

Our Bible notes on Peter's epistles last week concluded that Peter's purpose for writing was to strengthen his brethren - even as Jesus promised he would do after his denial of his Savior three times (Luke 22:34). The impetus of this grace that saved Peter from disaster is revealed in Luke 22:32, where Jesus commands him: "When you have turned back strengthen your brethren." As we study Christ's command that Peter strengthen the church, may we continue to find much encouragement in the lessons Peter learned and applies to us in 1 and 2 Peter.

Monday: Read Luke 22:31-34; Luke 22:54-62 & Gal. 6:1

A Prayer for Gentle Restoration

How sweet to hear Peter's grasp on grace because of the bitter experiences predicted in Luke 22:31-34 and then realized in Luke 22:47-62. We have much to learn through Peter's bitter tears (Luke 22:62). To start with, let me offer the following application as we behold the danger of spiritual pride in this beloved Apostle: Behold the blessing to the church (in terms of the *sweet fragrance* of grace and peace) that comes from Peter's bitter experience and failure. In contrast with unbelievers, who find their trials and failures to be their downfall, we as believers (as one Puritan said) can butter our bread *with the very same knife of testing* the unregenerate use to slit their own throats.

Think of it this way. Sin in the unbeliever's life must be covered over with excuses, denials, and blame-shifting in order to get ahead in the world. The worst event in the unbelieving politician's life is for some hidden sin from the past to be uncovered. That is the end of aspirations and ambitions for many a person's desire for power. It is like a pile of noisome dung that festers in a plastic bag; covering it up makes it smell all the more.

But for Peter, the dung of his threefold denial is composted by grace so that God's gracious purposes bloom in what we learn from (and are strengthened by) in the Apostle's teaching about his mistakes.

Meditate and Pray: Gracious Lord, there is a hymn that asks, "Could we bear from one another, what He daily bears from us?" Please do not let your church descend into becoming a rending and tearing beast. Please help us to show grace to each other, even while holding firm to the need for real Biblical repentance from those who are caught in sin. Above all, when seeking to restore such a sinner (like Peter), caught in terrible sin, help us to be gentle (even as Galatians 6:1 commands us to be). In the name of the Savior who has been so gentle to us, Amen.

Tuesday: Read 1 Peter 5:6-11; Luke 22:31-34 and 22:54-62

Your Adversary Prowls

A.W. Pink quotes Thomas Goodwin to make some helpful connections between Peter's own experience of grace after his own sin and the lessons which Peter gives the church in later life. Using Pink and Goodwin, let's see how Peter's experience translates into his epistles.

- In Gethsemane, Christ commands Peter, "Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation" (Luke 22:46) In 1 Peter 5:8, Peter warns the church: Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

- In Luke 22:31, Jesus warns Peter and the other disciples that “Satan demanded to have you.” In 1 Peter 5:8, Peter warns his readers that Satan’s desire is to devour believers.
- In Luke 22:32, Jesus reassures Peter that He has “prayed that Peter’s faith won’t fail.” In 1 Peter 5:9, Peter urges his readers to “resist Satan, standing firm in the faith.” In both cases the promise is faith victoriously enduring Satan’s attack.

What is the result of Christ’s prayer for Peter’s faith and Peter’s exhortation to “stand firm” against the Devil? Just like Peter, our faith will, in the end, stand firm despite all our tears of regret and sense of failure. Peter remembers Christ’s Word in Luke 22:61, and we too find victory as God’s Word, hidden in our hearts, causes Satan to retreat.

Meditate and Pray: These are just a few examples of how God engineered the testing of Peter’s faith so that, through *the wisdom learned by his failures*, Peter was able to strengthen the church of God, teaching her how to resist sin and Satan. Sing with me a hymn about how God uses temptation to make us strong enough to say no to sin.

1 Yield not to temptation, for yielding is sin;
each vict'ry will help you some other to win;
fight manfully onward; dark passions subdue;
look ever to Jesus, he will carry you through.

Refrain: Ask the Savior to help you,
comfort, strengthen, and keep you;
he is willing to aid you,
he will carry you through.

2 Shun evil companions; bad language disdain;
God's name hold in rev'rence, nor take it in
vain;
be thoughtful and earnest, kind-hearted and
true;
look ever to Jesus, he will carry you through.
[Refrain]

3 To him that o'ercometh God giveth a crown;
through faith we shall conquer, though often
cast down;
he who is the Savior our strength will renew;
look ever to Jesus, he will carry you through.
[Refrain]

Trinity Hymnal # 582

Wednesday: Read 1 Peter 5:10-11; James 1:2-4 & Genesis 22:1-2

The Resilient Seed

We are beginning to see the true, Divinely orchestrated purpose in Peter’s struggle with Satan and his three-fold denial of Christ. God would not have permitted Peter’s reaping so much failure from his own pride if He could not use it as a refining test. James urges us to, “count it all joy when we encounter various trials (or tests).” Likewise God tests Abraham by commanding him to offer up his one and only son as a burnt offering. So Satan’s sifting (described by one Puritan as Satan’s attempt to shake all grace right out of Peter) is used by God to reveal the mighty presence of Christ to the Apostle – even at his lowest point.

Until God allowed this testing of faith in Peter, his grasp of Christ's ability to be strong, at precisely the moment of Peter's greatest weakness, lay unrealized, waiting Divine revelation. But when God permits this trial to plumb the depths of Peter's soul, what is revealed to Peter (and Satan) is the powerful, God-given seed of faith - which could not be eradicated by Satan's attack. God in this way demonstrates the triumphing power of the Spirit's work of faith in Peter.

Meditate and Pray: Let us praise God for His power to produce in us the fruit of godliness and increased joy and peace – even through our most painful trials.

1 Like a river glorious is God's perfect peace,
over all victorious in its bright increase;
perfect, yet it floweth fuller ev'ry day,
perfect, yet it groweth deeper all the way.

Refrain:
Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest,
finding, as he promised, perfect peace and rest

2 Hidden in the hollow of his blessed hand,
never foe can follow, never traitor stand; not a
surge of worry, not a shade of care, not a blast
of hurry, touch the spirit there. [Refrain]
3 Ev'ry joy or trial falleth from above,

traced upon our dial by the Sun of Love.
We may trust him fully all for us to do;
they who trust him wholly find him wholly
true. [Refrain]

Trinity Hymnal # 699:

Thursday/Fri: Read 2 Peter 1:1-4

Final Words

As we now move to Peter's second letter, we pause to remind ourselves of the historical situation of it's origin. 2 Peter was written when Peter was acutely aware of his impending death – read 2 Peter 1:12-15:

Therefore I intend always to remind you of these qualities, though you know them and are established in the truth that you have. I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ made clear to me. And I will make every effort so that after my departure you may be able at any time to recall these things.

Church tradition says that Peter was martyred during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero in about 65 A.D. This letter was written shortly before his death.

Not surprisingly therefore, one of the prominent themes of Peter's letters is to encourage believers who will shortly face the first Roman persecution of the church. Such spiritual strengthening is also designed to help believers in the church to guard their souls and to protect the Gospel from the false teachers that have crept into their midst (2 Peter 2:1). Thus, at this difficult passe, the theme of strengthening the brethren lies at the heart of Peter's writing.

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks with me that it is never God's desire for us to barely scrape by as believers. Mere fruitless survival in this evil world is too low a bar when it comes to Christ's aspirations for the church on earth. He therefore seeks to strengthen her at every turn. Sing about such strengthening now.

1 How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord,
is laid for your faith in his excellent Word!
What more can he say than to you he has said,
to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

2 "Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed;
for I am your God, and will still give you aid;
I'll strengthen you, help you, and cause you to stand,
upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand.

3 "When through the deep waters I call you to go,
the rivers of sorrow shall not overflow;
for I will be with you, your troubles to bless,
and sanctify to you your deepest distress.

4 "When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie,
my grace, all-sufficient, shall be your supply;
the flame shall not hurt you; I only design
your dross to consume and your gold to refine.

5 "E'en down to old age all my people shall prove my sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love;
and when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn,
like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne.

6 "The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I'll never, no never, no never forsake."

Trinity Hymnal #94

Sat/Sun: Read 2 Peter 1:1-4

Priceless Faith, Priceless Savior

Note these variations in the English translations of 1 Peter 1:1, with the pertinent phrase italicized:

- **ESV:** Simeon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who have obtained a *faith of equal standing with ours* by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.
- **KJV:** Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained *like precious faith with us* through the righteousness of God and our Savior Jesus Christ.

That faith that Peter begins with is precious because it focuses on the costly payment in blood which Christ paid to redeem us. It is also precious because it is tested and tried in order to be refined into spiritual gold. Most of all, its preciousness comes from its focus on a great Savior, Jesus Christ. This, then, is the treasure which Peter wants every believer to guard: the precious knowledge of our Savior, valuing the very righteousness of our God, Jesus Christ.

Meditate and Pray: Peter begins his last letter to this dear flock focusing on the most precious and holy legacy that he will soon leave to them: their priceless faith in their priceless Savior. Let us sing about the value which Christ is too us:

1 When I survey the wondrous cross
on which the Prince of glory died,
my richest gain I count but loss,
and pour contempt on all my pride.

2 Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
save in the death of Christ my God:
all the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to his blood.

3 See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
sorrow and love flow mingled down:
did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
or thorns compose so rich a crown?

4 Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small;
love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

Trinity Hymnal # 252: