day will come when you are seated at a banquet table with more spiritual children than you could have produced in your physical womb. For those of you who have not married, or have a disobedient mate, you will come face-to-face with the Spouse who loved you all along. That is the great joy to which we look forward, and our capacity to experience that joy will be increased by suffering.

Peter then tells believers to rejoice because it is an indicator that we have privileged status. He says,

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.

When Christians suffer, at times their first thought is that God is angry with them. Why me? they ask. The truth is, God is not mad at us; on the contrary, our suffering is evidence that he loves us dearly. It is a sign that the Spirit is finding a permanent home in us, the

temple of the living God. From that platform his ministry will be multiplied.

At Pentecost, the visible sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit was tongues of fire over the believers’ heads. The significance of this is that the unique experience Isaiah had. Isaiah 6 is now possible or every Christian after Pentecost. Caught up into heaven, Isaiah saw the holy God on his throne, his holiness so pure and great that Isaiah responded, “Woe is me, I am an unclean man.” An angel touched his mouth with a burning hot coal and declared, “Your sins are forgiven.” Cleansed by the power of God’s Spirit, Isaiah was made a prophet to speak the oracles that changed the entire course of world history. In the book of Acts the gift of the Spirit produces the same effect for all Christians. The flame will purify and burn so brightly that it will affect our speech. By its power, all Christians become prophets, and the words of salvation we speak will bring healing throughout the world. We can rejoice because it is through the process of unjust suffering God that will perfect us.

Suffering has great purpose and value in our lives, therefore we must expect it and learn to rejoice through it. If we understand that it is not meant to destroy us, but to purify us, we can have inexpressible joy at its advent.

II. The Way to Suffer (4:15-16)

A. Not in Shame as a Law-Breaker

By no means let any of you suffer as a murderer, or thief, or evildoer, or a troublesome meddler;

The Spirit has written God’s law on our hearts, and we are able to keep the law by his power. Peter exhorts us, therefore, to suffer not as law-breakers (e.g., cheating on our taxes, laziness at work, drunkenness, etc.), but as Christians. In the classical literature, “troublesome meddler” was defined as a spy or an informer, and later as a revolutionary. In this context, I believe Christians are warned against the temptation to act with excessive zeal, like revolutionaries, in attacking non-Christian habits. As we see society going downhill morally, it is tempting to group together as Christians and attack the world, thereby meddling in their lives. When we do this, we in fact break the law and become troublesome meddlers rather than good citizens in Christ. Unfortunately, Christians of the second and third centuries lost their witness by being strident and combative toward non-Christians.

Peter counters this attitude by exhorting the brethren to suffer as Christians, turning people towards God with their gentle spirit rather than away from him.

B. But in triumph as a Christian (4:16)

My timid personality has often been a hindrance when I have been presented with opportunities to speak boldly for the name of Christ. Six months ago, for example, some neighbors came around with a petition against a building that was to be erected near our residential area. After I signed without reading it in detail, they informed me that a group of Christians wanted to use the building on Sundays for worship. I said nothing as they left, but felt miserable knowing that I had missed the opportunity to suffer as a Christian by speaking out for my brothers. I thank God that the petition failed and the building was indeed constructed.

When we suffer, says Peter, we must not be ashamed, but instead we should glorify God. Our text begins with the name of Christ being reviled, but it concludes with the name of Christ being glorified

in verse 16. This verse is best exemplified to me by the witness of the Romanian leader, Traian Dorz, who was imprisoned sixteen years for his faith. In his cell, he did not respond in silent shame, but wrote over ten thousand hymns to Christ, glorifying the name of God. One of them reads:

IN TEARS OF THE NIGHT

Oh we trusted in the LORD, that's the reason
Why neither the strong wind that was blowing,
Nor the waves which were striking,
Could destroy us.

Trust in the LORD in all your ways,
You who belong to Him,
Because to all who trust in Him,
In Him they have victory.

Oh we trusted in the LORD, that's the reason
While it looked like we were being struck down,
We were looking confidently
To our bright salvation.

Oh we trusted in the LORD, that's the reason
Why in tears of the night,
We prepared our songs of praise
For the morning victory.

Oh we trusted in the LORD, that's the reason
Why in silence we beheld,
And stood unflinching
In the face of our terrible enemy.

Oh we trusted in the LORD, that's the reason
Why we sing so today,
And so eternally will we praise
His glorious victory in heaven as well.

If we are suffering for the sake of righteousness, we must not only rejoice inwardly, but we must also take the opportunity to boldly proclaim the name of Christ in public.

III. The Significance of Our Suffering: Judgment Has Begun (4:17-19)

For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And if it is with difficulty that the righteous is saved, what will become of the godless man and the sinner? Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

A. It Begins in God's Temple for Purification

What is the significance of our suffering? Peter reveals that it is a sign that God's judgment has begun in history. That judgment does not begin with the nations and then filter down to his people; rather, it begins in God's temple, the new Jerusalem, for purification, and then it works outwardly to the nations.

Concerning Christ's first coming, Malachi wrote:

"Behold, I am going to send My messenger [John the Baptist], and he will clear the way before Me. And the LORD, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight, behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's

fire and like fullers' soap. And He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, so that they many present to the LORD offerings in righteousness. (Mal 3:1-3)

God proclaims the good news to the Gentiles that they too are brought into his kingdom of priests and are the new sons of Levi. The Spirit's fire will reside in our hearts and purify us so that when we come to the temple through the blood of Christ and the gift of the Spirit, we offer sacrifices of righteousness. Thus, judgment begins with us in order to purify us. It not only begins with us, says the apostle, but it is with great difficulty that it sanctifies us.

"Difficulty does not imply uncertainty of the outcome, but the difficulty of the road that leads to it." This word is used of the difficulty it took to force a demon to leave a young boy (Luke 9:39), and the difficulty in sailing against a fierce wind (Acts 27:8). It is difficult for the Father to save people even when they cooperate, because saving them cost him his only Son. After the resurrection and the giving of the gift of the Spirit, God still must design history to act like labor pains for the believer. It is only through the process of that pain that the reality of the cross will filter into our hearts, purifying us so that we might grasp the magnitude of Christ's love. Oswald Chambers wrote, "The finest men and women suffer, and the devil uses their sufferings to slander God. God is after one thing—bringing many sons to glory, and He does not care what it costs us, any more than He cared what it cost Him."

B. It Ends With the World Unto Destruction

If it is with difficulty that we believers are saved, what happens to the wicked who reject Jesus? Peter refuses to describe the horror of hell; he leaves his thoughts unspoken. Scripture talks of hell metaphorically, but not in great detail. It is rather contrasted to the grace of God. Psalm 1:4-6, for example, says of the wicked,

Not so, the wicked.

For they are like chaff which the wind drives away
Therefore the wicked will not rise in the day of judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For the LORD knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.

Likewise, the author of Hebrews will not describe the experience of hell, but says,

For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb 10:26-31)

C. It Evokes Trust and Righteousness

We must put suffering in perspective, and realize that what God is doing is purifying and enlarging our hearts to receive the joy. When we do, we affirm Peter's words in verse 19:

Therefore, let those also who suffer according to the will of God entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

If we understand the significance of suffering, we will respond in trust rather than anger toward God for our situation. This passage is the only place in the New Testament where the title “Creator” is used with reference to God. It emphasizes that the believer’s hope is in God’s ability to bring about the creation of the new heavens and earth through this process of labor pains called unjust suffering (2 Pet 3:15). Therefore, we must trust him as the Creator, knowing that he uses suffering in our lives to make us new creations.

Secondly, self-righteousness and anger toward the world will be replaced with fear and love for the lost. Thoughts of hell will evoke compassion for the ungodly, motivating us to do good. We must not hate those who malign us for Christ’s sake, because suffering opens avenues to manifest his love to a watching world. We must not condemn them, but rather our passion must be to die to ourselves for their benefit, just as Christ died for us.

Instead of regarding unjust suffering as if God were angry with us, we should take suffering as the very sign that we are his legitimate children and the objects of his love. The fearful price that Christ paid for our salvation ought to evoke a tremendous sense of awe and fear in us. Suffering is the sign that a new creation has already begun. It is not a threat, but a pledge that we belong to the Lord, and thus we have a promise of the future hope.

Tomorrow, when the selected few will see Mikhail Gorbachev, remember that One is coming—he is right at the door of history—and he will be seen by all. It is my prayer that our hearts will be ready to make that a day of great joy.

I will conclude by reading a couple of stanzas of a prayer I wrote after my experience with the brethren in Romania. The depth and purity of their faith is a testimony to Christ’s refining work in their lives through the process of suffering. Comparing their position to the richness of my life, and all the privileges I have had, I tallied the resources and then counted what it cost me:

And what have you asked for all this?
A son, a daughter,
Cold families.
Tears? Yes.
And what have you asked for all this?
A son, a daughter,
Cold families.
Tears? Yes.

But you already did for me what you did for Job.
Double plus one from your grace,
And ten times the family and home,
And I didn’t face his accusers.

And what do you ask in return—
Is there any contribution I can make?
I am so weak—so flawed,
So stained with selfishness.

You ask me to teach, a joy not a burden;
Shepherd the 70, but the 12 are better than I;
Train the 12, but what is that?
To be melted together in their love.

I am not like the saints of past,
Calvin, MacDonald, Whitefield,
And that amazing Edwards.
They labored at great cost,
And with less produced much more.

For such grace and so little task,
I feel I will stand alone in heaven.
In heaven, yes, by your blood,
But alone—so far behind

Those you gave no privilege
no gifts,
no money,
no friends,
no glory.

Like those simple ones in Babylon
Who stood unflinching under your cross,
Their bodies buried under the flames of ridicule,
Crying “*Yahweh Echad!*” [the Lord is one]
To you be the glory.

I love you, Adonai,
Brian

Don’t waste my life, O Lord!

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1 Peter 5:1-4

Seventeenth Message

Brian Morgan

June 10, 1990

LEADING FROM THE BOTTOM

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

As it faces a hostile world, the church in America is in a state of crisis. Every arena of secular life—whether it is government, the schools, or business—is taking an aggressive stance against Christianity and the absolutes it represents. The difficulties we face are enhanced by the deplorable lack of godly Christian leaders to confront this challenge. Eugene Peterson, a pastor of a church in Maryland, laments this state of affairs. In his book, *Working the Angles*, he wrote,

American pastors are abandoning their posts, left and right, and at an alarming rate. They are not leaving their churches and getting other jobs. Congregations still pay their salaries. Their names remain on the church stationery and they continue to appear in pulpits on Sundays. But they are abandoning their posts, their *calling*. They have gone whoring after other gods. What they do with their time under the guise of pastoral ministry hasn't the remotest connection with what the church's pastors have done for most of twenty centuries.

A few of us are angry about it. We are angry because we have been deserted... The people I thought I would be working with disappeared when the work started. Being a pastor is difficult work; we want the companionship and counsel of allies. It is bitterly disappointing to enter a room full of people whom you have every reason to expect share the quest and commitments of pastoral work and find within ten minutes that they most definitely do not. They talk of images and statistics. They drop names. They discuss influence and status. Matters of God and the soul and Scripture are not grist for their mills.

The pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shops they keep are churches. They are preoccupied with shopkeepers' concerns—how to keep the customers happy, how to lure customers away from competitors down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money.

Some of them are very good shopkeepers. They attract a lot of customers, pull in great sums of money, develop splendid reputations... The marketing strategies of the fast-food franchises occupy the waking minds of these entrepreneurs; while asleep they dream of the kind of success that will get the attention of journalists. "A walloping great congregation is fine, and fun," says Martin Thornton, "but what most communities really need is a couple of saints."¹

In response to similar concerns in his day, the apostle Peter in his first letter sets out the qualifications necessary for biblical leadership in the church. During a time of impending persecution and crisis, Peter affirms the need for leadership which transcends the worldly model that is based on charisma and control. Humility is the one quality he desires for those who lead in the church.

In contrast to Peter's own human failings, the image of our Lord as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 42-53 comes into clear focus as the apostle exhorts Christians to clothe themselves in humility. Now that we have transformed hearts and possess new insight, the apostle instructs us to seek God's glory (verses 1,4,10). Humility is the only path to glory, and it must be cultivated by God's people in every sphere of life if we are to impact the world and develop the kingdom of God. In this context, the apostle will reveal the qualifications for leadership, the basis for authority,

the motivation for leadership, and finally, the rewards of leadership. May humility be ours in the fullest measure!

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Pet 5:1-4 NASB)

I. The Qualifications for Leadership (5:1-2)

In verses 1-2, Peter defines the qualifications necessary for Christian leaders, using three biblical terms for leaders in the church: pastor, elder, and overseer. Each of these words refers to the same individual seen from different points of view.

A. Gift: Pastor-Teacher

First, Peter describes the work of elders, using the verb "to shepherd," meaning that leaders must be gifted to teach. The primary work of a shepherd is to lead believers to green pastures, where they will be fed and strengthened by meditating on the word of God, and they will be surrounded by walls of protection and rest.

Peter knew only too well the consequences of not strengthening himself on God's truth. Once, he arrogantly attempted to introduce the kingdom of God by force, as he tried to defend Jesus by cutting off the slave's ear. Then, fearful and anxious, he denied the Lord three times, quickly forgetting his boast of allegiance to his Savior. Later, in John 21, when Jesus asked him three times if he loved him, the Lord magnified the three denials and his forgiveness. Jesus then charged Peter with the responsibility, "Feed my lambs." This emphasizes that the primary work of pastors is to teach sheep where to find sustenance.

To accomplish this, God has given elders a divine gift "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:11-12). These qualities are not earned; they are not learned in school, nor are they conferred by any man. These are gifts imparted by the Holy Spirit according to his sovereign will. Our body has a multitude of shepherds who work in Sunday School, women's ministries, home fellowships, Backyard Bible Club, etc. They are gifted to impart the Word to those whom they lead, and they come from a broad category of people.

Paul tells us that the elders who are especially gifted in this area must be set aside fulltime to study and preach. "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching" (1 Tim 5:17). Thus, Peter tells elders to shepherd the church "of God." We must never forget that the church is God's possession. The New Testament demonstrates that the apostles were seldom planted anywhere permanently. For example, it is recorded that different people preached at various times in Corinth. As a result, no one could claim ownership of the people. Although the situation is the opposite at Peninsula Bible Church, the principle is the same. Because the Silicon Valley and its high-tech industrial base is in a constant state of flux, it is

the pastors who remain planted while the congregation changes. This is a good reminder that people are not to be considered property to control, but are here to be served for a short time. Although we want to be faithful to teach you, we emphasize that you belong to the Lord.

B. Experience and Character: Elder

Secondly, the word “elder” refers to experience and character. Thus, there are some shepherds who are more experienced than others. The word for “elder” in Greek is where we get the word “presbyterian,” referring to experience and godly character (Titus 1:5-9). The Old Testament refers to the “gray hairs,” the elders who sat at the city gates and acquired their wisdom through life experiences. In the New Testament, with the giving of the gift of the Spirit, we meet a mature young man. Timothy was disciplined by the apostle Paul for about sixteen years. In his mid-thirties, he functioned as an elder by experience and gift. Paul encourages him, saying, “Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe” (1 Tim 4:12).

In the church, there is a process which a man must go through to reach this point of maturity. First, he must elder his own life and grow in his personal piety. Then he must elder his home, leading and teaching his wife and children by his humble example. Throughout this time, he is to develop a good reputation in the world by his actions at work and in the community. Lastly, he is to elder the church. Eldership in the church is last because the flock of God is precious, having been purchased by the blood of his Son. God does not want a neophyte overseeing and feeding his church.

C. Calling: Overseer

Thirdly, leadership requires calling. This is described by the term “overseeing,” found in most Greek manuscripts. The word expresses the shepherd’s call to watch over and guard the flock of God, to protect his people from evil forces that would hinder their growth in the Lord. A leader must care for his charges by guiding them to good pastures where they can feed on the Word. “Overseer” is used in the Greek translation of the Old Testament to describe God himself. He watches over Israel, his flock, with tender care, and then intercedes from heaven to “visit” his people with salvation or judgment (Ps 17:3; 65:9; 89:32; 106:4; Jer 29:10; Luke 1:68; 7:16).

In Acts 20, Paul says to the elders in Ephesus, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). This verse establishes that it is the Spirit who chooses people out of the pool of shepherds who are gifted and experienced, and then calls them to a particular flock. We have many people in our church who have spiritual gifts and godly character, but God has called them to other ministries. It is only those whom God has called to elder who serve the people in that capacity.

Thus, the qualifications for leadership is gift, experience and character, and calling. In PBC, none of our elders are serving because they are ambitious. They want to find the mind of the Lord, to cultivate a pasture where we can feed on the life of Christ and grow up in grace. Twice a month they meet for several hours at a time to pray and seek the mind of the Lord for this body. It is not an easy task because they also have the demands of their jobs and families, and yet they have the important task of leading the church. Please be committed to pray for them.

II. The Basis of a Leader’s Authority (5:1)

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed.

A. Relative to the Past: “As a Witness of the Sufferings of Christ”

The basis of Peter’s authority is in the context of the past, the present, and the future. Regarding the past, he says he was “a witness of the sufferings of Christ.” Thus, Peter has authority to speak about humility as the road to glory as he himself was an eyewitness to the sufferings of Christ. Since no one can replace these apostolic eyewitnesses, the authority of elders today comes by submitting to this apostolic teaching and authority. No elder is free to regard himself as equal to an apostle; he must be subject to their teaching. Only one generation of eyewitnesses saw the sufferings of Christ. Subsequent generations must feed on the foundation of that temple.

The earliest church fathers give testimony to this attitude. Papias, Bishop of Hieropolis (c. A.D. 130) wrote,

I shall not hesitate to set down for you, along with my interpretations, all things which I have learned from the elders with care and recorded with care, being well assured of their truth. For, unlike most men, I took pleasure not in those that had much to say but in those that teach the truth; not in those who record strange precepts, but in those who related such precepts as were given to the Faith from the Lord and are derived from the Truth itself. Besides, if ever any man came who had been a follower of the elders, I would enquire about the sayings of the elders; what Andrew said, or Peter, or Philip, or Thomas, or James, or John, or Matthew, or any other of the Lord’s disciples; for I did not consider that I got so much profit from the contents of books as from the utterances of a living and abiding voice.

After 1800 years of building on that foundation, it is ludicrous to think that God would deny his work by using someone like Joseph Smith or Mary Baker Eddy to create a whole new foundation to the building. We do not listen to anyone’s teaching if it does not line up with apostolic truth. It has no authority in our lives.

B. Relative to the Present: “As Your Fellow Elder”

In the present, Peter says that he is merely a fellow elder. In this capacity he steps out of the role of apostle and walks among his brothers as an equal. In the New Testament church there was a plurality of leadership who sought the mind of Christ together; they never invested it in one man. As an apostle, Peter indicates that he does not violate the unanimous voice of the elders. That is an important principle when we remember there were times in Peter’s life as an apostle when he drifted. Then the brothers rebuked him and called him back to the mind of Christ for the local church.

Acts 15 records one of these incidents. The letter from the leadership of the church in Jerusalem to the church at Antioch sets the stage for us: “it seemed good to us, having become of one mind, to select men to send to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul...for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials: that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled and from fornication; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well...they went down to Antioch...they rejoiced” (Acts 15:25,28,29,30,31). In Galatians, Paul adds, “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned...he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews joined him in the hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy” (Gal 2:11-13).

Thus, Peter understood that being an apostle did not give him authority to act alone. As an elder, he acted in accord with his brothers to find the mind of Christ.

That is the same principle by which we are guided at Peninsula Bible Church. First, the elders pray that they will find the mind of the Lord. When that happens, they too must submit to it. Acting out of that circle, they are merely older brothers working together, with no authority in

themselves. This is a guiding principle by which this body has been well served for the past forty years.

C. Relative to the Future: “A Partaker of the Glory to be Revealed”

The goal of leadership is not to create an empire, where one person dominates and controls the body, but rather to serve the flock so that the life of Christ might flood into their lives. By coming alongside those who are suffering, leaders enter into the glory of Christ by entering into his suffering. Peter must have been reminded of the incident when James and John asked the Lord to let them rule in glory (Mark 10:35-45). Contemplating his crucifixion, Jesus said, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” Similarly, when Peter was ordained after the resurrection, Jesus told him that he also would be crucified. This is to show that a leader’s greatest encouragement to his flock is that they can enter into glory together through the process of suffering.

Thus, an elder gains authority by submitting himself to apostolic teaching. Then, as a more mature brother, he comes alongside the flock to encourage them in their pain so that they might enter into the glory of the age to come.

III. The Motivation for Leadership (5:2)

A. How an Elder is Motivated

shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness.

Peter exhorts elders not to be motivated under compulsion. When ministry is prompted by obligation rather than from the Spirit’s initiation, there is no lasting impact on the flock. Elders must allow the Lord to move them from the heart. Otherwise their actions will be routine and void of love.

Likewise, profit or earthly rewards must not be a motivation, but elders must serve with a full heart. In Psalm 110, David looked ahead to the Ascension of the Messiah when he would inaugurate the New Covenant. He wrote, “Thy people will volunteer freely in the day of Thy power” (Ps 110:3). This demonstrates that we must be ready to serve with a willing heart, rather than holding back to see first if there is an earthly reward (such as money or prestige). If we understand our reward comes from the Lord on the last day, then we will be able to cultivate a ready heart to serve from pure motives. The apostle Paul affirms, “The love of Christ constrains me” (2 Cor 5:14).

The elders of this church have ruled that no can speak or sing here if they demand a financial payment in return. There are some ministries today that demand a specific honorarium before they will minister in a church. We say to them, “Come and serve. As the Spirit moves our people to give in response to your ministry to them, they are to give freely to you.” We may take care of their expenses to come, but we will never guarantee anything except what the love offering yields. If they are not willing to serve on that basis, then we are not interested in having them come. We desire that people serve you out of pure motives for ministry.

B. How an Elder Motivates Others

...nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.

Just as the shepherd is not to be driven to obedience by external coercion, the best way to influence the flock is to motivate them from within. The most powerful force to accomplish this is by example. It is not spiritually profitable for the leader to impose duty on people, because there is only one Lord in the church; the rest of us are merely brothers. The text is a play on words: You cannot lord it over the flock because you are not the Lord. Even Jesus, who was Lord, never coerced his disciples into obedience; he motivated them by his love, which eventually led him to

the cross. Thus, leaders must never boss, command, dominate, manipulate, coerce, or use their leverage to accomplish their purposes. Rather, example is the most powerful way for leaders to influence others. Jesus said, “You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them...But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all” (Mark 10:42-43).

When one of our pastors shared this concept at a pastors’ conference, a pastor asked, “If you lose control, who is going to keep the people straight?” I will never forget how our pastor responded: “Who keeps you straight? It is the Lord who keeps his people straight.” None of us is Lord. We cannot pull all the strings, be at every meeting, etc. The only way we can lead is by being an example of godly character.

I have never taken a course on how to study the Bible, but have been led by watching godly men as they spent time with God in prayer and study of his word. Once, when our pastoral staff took a ministry trip together, I was inspired by the example of a man named Bruce Waltke. In the midst of a busy hotel lobby one day he opened his Bible to the book of Proverbs and spoke from his understanding of the Hebrew text. I felt my heart burning, just as the disciples’ hearts burned when they were with Jesus and they heard him teach the word. I made a vow that day that I was going to learn to study like Bruce. When I roomed with him, I saw that he was not merely a scholar, but he had a deep piety which informed his intellect. At night he would pray humbly, on his knees by his bed. When I heard him praying for his children, I was deeply affected. I knew then that I wanted the Lord to give me a spirit like that.

An elder can also teach us how to suffer by his own example and transparency in suffering. Murmurers and complainers are silenced by such godly conduct. Many people in this body may not be aware that one of our elders has suffered from a tropical disease for over fifty years. For most of that time the medical profession did not even have a name for it, but it has paralyzed him and deeply affected him. He now has kidney failure and is uncertain of the future. His wife is not in good health either, yet I have never heard this man complain about his circumstances. His sweet spirit rebukes me, and is a great example of a deep and lasting faith in our sovereign Lord.

Thus, the very thing that motivates us, the Spirit moving on our hearts, is the way we are to motivate others. This is an important model for leadership, whether it is in the church, the community, or the home.

IV. The Reward for Leadership (5:4)

And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

There are rewards to leading, but they will not be realized in this life. Is it difficult to serve when no one notices and there is no earthly reward? Christ, the head of his church, is the one who rewards leaders, not men, and his reward is an unfading crown of glory. At the banquet feast on the last day, the Lord will hand the faithful a crown and say, “I want you to reign with me. You can now do it with the unadulterated flow of my life through you. It is pure, holy, and perfect. I give you this aspect of the universe to rule.” That is our reward.

This year, four of our elders retired from the PBC board. Between them, they faithfully served as elders a total of 130 years, but they did not expect or desire earthly rewards. When we honored Ray Stedman for his forty years of ministry to this church, we asked him what we could give him. “A week in Carmel,” he replied. After forty years of service, a week in Carmel! That kind of humility describes the man who will be greatly rewarded when the Chief Shepherd appears.

We see in this passage the model for Christian leadership. Leaders must be gifted, humble servants who motivate by example. They are looking for the crown of glory, with no thought of earthly reward in this

life. In contrast, the greatest danger to leadership is pride, because its motive is self rather than love of the Lord. That is why Paul warns that an elder should not be a new convert lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

V. The Corruption of Leadership

A. Historically

Despite the model for servant leadership in this letter, Peter's words were disregarded by the middle of the first century. Facing the intense persecution of Rome, the church adopted a hierarchical model. They took the three names for the same individual—pastor, elder, and bishop—and applied them to individual offices. At the top of the hierarchy was the bishop, who ruled the elders, who in turn ruled the pastors. The pastors then ruled the deacons, and the deacons ruled the flock. A document from A.D. 107 describes the corruption of the biblical model at that time:

It is evident that we should look upon the bishop as we do upon the Lord himself...It is necessary, as in your habit, to do nothing without the bishop [that means, no ministry without the bishop being there], and that you should be subject also to the presbytery, as to the apostles of Jesus Christ...Let all of you follow the bishop, as Jesus Christ [follows] the Father; and the presbytery as ye would the apostles; and reverence the deacons as the ordinance of God. Without the bishop let no one do anything connected with the church. Let that Eucharist be accounted valid which is [offered] under the bishop or by one he has appointed. Everywhere the bishop is found, there let the people be; as wherever Christ is, there is the catholic church. Without the bishop it is not lawful either to baptize or to celebrate a love-feast (Ignatius).

It was not long before there were leading bishops in cities like Caesarea and Rome competing for the control, and this led to the Papacy. Finally, the pope was not only given ultimate spiritual authority, but he grasped at secular power as well. By failing to follow the biblical model for leadership, power-hungry men corrupted the church and its influence in the world. It was not until fifteen hundred years later, during the Reformation, that Martin Luther returned to the scriptures alone as the basis for ministry.

B. In the Present

Most churches in America today are led by a "pope," but his title has been changed to "senior pastor." He or she controls the church, goading the people to service rather than modeling humility and motivating people to serve from a full heart. Unfortunately, that is the state of Christian leadership today. It is deplorable that a godly man like Eugene Peterson continues to hope for a mentor who follows the biblical pattern of leadership.

Occasionally, however, we see a rare jewel who models servant leadership against the backdrop of arrogance and wrong, authoritarian models. I will close by reading a letter, written by Chuck Swindoll, which describes such a man. This man is a mentor in Chuck's life, a unique elder who models according to the biblical standard we have just been discussing.

A MENTOR

There we sat, a cluster of six. A stubby orange candle burned at the center of our table. Flickering eerie shadows crossed all our faces. One spoke; five listened. Every question was handled with such grace, such effortless ease. There was no doubt that each answer was drawn from deep wells of wisdom, shaped by tough decisions and nurtured by time. Like forty years in the same church. And seasoned by travel. Like having ministered around the

world. And honed by tests, risks, heartbreaks, and failures. But, like the best wines, it was those decades in the same crucible year and year that made his counsel invaluable. Had those years been spent in the military, he would have a chest full of medals.

His age? Seventy-two. His face? Rugged as fifty miles of bad road. His eyes? Ah, those eyes. Piercing. When he peered at you, it was as if they penetrated to the back of your cranium. He had virtually seen it all; weathered all the flack and delights of the flock. Outlasted all the fads and gimmicks of gullible and greedy generations, known the ecstasy of seeing many lives revolutionized, the agony of several lives ruined, and the monotony of a few lives remaining unchanged. He has paid his dues. And he had the scars to prove it. What a creative visionary!

But this is not to say he's over the hill. Or to suggest that he has lost his zest for living, his ability to articulate his thoughts, or his keen sense of humor. There we sat for well over three hours, hearing his stories, pondering his principles, questioning his conclusions, and responding to his ideas. The evening was punctuated with periodic outbursts of laughter followed by protracted periods of quiet talk. All six lost contact with time.

As I participated, I was suddenly 26 years old again. A young seminarian. No children. A pastoral intern, existing in a no-man's land between a heart full of desire and a head full of dreams. I was long on theological theories but short on practical experience. I had answers to questions no one was asking, but a lack of understanding on the things that really mattered. In momentary flashbacks, I saw myself in the same room with the man thirty years earlier, drinking at the same well, soaking up the same spirit of his style. Back then I was merely impressed...last week I was deeply moved. Thirty years ago he was a model; last week I realized he had become a mentor. Thoroughly human and absolutely authentic, he has emerged a time-warped, well-worn vessel of honor fit for the Master's use. I found myself profoundly grateful that Ray Stedman's shadow had crossed my life.

In a day of tarnished leaders, fallen heroes, busy fathers, frantic coaches, arrogant authority figures, and eggheaded profs, we need mentors like never before. Such rare finds are guides, not gods. They are approachable and caring souls who help us negotiate our way through life's labyrinth without shouting or dictating. Mentors know how to stretch us without insulting us, affirm us without flattering us, make us think without requiring their answers in return, release us without abandoning us. They're always right there, even though they may be a thousand miles away. They become invisible partners, whispering hope and reproofs on the journey toward excellence.

As we said good-bye to Ray, I walked a little slower. I thought about the things he had taught me without directly instructing me and about the courage he had given me without deliberately exhorting me. I wondered how it had happened. I wondered why I had been so privileged to have had my "face" reflected in his "water" or my "iron" sharpened by his "iron." A nostalgic knot formed in my throat as I forced myself to realize that, at age 72, he doesn't have much more than a couple decades left, if that. I found myself wanting to run back to his car and tell him again how much I love and admire him. But it was late, and after all I'm a 55-year-old man. A husband. A father. A grandfather. A pastor. To some, a leader, and perhaps to a few, maybe even a hero.

But as I stood there alone in the cold night air, I suddenly realized what I wanted to be most when I grow up.

As we contemplate the sad state of church leadership today we can be grateful that one has gone before us who has left a godly legacy. Pray that by God's grace the leadership of Peninsula Bible Church will remain on course.

1. Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 1-2.

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1 Peter 5:5-11

Eighteenth Message

Brian Morgan

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THE GREATEST WEAPON IN AN EVIL AGE: HUMILITY

SERIES: A PILGRIM'S LIFE IN AN ALIEN LAND

Christians should live as aliens in a hostile world, says the apostle Peter in his first letter. Writing in the first century, Peter foresaw the persecution which Christians would face as the Roman authorities sought to destroy them and their faith. Our country too is experiencing a hostile attitude toward those who profess Christ and the absolute values of Christianity. A recent letter to the editor in a local newspaper illustrates this attitude. In response to William Bennett's statement that he felt the devil was behind the drug culture in our country, this person wrote, "Like federal drug czar William Bennett, I too have seen the face of evil. I saw Satan in one of his numerous disguises, amusing himself as he so often does. In one hand, our flag, in his other, a cross, leading Christian fundamentalists down the road to stupidity."

This statement typifies the popular attitude toward Christ and Christians. But Peter encourages Christians to not merely survive the onslaught, but to conquer and be victorious over evil, just as Jesus did by dying on the cross. Humility, says the apostle, is the Christian's most powerful weapon to confront the forces of evil. Conversely, pride is the devil's most formidable weapon in gaining access to the believer's heart. As Proverbs 26:12 says, "Do you see a man wise in his own eye? There is more hope for a fool than for him." The book of Proverbs explicitly teaches that there is no hope for a fool, thus, the person who thinks he is wise is in great danger. Likewise, Jesus built the kingdom of God on those for whom the world holds no value—prostitutes, tax-collectors and thieves—but who were clothed in humility. When they repented, they never forgot the state from which they came. On the other hand, self-righteous, smug, religious hypocrites have no place in God's kingdom because they fail to recognize their inadequacy.

