

1 P E T E R

A VERSE BY VERSE STUDY THROUGH PETER'S EPISTLE

SESSION OBJECTIVE: 1 PETER 1:3-9

To understand how suffering and salvation work together.

Tried and True

I've always loved words. I am fascinated with how words evolve, how we use them to do different things, and how language grows and changes through the ages (I mean, I *did* get a whole degree in linguistics). One phrase you have likely heard before (especially if your first language is English) is the phrase, "tried and true." If something is historically reliable for you (think: recipes, methods, solutions, etc.), you can say, "it's tried and true." The phrase was first documented in 1792, and was actually used with regard to woodworking (another pastime I enjoy, actually). In order to create a flat surface on a piece of wood, woodworkers use a tool called a *wood plane* or a *try plane* or sometimes referred to as a *jointer plane*. Once the wood is flat, it's considered "true." It's only by planing the wood, which involves a cutting and shaping process, that the wood is considered true. It's *tried* and therefore, *true*. Our salvation in Christ Jesus is very similar according to 1 Peter 1. It is not just a distant hope, but, "a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ." It is, "grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith - more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire - may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." In other words, it's *tried* and therefore, *true*.

Salvation According to What?

In session 2, we learned that salvation comes from the foreknowledge of the Father, the sanctification of the Spirit, and the obedience of Christ to shed His blood on our behalf. Verse 3 picks up and gives two more aspects of how salvation comes to us. Below is a brief outline.

ACCORDING TO HIS GREAT MERCY

God's act to save us from our sins and restore our fellowship is not based on our own merit, but on His mercy and His mercy alone. The 5th century Bishop of Arles wrote in his commentary on 1 Peter: "Peter means that God has acted to redeem us without any help from us." It is God's mercy alone that saves. Paul reaffirms this when he says, "But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:4-5). Paul wrote similar words to Titus: "He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit" (Titus 3:5). It's why James, the half-brother of Jesus, wrote, "Mercy triumphs over judgment" (Js. 2:13). It is God's mercy that our salvation comes to fruition, and therefore as we worship God, one of the aspects of worship should include thanksgiving for God's mercy to cover our sin.

HE HAS CAUSED US TO BE BORN AGAIN

The Greek verb here, ἀναγεννήσας, is translated literally here. God has caused the new birth to happen, not us. This word establishes a theme that Peter carries into this letter. That God has caused us to be born again means that He is our Father and we are His children, and we are referred to as such (1 Pet. 1:14; 2:2).

A NOTE ON ELECTION

This is, admittedly, one of the most difficult doctrines to come to terms with, and yet it is found in a great deal of the New Testament. There are other theological convictions that have attempted to talk around this concept, but they lack a holistic biblical theology, and they cannot square with historical, orthodox Christianity. Beyond that, it's very challenging to explain what Peter means when he says that God causes this to happen! It is true that God desires *all* to come to repentance, and for *none* to perish (2 Pet. 3:9). It is true that God loved the world and gave Jesus as a ransom (Jn. 3:16). That should always be mentioned in this discussion, as well as an acknowledgement that there is tension in the Scripture between these concepts.

However, that God desires *all* to come to faith does not mean that all *will* come to repentance, for, "the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few" (Matt. 7:14). That any are saved is, in and of itself, the greatest demonstration of compassion. God desires *all* to know Jesus, but without His redeeming love, *none* would know Him on their own (Ps. 14:2-3; Rom. 3:11-12). That is not to say that life will not be difficult, for Jesus knows that His elect will face great trials, which is why we see Him praying for us in John 17:9: "I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours." Who does Jesus pray for? Not the world, but those, "chosen in Him before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4). Let me say, however, that if you wrestle with this concept, you are not alone. My challenge for you is not to merely take my word for anything, but to read and study the Scripture and biblical history and let your own study empowered by the Holy Spirit inform your convictions.

The Fires We Face

Peter goes on to say that believers can rejoice because we have assurance in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. When Jesus conquered death, the war was won. Because of that our hope in eternity is a, "living hope," and that allows us to rejoice in Him even when we face various trials (1 Pet. 1:6). Beyond that, our suffering is only temporary. Peter goes on later to say, "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you" (1 Pet. 5:10). When this happens, our suffering will be swallowed up by the end of all things as Christ makes all things new (Rev. 21:1-4).

Even more than that, the trials we face actually do serve a purpose - to test the genuineness of our faith (1 Pet. 1:6). Suffering in this passage is compared to the refining process of gold. In the ancient world, gold would be passed through fire and would melt, and the impurities of the metal would rise to the surface to be separated and removed. Then the metal would cool, and then it would be reheated again, and the process was continued until no impurities remained. In this way, suffering is a process that shapes us and molds and removes impurities in our faith. If the believer's faith is truly genuine, he/she will receive, "praise and glory and honor" at the second coming of Christ (1 Pet. 1:7). This is why James writes, "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (Js. 1:2-4). It's also why Paul says, "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope" (Rom. 5:3-4). Ultimately, even our suffering (which is a result of sin) can be used by God for good (Rom. 8:28).

What Love Does For Us

In verses 8 and 9, Peter goes on to describe how faith and love interact. "Though you have not seen Him, you love Him." This passage reveals that the believers he has in mind are post-resurrection believers. Unlike the disciples and apostles who were able to walk with and witness Jesus, those who came after (all the way up to us) are guided by a more supreme faith since we have not actually seen Him. However, though we have not seen Him does not mean we are unable to love Him. One way the New Testament indicates love for God whom we have not seen is by our love for our brother whom we have seen. John tells us that it is impossible to love God if we hate our brother for this very reason (1 Jn. 4:20). It's easy to say you love God, but much more difficult to confirm your love for God by your love for others.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read 1 Peter 1:3. Who has caused us to be born again? According to what?

2. Read 1 Peter 1:3. What does it mean that we are born again to a living hope?

Day Two

1. Read 1 Peter 1:4. What kind of inheritance is described here? Where is it kept?

2. Read 1 Peter 1:5. What are we guarded by? Through what are we guarded? For what are we guarded?

Day Three

1. Read 1 Peter 1:6. In what are we to rejoice? What will be be grieved by if necessary?

2. Read 1 Peter 1:7. According to this verse, what is the purpose of the suffering mentioned in verse 6? What is this suffering compared to, and why? What is the point of suffering?

Day Four

1. Read 1 Peter 1:8. Is it possible to love Jesus if you've never seen Him? What kind of joy are we filled with because of our love for Him?

2. Read 1 Peter 1:9. What is the outcome of our faith, according to this verse?

Week 3 Discussion: Suffering Well

Suffering is not fun, and Christians shouldn't pretend otherwise. However, there is benefit to it as well. The genuineness of our faith is tested, and God can redeem our suffering to work together for good for His glory. Luckily, we don't have to suffer alone either. God has established His body, the church, to operate together as a community that leans on the Gospel and one another when things get rough. Talk as a group about suffering, what you've learned from it, and how the church has been integral for you through it.

1. Icebreaker: Talk about a time when you suffered recently. It can be from anything.
2. What have you learned from suffering?
3. How has God used your suffering for your benefit and His glory?
4. How has the church intervened and supported you during a time of trial or hardship?
5. Have you ever supported someone, emotionally or spiritually, when they were facing a time of suffering? What did that experience do for your faith?
6. How does suffering help you identify with Jesus more? (Hint: Read Isaiah 53)

Takeaways:

1. Salvation is caused by God according to His mercy.
2. Suffering tests the genuineness of our faith.

PRAYER REQUESTS: