

Now and Then

I Peter 1:8-9

Turn to I Peter 1 in your Bibles this morning. We will be considering verses 8-9 of this ancient epistle written to believers in a portion of the world who at that time were undergoing persecution for their faith. They were reminded early in the letter that their faith came through being “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood.”

Peter’s words served as a soothing balm to encourage those who were perhaps fearful because of government edicts enacted under a ruthless despot that something better, something greater awaited them through the inheritance that God was Himself protecting for them. They were also being reminded that God was protecting them for that inheritance.

When you are in the heat of trials it can be hard to look past the suffering, but that’s what Peter wanted them to do, to see beyond the here and now to the glory that awaited them in heaven. From the perspective of history, we can look back and see that persecution against the church would continue with little respite for another 200 years as long as Christians lived under the long arm of Roman authority. Religious oppression whether overt or covert can be mentally, emotionally, physically, and spiritually draining. His words served to bolster and even embolden their faith. They served to keep them from fainting or even forsaking their faith because of the relentless pressure. And they are words for any time of history since the founding of the church at Pentecost till today and beyond for people undergoing the pressure of persecution.

So, whatever time it is we live in church history or whatever we are experiencing what Peter says next is for you. It was for them then. It is for you now and it is for any Christian in the future. He talks

about two important truths for the Christian.

He talks about a Christian’s life

He talks about a Christian’s longing

According to statistics from Open Doors in their World Watch List, (www.worldwatchlist.us/world-watch-list-countries), more Christians were martyred in the 21st century than in all previous centuries combined.

It is illegal to be a Christian in North Korea and some 50,000 Christians have been sent to labor camps. Incidentally, this month’s issue from the Voice of Martyrs is on North Korea.

In 2013 nearly 300 churches were destroyed and 612 Christians killed in Nigeria alone.

In India, five states have enacted anti-conversion laws and are often the pretext for disrupting services to harass Christians.

Violence erupted in 2013 against the Coptic Christians in Egypt resulting in the total destruction or damage of over 60 churches.

Whether persecution abroad or the daily trials we may encounter how should we as Christians live? Peter begins by talking about the Christian’s life.

I. THE CHRISTIAN’S LIFE – v. 8

He points out three important marks of the Christian’s life.

A. A Christian Loves Christ – v. 8a

Peter had the opportunity, even the privilege of walking and talking with Christ. Yet he did what seems to us to be the unthinkable. He denied Christ. Earlier Peter unequivocally asserted his allegiance to Christ, that he would be loyal to the end, even willing to die for Him, and yet when the real test came in the courtyard on the night of Christ’s betrayal, Peter wouldn’t even acknowledge their association.

But an important lesson is taught in John 21.

Following a morning breakfast of broiled fish, Peter and Jesus sat by the fire. The other 10 disciples all knew of Peter's denial. They were in ear shot of this otherwise private conversation. Jesus asked Peter if he loved him with an unconditional love. Perhaps too overcome by the overwhelming sense of his own guilt for his recent failure Peter couldn't go where Jesus wanted him to go, to love Him unconditionally even though he made that boastful claim earlier. He couldn't claim that kind of love for Christ, not now, not after what he had done. So Peter answered honestly, with the painful truth of reality. It was an admission to his own earlier shortcoming and sin. Peter appealed to the all-knowing nature of Christ in his reply: "You know all things, Lord, You know I love you like a friend." It revealed a heart of strong affection for the Lord, but not absolute and unconditional surrender and devotion expressed in the term Jesus used.

Jesus responded with an affirmation of forgiveness and reinstatement to responsibility for the disciple.

But Jesus didn't stop there. He asked Peter the same question a second time, and Peter gave the Lord the same answer. Jesus responded with another word of forgiveness and affirmation and call to restored responsibility.

There was one additional exchange between them. What Jesus then asked Peter in this third dialogue is significant because he took Peter where he was at. "Peter, do you love me like a friend?"

Grieved that he was asked a third time, Peter responded in the same way acknowledging that the all-knowing Lord knew his heart.

This passage shows us that every Christian, no matter how strong a walk they think they have with the Lord can fall. That's what the Apostle Paul suggests in I Corinthians 10:12 "So, if you think you are standing, be careful that you don't fall."

But more importantly, it shows us that no matter

how far you fall, the Lord is willing to forgive through repentance, taking us where we are and restoring us. In this case Peter was restored to responsibility and would become a pillar in the church. What would have happened if on the seashore Jesus would have told Peter he was forgiven but couldn't be used for any further kingdom work? I think Peter would have drifted off into spiritual mediocrity. So, never think that if you fall, that you're all washed up for serving the Lord.

Peter knew what it was like to love the Lord having walked with Him, and seen Him in person. Yet, here in our text, Peter commends these believers for loving Christ even though they had never seen Him.

We might tend to think that seeing and being around Christ, listening to Him speak, watching Him perform a myriad of miracles would result in an obvious love for Christ.

The sad reality is that's not necessarily the case. With what Jesus had to say many no longer followed Him. (John 6:66)

Judas despised Him to the point of betraying Him. (Luke 22:3-6)

The Pharisees hated Him to the point of having Him crucified. (Matthew 27:18)

Even though these believers had never seen Christ, yet they loved Him. Now we don't love Him first. He loved us first. We love Him because He first loved us.

Thinking about this love for someone unseen Alexander McLaren wrote: "There is nothing else in the world parallel to that strange, deep personal attachment which fills millions of hearts to this Man who died 19 centuries ago, and which is utterly unlike the feelings that any men have to any other of the great names of the past. To love one unseen is a paradox, which is realized only in the relation of the Christian soul to Jesus Christ."

Now, what does such love look like? I think the

answer to that is found in the question that was posed to Jesus one day.
Matthew 22:34-40

We have come to know this passage as the Great Commandment. It is twofold. In order to obey the second, we must first obey the initial or primary commandment. The first is this:

1. We are to love Christ passionately

We are to love the Lord with everything we have: heart, mind, will; body, soul, spirit. In modern vernacular we might say we are to love Him with the whole kit and caboodle. It's a passionate love that owes to Him everything because everything we have and anything we are come from Him.

Now you might be saying, "but Pastor, I'm not quite there yet. I love Him a lot, but not with everything." Guess what? He'll take you where you are just like Peter and gradually, as you give more of yourself to Him, you learn to love Him more and more.

When that happens the reality becomes obvious and the choruses we sing become more than just words to a pretty melody. It resonates with deep seated love and desire.

I love You, Lord, and I lift my voice
To worship You, O my soul rejoice!
Take joy my King, in what you hear:
May it be a sweet, sweet sound in Your ear.

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I will serve Thee because I love Thee;
You have given life to me.
I was nothing before you found me;
You have given life to me.
Heartaches, broken pieces
Ruined lives are why You died on Calv'ry.
Your touch was what I longed for;
You have given life to me.

CCLI 1292471

Do you love the Lord more today than you did yesterday? We are to love Him passionately. "Love the Lord your God with ALL your heart, soul, mind, and strength."

All means all that's all all means.

That's the first command.

In some final instructions before Jesus' pending crucifixion, He gave His disciples this admonition. John 14:21 "He that has My commandments and keeps them, he it is that loves Me and he that loves Me will be loved by My Father and I will love him and will make Myself known to Him."

That is passionate love, love that does not do or obey out of duty, but out of devotion and desire because of wanting to please the Lord. It's not because I have to, but because I want to. It's not because I want to gain favor but because I want to be faithful.

We are to love Christ passionately.
We are to love others purposefully.

2. We are to love others purposefully

That is the second command given in the passage. "Love your neighbor as yourself."

In the Old Testament, God gave 10 commandments (Exodus 20:1-17). Jesus condensed them down to two. He wasn't saying that only two are important and the other eight you can ignore. He was saying that essentially the 10 commandments can be boiled down to two. The first four deal with our relationship to God, the remaining six deal with our relationship to others.

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make idols.
3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.

7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

If we love God with our whole being we will naturally obey the first four. If we love our neighbor as ourselves, we will naturally love God' people purposefully.

John 13:34-35

In this passage we see the motivation, the means, the measure and the method of such love.

a) The motivation of loving others

1) It is a commandment

I John 3:23 "And this is His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us."

Let me remind you of the obvious: this is all inclusive. We don't get to pick and choose. "One another" means everyone. Essentially it's saying that we shouldn't have enemies.

The boss who is oppressive and unrealistic

The classmate who is unkind and obnoxious

The neighbor who is unforgiving

The person who is unfaithful

The person who is unloving

But you say, "but Pastor, you don't _____ or what that person did to me or how they act. I can't love them." And you would be right. That's when we learn the means of loving others.

b) The means of loving others

1) It is by Christ

John 13:34-35 "...as I have love you..."

We can only love others through Christ or because of Christ. We know from Galatians 5:22 that this kind of love is only developed in us through the indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit whose goal and desire is to develop this along with other essential godly character traits in your life, but He

can only do so as we yield more and more of our will to His leading and control. That's why the only means by which we can love others is through Christ.

The result then is obvious to others. When we love in this way others see the measure of that love.

c) The measure of loving others

1) It is a confirmation

Loving others as Christ loved us demonstrates to everyone that we are a true follower of Christ. "By this all men will know that you are my disciples if you have love one toward another."

In his first epistle, John put it another way.

I John 2:9

I John 3:18

I John 4:7-12, 16-21

How is your love for others, even the difficult?

If we say we love God, then the proof in the pudding is in our loving others. That's the measure of our love for Christ.

We are to love God's people passionately. So what does that look like?

d) The method of loving others

I want to give you four methods that I think demonstrate love for both God and for others.

1) We give our time

There is a willingness even when there is it inconvenient to help someone else out.

We might have to give up some project or activity we wanted to do in order to help someone with a project they may want to get done.

I am so very grateful when I needed to go to Ann Arbor several years ago when I was getting steroid injections for my back and Robyn couldn't take me that someone stepped in and gave up several hours in their day to drive me down and sit in a waiting room during the procedure and recovery and drive

me back.

A retired couple in my Dad's church has made it their ministry to drive others to appointments or to sit in the hospital when family couldn't be present.

What time do you have to give to the Lord for Him and for others?

We are told to "serve the Lord with gladness."

Psalm 100:2

We are told to "serve one another by love."

Galatians 5:13

I Corinthians 12 says we have each been given a spiritual gift for the benefit of others in the body of Christ for the glory of God.

How much time do we have for others? It is a measure of our love.

2) We give our talent

This is very similar in nature to giving our time and we could just as easily reference the same passages to support this point. So let me just add here that time and talent really go hand in hand. We might say that it's two sides of the same coin. I think that this is different than spiritual gifts. Exercising your spiritual gift may be a way of using your talent at the same.

Where do we begin?

Teaching

Nursery

Babysitting

Yardwork/gardening

Home or simple auto repairs

Trips to appointments

Maybe your talent is in finances and someone needs help in setting up a budget to get out of debt.

Maybe it's in teaching and you can volunteer to tutor at one of the local schools.

When we first moved up to Camp, there was a retired carpenter who took us young staff kids once a week into the carpenter's shop and taught us about

woodworking, learning how to use hand and power tools.

What talent has the Lord given you that you can share with others who have a need?

3) We give our tithe

How are you investing in kingdom work with the money God has given you as income? Are you a cheerful giver?

II Corinthians 9:6-11

This is not a prosperity passage that if you give God will in turn give you more. It speaks more to the proper heart motivation that compels the giving.

4) We give our treasures

In one of the churches I served as Assistant Pastor we had a week long mission's conference every year. During the week various homes would be opened up for families to share a more intimate setting with the missionaries. It was much more relaxed and they could share some of the more personal needs that couldn't be shared in a larger church setting. One lady always opened her home every year, but it was only for adults. No children were allowed. She was rather well to do and lived in a very affluent part of town and had quite a few valuables in easy reach. I always felt like her things were too good for a lot of people.

What if the little boy who gave his cheap lunch of barley loaves and dried fish thought that his little lunch wasn't good enough to give to Jesus? What if he thought that Jesus only wanted the best cut of steak and bread made from the finest flour? We wouldn't have the wonderful account of Jesus feeding the 5,000.

That doesn't mean we can get by with giving Jesus any old thing, it begs us to ask if are we giving Jesus the best we have. If the best is barley and fish, then give it. Don't hold on to things when they can be used for the Lord. The hymnist writes:

Give of your best to the Master;
 Give Him first place in your heart;
 Give Him first place in your service;
 Consecrate every part.

Peter reminds us that in the Christian life is a Christian that loves Christ.

B. A Christian Believes in Christ – v. 8b

Peter says that even though you have not seen Christ you still believe in Him.
 Which is easier, to believe in something you can see or in something you cannot see?
 Which is better, to believe in something you can see or in something you cannot see?
 Let's allow Jesus to answer that question.
 John 20:24-29

Hebrews 11:6 tells us that it is faith pleases God. Proverbs 3:5-6 brings a strong measure of confidence in God who we cannot see, because we trust Him to lead us in all our ways. Would you agree intuitively that His way is always better? So, why is it that we seem at times to want to go our own way? Both ways are uncertain, but His way is always the right way and the best way.

In Numbers 14 we have an important illustration of what it's like to trust self and not God. God had led Israel out of Egypt and was taking them to the Promised Land. It was a jolly time even though there had been some days of complaining. They were still looking forward to receiving their inheritance and were on the threshold of the land when Moses sent out 10 spies to look over the land. They come back with their report. All 10 agreed that it was indeed just as God promised, a land flowing with milk and honey and even brought back evidence of its splendor in some clusters of grapes. They also agreed that the cities were well fortified with giants living in the land. They seemed like grasshoppers in comparison to its inhabitants.

That's where their agreement ended. Joshua and Caleb trusted God to deliver them as promised. The other eight believed they would be unable to conquer the land and that their women and little one's would be consumed by the land and its inhabitants. They should return to Egypt at once. God was angry with them and instead said that for their lack of faith they would wander the wilderness until all that generation of those unbelievers who doubted God's deliverance died. The people tried to appeal to God and said they would repent. They even showed their belief by preparing to go to battle, but God said if they went He would not be with them. They went anyway and were routed.

Trust in the Lord, believe Him, and believe His Word even though we cannot see Him. Not one of His promises has failed. Lamentations 3:23 assures us that His faithfulness is great.

To "believe" means to trust or to put one's confidence in, or to depend on. A Christian believes in Christ, not only for salvation but also for daily living. While we don't see Him now, we look forward to the day when our faith will become sight, when we will see Christ face to face. Do you have a faith that is commended?

C. A Christian Rejoices in Christ – v. 8c

This rejoicing Peter says is inexpressible and full of glory. That literally means higher than speech. Words fail to express the kind of joy we have because of our being in Christ. If you grew up attending Sunday school you may have learned that little chorus
 I have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.
 Where? Down in my heart.
 Where? Down in my heart.
 I have the joy, joy, joy, joy down in my heart.
 Where? Down in my heart to stay.

For all that we have now and have been promised there is inexpressible joy.

Again from the pen of Alexander McLaren: “Love longs for the presence of the beloved and is restless and defrauded of its gladness so long as absence continues. But this strange love, which is kindled by an unseen Man, does not need His visible presence in order to be a fountain of joy unspeakable and full of glory. Then the Apostle takes it for granted that everyone who believes knows what this joy is. It is a large assumption, contradicted, I am afraid, by the average experience of the people that at this day call themselves Christians.”

That is a sobering thought don't you think? One would think that we should have tremendous joy, but then is that not the case for some or many Christians? I think it is because we have taken our eyes off Christ, we don't trust Him or love Him as we should and so we rob ourselves of inexpressible joy. If we are to experience such inexpressible joy we must fix our eyes on Christ, the author and finisher of our faith and trust Him.

The hymn captured it well: “It is joy unspeakable and full of glory; O the half has never yet been told!

Charles Spurgeon said that “Little faith will take your soul to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your soul” meaning that there will be a joy we won't be able to express here on earth.

These believers had never seen Jesus with their physical eyes as Peter had but they loved Him having seen Him with spiritual eyes and believed in Him which brought them great joy, joy that lacked for words. They were experiencing the reality of Jesus' words in John 15:11 “I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”

If that is the Christian's life, what is his longing? We find it in verse 9.

This is in reference to salvation.

- A. It is a Continuous Salvation
- B. It is a Complete Salvation

The word “soul” does not mean that only the soul is saved and not the body as some believe, but instead refers to the whole person. The phrase “are receiving” is in the present tense indicating some tension between what we received when we accepted Christ, what we already possess as believers and what we will yet receive when Christ returns. We received salvation when we trusted Christ as Savior, but our salvation won't be complete until Christ returns and makes everything new. Until then we are to grow in Christ. There is faith that believes and receives the moment we trust Christ and a faith that anticipates the completion of what has been promised that we have yet to receive when Christ returns. We call that glorification.

In a nutshell, the reward for faith in Christ is our salvation and inexpressible joy now and then. Is your life defined by loving Christ, believing in Christ, and rejoicing in Christ? Is your longing defined by faith in a continuous salvation and waiting for the day when Christ will return rendering your salvation complete?