In 1 Peter 5:5-11, the apostle first describes the expressions of humility Christians are to have toward one another; secondly, how they should cultivate humility; and finally, how to use humility to conquer evil.

I. Expressions of Humility (5:5)

You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. (NASB)

A. Toward the Leadership (5:5a)

In the first part of chapter 5, Peter declared that humility is the greatest quality an elder can possess. He now tells younger men that they can express humility by submitting to their elders, not because elders are the bosses of the church, but rather because they have humbly sought the mind of the Lord through prayer. When the elders come to agreement, therefore, it is important for the church to submit to their leading as if they were following Jesus Christ himself.

Peninsula Bible Church has always followed the principle of unanimity to discover the mind of Christ. This is based on our understanding of the words of the apostles in Acts 15:25, 28, "It seemed good to us, having become of one mind...for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to." Thus in all matters, if the board of elders is unanimous (each elder seeking the mind of the Lord through prayer, without any

coercion by stronger members), they feel they have found the mind of the Lord for the church. The church ought therefore to submit and not be strident, arrogant or impulsive in their reaction to the decisions of the board.

One of the difficulties faced by every generation of leaders is that God often requires them to lead the flock into places that are uncomfortable and contrary to public opinion. Moses, for example, was commanded by God to lead Israel through a wilderness in order to reach the Promised Land. But the flesh rebels in such situations because it wants what it can see with the eye. In contrast, faith hopes for what it cannot see and, resting in that, postpones its desires for the future. Although Moses was leading them to the good land, the flesh in the nation of Israel murmured and stirred up trouble. Leaders then must often guide their flocks through the wilderness before reaching the land of promise.

In the sixteen years I have been a pastor at this church, I have found it difficult at times to submit to the elders, but I have always found that it has been in my best interest to do so. The hardest time in my life, in fact, occurred five and a half years ago when we opened PBC South. My college ministry at Stanford was flourishing and I had no desire to leave. When each pastor was asked whether he wanted to minister at North or South, for some reason I was not asked, but was assigned to South. It was difficult for me to adjust because I had no time to reflect on the elders' decision. In retrospect, however, I now see that it was the best thing that ever happened to me and my family.

Likewise, you too will get a chance to submit in the weeks ahead, as the elders have decided on some changes for our church. I have been delighted to see the godly process at work. Each elder has prayed about your input, and has sought to weight and prioritize each concern. They have finally come to one mind about the direction for the church, and we will be led on to greener pastures. Therefore, you will have the opportunity to submit and, by faith, enter into a new adventure with them.

B. Toward All

Secondly, says Peter,

...clothe yourself with humility toward one another.

Peter uses the word "clothe" because he is remembering the time when Jesus girded himself with a towel and took the role of the maid-servant to wash the disciples' feet. Then, Peter responded, saying, "Not me, Lord." Jesus replied, "If I do not wash your feet, you have nothing to do with me." I am sure that incident impressed upon Peter that we must always clothe ourselves in humility. Just as Jesus put aside thoughts of his impending death to take care of his disciples' needs, we too must put our agendas aside in order to serve. We must never come into someone's presence without first putting on the garments of humility.

While studying for this message last week, I heard a noise outside our home that sounded like a bicycle crashing on the pavement. From our upstairs window I saw that a young man had fallen off his bike. He

was bloody and dazed, so I immediately dropped what I was doing. I called 911, cleaned his injuries, and contacted his parents. I felt it was an honor rather than an imposition to help the young man. When I went back to studying this text, however, I felt rebuked in my spirit because I thought, “Do I have that kind of attitude when God asks me to wash somebody’s feet spiritually, or do I see it as an interruption of my schedule?” Peter tells us to wear a towel at all times, taking the lowest place to serve.

C. The Incentive for Humility

God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Peter cites Proverbs 3:34, saying that God is an enemy to the arrogant, but a friend to the humble, extending abundant grace, blessing and life to him. The enemies to humility, however, are the devil and the world. In the battle for our affections, there is no room for neutrality; we must choose sides. The choice is between opposing God and having God oppose us, or fighting with the Lord’s arsenal to oppose the devil. Thus, our incentive for humility is that we know we will have God as our friend and not our enemy.

Humility is to be the characteristic attitude of all believers. From elders to the youngest believer, humility is like precious oil that creates a supernatural harmony in the body of Christ. The Psalmist saw the coming day when God would pour out the vibrant life of his Spirit into our midst like the morning dew, making us supernaturally one. Today, we receive that blessing through a humble spirit.

Psalm 133 becomes fulfilled in our midst when it says,

**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
For brothers to dwell together as ONE!
It is like the precious oil upon the head,
Coming down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard,
Coming down upon the edges of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
Coming down upon the mountains of Zion;
For there the LORD commanded the blessing—life forever.**

II. Cultivating Humility with God (5:6-7)

Since all of us are innately arrogant, how do we cultivate humility? In verses 6-7, Peter says:

**Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God,
that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety
upon Him, because He cares for you.**

A. Submit to His Process and Timing (5:6)

The apostle says we must do two things to cultivate humility. First, we must submit to God’s process and his timing. The “mighty hand of God” refers to the time of Exodus when God delivered Israel through a mighty hand and outstretched arm (see Exod 15:1-18; Deut 7:19). When the ten plagues descended on Egypt because of Pharaoh’s hardened heart, Israel also had to endure them. The eye of faith understood that these plagues were not their judgment, but indeed their actual salvation. God dismantled the pagan nation at the core of its idolatry to give birth to a new nation. The people of Israel thus learned that God in his sovereignty uses the sufferings of this present age to give birth to his new kingdom.

Peter reveals that the same thing will happen for all believers, as all generations suffer persecution at some level. The evil one is behind it. His heart is hard, but believers must not despair. God will dismantle any empire that opposes him and will give birth to a new kingdom, comprised of those who walk by his Spirit. Those who have faith will see it. Therefore, the suffering a Christian experiences will dismantle idolatry and result in a new faith.

...that He will exalt you at the proper time...

The ten plagues produced a child, and Israel was born. When Jesus Christ submitted to the mighty hand of God through his death on the cross, he dismantled evil and was exalted in the resurrection. We too will be exalted in God’s timing. Just as God exalted his servant Israel after the plagues scourged the land, and exalted his servant Jesus after his crucifixion, so indeed he will ultimately exalt us because we are in Christ.

B. Submit to His Provision of Love (5:7)

...casting all your anxiety upon Him because He cares for you.

Peter reminds his readers of David’s words from Psalm 55:22: “Cast your burden upon the Lord and he will sustain you. He will never allow the righteous to be shaken.”

Peter utilizes the picture of someone throwing (“casting”) off clothes that are binding. The idea is that we all wear multi-colored coats that are laden with anxieties. Peter says, “Take these off and give them on the Lord, and he will give you a towel of simplicity to wear.” Although many Christians have faith to see the process of God at work, it is unfortunate that so few go into their closets and give their anxieties to him. We do not have to carry around the heavy-weighted garments; we can wear clothes that free us from our burdens.

John Newton, an ex-slave owner in the 1700’s, was a remarkable scholar and pastor who thought humility was the most valuable quality for leadership. He wrote of the renewal he experienced as he cast his anxieties on the Lord:

I well remember when I had freedom of access and found it good to draw near to my God, when I could pour out all my complaints and cares before Him, and leave them with Him. I remember the time when my heart was overwhelmed within me, and my spirit was burdened (Psalm 142:3). I saw myself a wretched, helpless sinner. Innumerable evils took hold of me. I thought I was marked out for destruction. I found Satan at my right hand, waiting for permission to seize my soul and make me his prey forever (Zechariah 3:1). I looked round but saw no way to escape, and gave up all for lost. But O, I remembered when none in heaven or earth could help me, how the Lord drew near to me in the day of my distress and said unto my soul, “Fear not, I am thy salvation” (Lamentations 3:57). He revealed Himself as an almighty and sufficient Saviour. He said, “Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom” (Job 33:24) “He brought me out of the horrible pit, and miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock” (Psalm 40:2). “He brought me into his banqueting-house, and his banner over me was Love.”

This was the beginning, but it was not all. Many a gracious visit He favored me with afterwards. O the sweet hours of secret prayer! O the happy communion in which I walked with Him all the day long! “Then in the multitude of thoughts within me his comfort refreshed my soul” (Psalm 94:19). Then I could smile at Satan’s rage and face a frowning world. Every blessing of common providence was doubly welcome, for I could read his name of love written upon it. And every affliction brought resignation and peace because I saw my father’s hand in it and found at a throne of grace renewed strength always suited to my need.

We do not merely survive these birth pangs, we must seek the Lord through them to know him intimately. As we do this, we will find that our concerns are his also. We must learn to put our complete trust in him, truly believing him when he says, “Do not be anxious...Your Father knows that you need all these things” (Matt 6:25-34).

I recently received some anonymous letters from a man who is struggling with homosexuality. When he first wrote, he simply said,

“Pray for me.” He was struggling, and he wanted deliverance from this lifestyle. The second letter I read was a beautifully penned prayer, filled with grace and humility. As I read it and saw its beauty, I thought, “There is more hope with someone struggling with homosexuality who is humble, than a man who is wise in his own eyes.”

Cultivating humility takes faith to see the things that are not apparent to the eye—a submissive spirit to God, and time alone with him in prayer. Peter will now tell us how essential humility is to fight the cosmic battles of the universe.

III. Using Humility to Conquer Evil (5:8-11)

When I read or hear about anti-Christian attitudes, such as the letter to the editor that I read earlier, I am enraged and want to lash out. Peter, however, reveals that humility in an evil world will disarm and conquer Satan himself. Verses 8-10 say,

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be dominion forever and ever. Amen.

A. The Necessity to Be On the Alert (5:8)

Your adversary the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

As we enter the battle, Peter says we must be on the alert at all times to pray because our adversary is a roaring lion who seeks to devour us. The words “walking,” or “prowling,” are taken from Job 1:7; “roaring” is from Psalm 22:13. The apostle uses these verbs to show the devil’s vicious and evil intentions. The reality is that Satan wants to devour, “drink down” or “swallow whole” the believer. It is a picture of a ferocious beast of prey, like the pre-historic Star Wars monster in *Return of the Jedi* which swallows people whole.

Jesus once told Peter of a vision he had of the devil falling as lightning from heaven. It is indeed true that through the work of Christ the devil has been bound and his power broken. Since his time is short, he is extremely vicious and combative against Christ and the church. Thus, he prowls around, his mouth dripping with blood like the lions of the Roman amphitheater, ready to devour those who falter in their faith.

Peter remembers Jesus’ words that he would be “sifted like wheat by Satan” (Luke 22:31). Jesus also told him, “I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” Prior to the time of Jesus’ arrest, Peter was not humble enough to keep praying (Matt 26:33,41). Since he was not on the alert, he succumbed to the enemy and in his self-righteousness, cut off the slave’s ear, shedding innocent blood. When he was later given opportunity to claim Christ as Lord, he denied him three times. Matthew 22:60b-61 says, “And immediately, while he was still speaking, a cock crowed. And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord...and wept bitter tears.”

When we are filled with pride, the way is clear for the devil to gain access to our hearts. Oswald Chambers wrote, “It is easier to be a fanatic than a faithful soul, because there is something amazingly humbling, particularly to our religious conceit, in being loyal to God.” It is much harder to have our blood shed in humility than to shed the blood of others in our self-righteousness.

In his grace, God gave Peter the symbol of his arrogance, the cock. Every morning when he awoke to the crowing of the rooster, I am sure Peter was reminded of his failure to remain faithful. The symbol of a cock is also significant. The rooster arrogantly struts around the barnyard during the day, but by night he has lost his head and is served for dinner. It must have been a constant reminder to Peter that he was arrogant to the core and needed a humble spirit to fight spiritual battles.

What is your symbol? Many of us have daily reminders of our arrogance. For some of you, it might be a divorce and the consequences in terms of estrangement and broken families. For others, it might be a financial failure, an indebtedness which is a symbol of a one-time arrogance. We must regard these memories not as God’s judgment on us, but rather symbols of his grace to keep up humble. It would be wise for us to remember a rooster that begins the day by trumpeting our failure so we will not be tempted to forget, and thus fall back into pride. Every time Peter heard the rooster, he must have prayed. He was on the alert because he was reminded that the devil was there, ready to devour him. Thus, we must thank God for those symbols because we need humility to save us from our arrogance.

Christina Rossetti’s beautiful poem helps us enter into Peter’s shoes:

St. Peter once said: ‘Lord, dost Thou wash my feet?’
Much more I say: Lord, dost Thou stand and know
At my closed heart more rugged than a rock,
Bolted and barred, for Thy soft touch unmeet,
Nor garnished nor in any wise made sweet?
Owls roost within and dancing satyrs mock.
Lord, I have heard the crowing of the cock
And have not wept: ah, Lord, thou knowest it.
Yet still I hear Thee knocking, still I hear:
‘Open to Me, look on Me eye to eye,
That I may wring thy heart and make it whole;
And teach thee love because I hold thee dear
And sup with thee in gladness soul with soul
And sup with thee in glory by and by.’

B. The Strategy for Defense (5:9a)

Resist him, firm in your faith...

We do not resist the devil by lashing out with a sword, but by being firm in Jesus Christ who strengthens our faith. The word “firm” comes from the Greek version of Isaiah 50:6-7, describing Jesus as the servant. When he went to the cross, he set his face like a solid, firm rock:

**“I gave my back to the scourges,
And my cheeks to blows;
And I turned not away my face from the shame of spitting;
But the Lord God became my helper;
Therefore I was not ashamed,
But I set my face as a solid [firm] rock.”**

The name “Peter” comes from the word “rock” used here. Here, the apostle is not referring to apostolic authority or pointing to himself as the rock of the church on which the papacy is founded. Rather he is referring to elders and leadership, and alluding only to his weaknesses. The apostle whom Jesus called “the rock” tells us to be firm in the rock, who is Christ. We cannot trust any authority given to men. We must have faith in Christ alone if we are to resist the devil.

The purpose of testings is not to destroy faith, but to purify it. Testings perfect the believer, and expose and conquer evil simultaneously. Therefore, we must resist the devil, and be firm in our faith.

C. Encouragement Under Trial (5:9b)

...knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.

God does not ask anything of us that he does not ask of others around the world who are suffering. They are not being devoured by Satan, but are a testimony to us, standing firm in their faith, and crushing Satan under their feet (Gen 3:15; Rom 16:20). This truly encourages us, and unites us in Christ with the saints in bonds of love.

In the 1700's, the Huguenots suffered great persecution. The following excerpt from Edmund Clowney's book, *The Message of 1 Peter*, is an example of one woman's faithful endurance:

In southern France, overlooking the Mediterranean, stands the Tower of Constance. There, in the eighteenth century, Huguenot women were imprisoned for decades because they refused to surrender their Reformed faith. In the tower room where they were held captive, a stone coping surrounds a round opening in the floor. Inscribed in the stone is the word '*Résistez!*' Marie Duran entered that room in 1729, when she was fifteen years old. Three years later her brother Pierre was hanged at Montpellier. In 1745 she was offered her freedom if she would agree to renounce Protestant worship. She refused all such offers and remained captive for thirty-eight years, resisting the temptations to despair, to suicide, to betrayal. From her imprisonment she began a ministry of encouragement by correspondence. Some of her letters are kept today in the 'Museum of the Wilderness' in the mountains of the Cévennes.¹

One reason I love to minister in Romania is that I am always encouraged by the believers there who suffer for their faith. They shared an English phrase with us that expresses their attitude under suffering. Regardless of the situation, they say, "*No problem!*" These words point to the reality that either they or their brethren have been in a similar circumstance and the Lord was faithful to carry them through it, and he will do it again. "No problem" is a great testimony and encouragement to God's sovereign power in our lives.

D. The Result of Resistance: Aslan Conquers the Lion (5:10-11)

And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. To Him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

While suffering is only for a little while, God's strength and glory is forever. Peter uses a wonderful set of verbs to tell us what God is going to do to us and in us. As we look at the glory of Christ in the midst of our suffering he *perfects* us; he will complete us where we are lacking. Then he will *strengthen* us. Then, *confirm* means to establish us, to make us steady. Strengthen is only used in the New Testament, and twice in the Greek version of the book of Job. Job uses the word *strength* to describe the power of a lion (Job 4:10) and the voice of thunder (Job 26:14). Edmund Clowney sees in this the figure C. S. Lewis uses to describe Jesus in the *Chronicles of Narnia*. He is Aslan, the Lion of Judah, who is endowed with great strength and has the voice of thunder. Thus, we defeat the prowling, roaring lion by strengthening ourselves in Aslan, the real lion. The risen Christ (Aslan) is the one who removes our fear of Satan, the roaring lion. Finally, we will be *established*. That is an architectural term to describe the completion of the new Jerusalem. At that time, every stone united and fitted in the great Cornerstone will then descend from heaven in the wonderful glory of the eternal city.

Thus, we have yet another reason to be humble. The world and its ruler are evil, powerful, and bent on our destruction. If we are arrogant and think we are adequate, Satan will devour us. But if we are humble and watch, depending on our mighty God to keep us standing firm, he will use the very instruments of Satan to further his righteous kingdom and crush evil under our feet.

Conclusion

The submissive, humble spirit expected of the believer has been stressed many times in this letter, and in this final section Peter again exhorts his readers to consider this aspect of their lives. It is obvious that the picture of Jesus as the Suffering Servant is to be our model forever before us (Isa 42:1-4; 49:1-7; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). How else can one who is called as an overseer and teacher of others possibly further the Lord's ministry unless he, like Jesus, becomes a servant to those he teaches and guides? Therefore, the example of the elders, and also of Peter, is to be cultivated by all believers in relationship to each other, as well as with those outside the church.

Finally, we must cultivate humility in the midst of suffering before a hostile world. In the fires of persecution we need to submit to God and trust his plan for our lives, never forgetting the wickedness and deceitfulness of the devil. Remaining under pressure in Christ's strength will create new beauty in our spirit. It will give us a radiant countenance that will glorify him. It is glory we are destined for, and it is the path of humility that leads us there. So let us clothe ourselves in a humble spirit.

Peter's Farewell (5:12-14)

Through Silvanus, our faithful brother (for so I regard him), I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it! She who is Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, and so does my son, Mark. Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.

Silvanus is most likely Silas of the book of Acts, one of the leaders in Jerusalem, a Jew and a Roman citizen, who had a prophetic gift. The person carrying a letter was no mere messenger, but was a trusted and honored ambassador. Peter was essentially saying, "This person reflects in his character everything that is written in this letter." It may be that Silas actually helped compose the letter. When it was delivered, he was the one who interpreted it and applied it in the setting of these Christians. Imagine the joy they had when they received a personal word from Peter through a faithful servant like Silas, who then became their teacher.

Peter ends his epistle with greetings from his son, Mark. This is possibly his spiritual son, John Mark, the author of the gospel of Mark. The church in Rome, which he refers to as "she who is in Babylon" sent its greetings also. The epistle ends where it began, "aliens in the world, but beloved by God." This points to the fact that Christians live in a symbolic Babylon. Just as the Babylon of old was judged and dismantled to give birth to a spiritual kingdom, the same is true for all time. Pagan Rome will not survive, but we who are beloved of God will live in the new city of Jerusalem, which will outlast history. Amen.

1. Edmund P. Clowney, *The Message of 1 Peter: The Way of the Cross* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 215-216.