

Please read 1Peter 1:3-12 ...

How would you begin a letter to someone who was suffering? I write many such letters and usually begin with something like, *"I'm sorry to hear about your troubles ..."* Peter doesn't do that. He starts with *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!"*

Striking, isn't it! We tend to focus downwards on the difficulties we're facing, but Peter shifts our focus upwards to God who has given us new life in Christ. And that's pastoral wisdom, because this is always the way to find strength and comfort when we're facing trials. Not to focus on the problems, because that will crush us in the end, but rather to focus on God, because that will give us a foundation on which to stand.

So what does Peter see when he focuses on God? Two things that will help us in every trial: first, that trials are not forever; and secondly, that trials are not for nothing. They're not endless, and they're not pointless.

vv.3-5: OUR TRIALS ARE NOT FOR EVER

v.3: *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."* You can feel Peter's excitement about the resurrection of Jesus. Think of Peter running to the tomb and finding it empty ... and meeting the risen Lord multiple times ... and now he writes and says, *"It's all true!"*

And it's life-changing! Peter knows this from experience. When Jesus died, Peter was a broken man, his life in pieces. But the resurrection of Jesus put Peter back together again, gave him new life and hope. And now he reminds us that we too share in this life-transforming reality. WE have a living hope, because Jesus has defeated death for His people. Whatever your trials today, if you are a Christian, your future is not to be "dead in the grave", but "raised with Christ." We can face the future with confidence, because Christ shares His victory with us.

And with His victory we receive (v.4) *"an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade."* At this present time we know how precious that is, because the coronavirus crisis has hit the economy and our pensions and stocks have nosedived. God is sovereign over these things too! But we have a trust fund that can't be touched. Our inheritance is life with Christ, and that's something that will never lose its value.

And God is watching over us to make sure we inherit (v.5) – remember that Peter writes this as one who had failed spectacularly, and then discovered that God wouldn't let him go. And now his heart is bursting with joy knowing that God guards our inheritance and He guards us, ready for the grand unveiling of our full salvation when Christ returns.

Do you share in this living hope? Every day we encounter a world where death seems absolute, in a culture that has no good news for the dying. How different the gospel is! Remind yourself every day that you've got a living hope and a glorious inheritance. When you grasp this, you can't help saying, *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"*. Because of Christ's resurrection, we know that our trials won't last forever.

And here's why you need to know this TODAY: because this hope sustains us in our present trials and enables us to see that they're not for nothing (vv.6-9):

vv.6-9: OUR TRIALS ARE NOT FOR NOTHING

I plead with you, for the sake of your sanity and your soul, listen carefully to what Peter writes next (v.6): *"... now for a little while you have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials."* These words seem to have dropped out of some people's bibles! And as a result there's a hole in the

middle of their theology. It leaves them vulnerable to Satan and silliness. We need to let Peter's words plug that hole!

Let's focus on understanding what Peter says, then return to why it's so important for our lives.

Here's his message: v.6: Even though we rejoice in our future hope, today we may find ourselves grieving because of *"all kinds of trials"* - Peter refuses to limit the variety or severity of those trials because what he's saying is applicable to every trial we face.

Well, we want to know, why would our loving Heavenly Father allow these hard things in our life? Peter tells us in v.7: *"These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed."* Peter says several important things here to help us understand what's happening in our lives between our conversion and our home-call (death):

- Our faith is incredibly precious: worth much more than gold! If you're dying of a virus or of anything else, it will be clear to you that your faith in Jesus Christ is worth a lot more than the money you're about to leave behind. So it's important to know that our faith is genuine ...
- Trials test whether our faith is the real thing. For example, right now our faith is being tried by Covid-19 and either exposed as false or proved as genuine. The removal of the scaffolding of our normal church life will show the genuineness of our faith. *When all this is over, will your faith have evaporated, or will it have been proved genuine?*
- Trials refine genuine faith and make it stronger and purer! When precious metal is refined, it's heated – and the heat separates the impurities – brings the muck to the surface so it can be skimmed off. Trials do that, when we respond in faith. And what's left is the real thing. We begin to shine so that God's reflection is seen more brightly in us. *We can see in the lives of older Christians how God has refined them through the years by trials.*
- And what's the end result of this testing and refining? Praise, glory and honour when Jesus returns – both for Him and for us, for we shall share in His kingdom.

Yet even today grief is not the dominant note of the Christian life, in spite of trials. So Peter adds in v.8 that even in the midst of trials we're filled *"with an inexpressible and glorious joy"*. How? Through our relationship with Jesus. Even now we've tasted His love and we love Him in return, because (v.9), we're getting what we prayed for: *"the salvation of our souls"* (i.e. day by day, through our trials, we're growing to Christian maturity).

The hole in our theology

That's an incredibly important piece of theology for making sense of the Christian life. It's what Paul Tripp neatly calls *"Uncomfortable Grace."* And it seems to be missing from many Christians' understanding. And as a result they suffer much unnecessary confusion and heartache.

Trials come and they think God has deserted them or was never real in the first place. They have no idea why a loving God would let them face difficulties. Yet God tells us plainly that His love and mercy will refine us. We need it! Every day we prove that we still need to change and grow. We so easily deceive ourselves, over-estimate ourselves, rely on the wrong things. So God takes us to places where we reach out to Him and say in desperation, *"I need your grace!"* That's not God abandoning us, that's God moving towards us in love, to rescue us from ourselves and our idols.

Here's the bottom line: Trials never get in the way of God's purpose in our life. They are the way God achieves His purpose in our life. AND it will be worth it. God is doing something that will end

not in our destruction but in our healing. These trials are not for nothing. They're leading to *"praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed"* (v.7). That will be an amazing moment – and God has chosen us to be a part of that, and right now He's preparing us for that moment.

vv.10-12: SO PONDER THESE THINGS!

NOW: You may be thinking: *"I hear it but I don't feel it! Truthfully, I'm more upset about my trials than I am joyful about my salvation. What's wrong with me?"* Well, Peter reminds us in vv.10-12 that it's not enough just to have a superficial acquaintance with our salvation. We've got to ponder our salvation deeply till it captures our hearts. The deeper we dig into the gospel, the more strengthening we find it to be. The gospel is not just a handful of doctrines we subscribe to – it's endless insights into how the grace of God applies to the particular circumstances of our lives. We need to be like the prophets and the angels:

- The Old Testament prophets *"searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow"* (vv.10-11). They wrote more than they could understand – they prayed and they racked their brains trying to get a better grasp of the glories of our salvation. Peter adds (v.12) that their ministry was actually intended to serve US – yet many of us pay less attention to the glory of Christ than they did.
- And then there's the angels (v.12): they are longing to understand better the riches of the gospel. It's beyond their mind to grasp! *"How can it be that our King, God's Son, should go through such suffering for these people? Who can explain this to us?"* If only we would ponder the question that every angel in heaven asks: *"Amazing love, how can it be ...?"*

We've got to gaze deeply into the gospel – meditate on it until our hearts are captivated by it. Be honest: are you doing that? Think of prophets and angels, continually gazing into the gospel with awe and wonder. And Peter is saying, *"You'd better do this too, or you won't be able to handle your troubles."* Every day we need to remind ourselves of how great is this salvation we've been given, and then apply it to the details of our lives. That's how to find stability and even joy when difficult things come into your life.

CONCLUSION

Well, that's how Peter begins a letter to Christians who are suffering. He dives straight into the resources that are ours in the gospel, and shows us that our trials are not for ever and they're not for nothing. We have a living hope because of the resurrection of Christ. Our present refining is preparing us for a glorious inheritance kept safe for us by God.

And it's grasping what God has done for us in Christ that puts a *"Praise be to God"* into our heart. ***It did that for Peter; may it do that for us too.***

PRAYER: God our Father, we confess that sometimes we struggle with your purposes for us. We have our own plans and they don't often include being refined. So we thank you that there'll be a day when every battle with temptation will cease, every idol will be destroyed, every trial will be over, every weakness in us will be healed, and there'll be a place for us at the banquet table to celebrate our inheritance in Christ. Until that day, keep holding us and growing us by Your Spirit, for your love's sake. AMEN.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND ACTION:

- Since your faith is worth more than gold, how are you going to nurture it?
- In what way is God refining you at the moment, and how is the resurrection of Jesus shaping your response?