

In Luke 22:34, Jesus predicted Peter's trio of denials and then says, "but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail, and after you have turned again, strengthen your brothers." We discovered in our Bible notes on Peter's epistles this last year that the purpose for which he writes is to strengthen his brethren - even as Jesus promised he would do. In our readings and prayers this week, may we continue to find much encouragement in the lessons Peter applies to us in 1 and 2 Peter.

Monday: Read Luke 22:31-34; Luke 22:54-62 and Galatians 6:1

Caught

We have much to learn through Peter's bitter tears (Luke 22:62). To start with, let me offer the following application about 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 unbeliever'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 with no other result than to make the place where we hide such filth smell all the more.

But for Peter, the dung of his threefold denial, openly admitted and mourned, is composted by grace so that God's gracious purposes bloom in what we learn from the Apostle's teaching.

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 in 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 Christ's, who has been so gentle to us, Amen.

Sing these verses from our Trinity Hymnal to celebrate Christ's gentleness with sinners.

1 One there is, above all others, well deserves the name of Friend
His is love beyond a brother's, costly, free, and knows no end;
they who once His kindness prove, find it everlasting love!

2 Which of all our friends to save us, could or would have shed their blood?
But our Jesus died to have us reconciled in Him to God;
this was boundless love indeed! Jesus is a Friend in need.

5 Could we bear from one another, what He daily bears from us?
Yet this glorious Friend and Brother loves us though we treat Him thus;
though for good we render ill, He accounts us brethren still.

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

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 his letters. Using Pink and Goodwin, let's see how what Peter learned 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, faith's victoriously enduring Satan's attack is that which Christ promises.

And what is the result of Christ's prayer for Peter's faith and Peter's exhortation to "stand firm" against the Devil? We see Peter rescued from Satan's clutches in Luke 22:61-62, and so our faith will in the end stand firm despite all our tears of regret and sense of failure. Peter remembers Christ's Word (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 by 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. Sing # 582:

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]

Wednesday: Read 1 Peter 5:10-11; James 1:2-4 and Genesis 22:1-2 Shaken, Not Shattered

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 for His refining purposes. Just as James urges us to, "count it all joy when we encounter various trials;" just as 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 unique ability "to be strong" at precisely the moment of Peter's greatest weakness - lay unrealized. But when God permits this trial to shake 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, using hymn # 699:

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]

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]

3 Ev'ry joy or trial falleth from above,

Thursday: Read 2 Peter 1:1-4**Strengthened beyond Mere Survival**

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, when Peter was acutely aware of his impending death

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.

2 Peter 1:12-15

Not surprisingly, one of the prominent themes of Peter's letters is to encourage believers, for they 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, the theme of strengthening the brethren lies at the heart of Peter's writing.

Meditate and Pray: Give thanks with me for God's advance preparation and supply in times of need. 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 using hymn # 94 in our red Trinity hymnal:

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."

Friday: Read 2 Peter 1:1-4

Precious Faith

2 Peter is written to guard the faith which has been entrusted to these believers. That faith is precious to the Apostle (2 Peter 1:1). Here are a couple ways of translating verse 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.

This faith 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 value 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, and the valuable appropriation of the very righteousness of our God Jesus Christ.

Meditate and Pray: Let us sing about the value which Christ is to us, using hymn # 252:

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.

Sat/Sun: Read 2 Peter 1:1-4 and Luke 16:1-15

Is it Worth It?

One illustration of the value of possessing Christ by faith is the Parable of the Dishonest Steward in Luke 16. This steward, though possessing a dishonest character that defrauded his Master, has one commendable trait which Jesus highlights: He knows how to use money for the purpose of securing himself a secure and fruitful future. By cutting the bills in half, he won for himself friends who would think highly of the steward's Master and thereby ensure the steward of remaining in his Master's favor.

Just so in our lives. Though Mammon is indeed unclean and a source of condemnation for those who use it for their instant gratification in this life, when invested in kingdom issues and when used to spread the good news of an invaluable Savior, who redeems at the infinite cost of His blood, that money one day will be a witness to our valuing Christ and the Gospel more than our material comforts. It all comes down to whether we agree with Peter that our faith, like his, is indeed precious and worth spending our time and money on.

But what a contrast were the greedy religious leaders of Jesus day, who loved their money too much to be willing to follow Christ on the costly road of discipleship (Luke 16:14). The Pharisees misused their blessings (spiritual, physical and financial) to *win for themselves praise and prominence* (Luke 16:14-15) instead of using such blessings *for eternity*. They should have invested in blessings that would further the eternal welfare of their own and others' souls. In this way, they would have made friends using their wealth (Luke 16:9) for eternity. They would have then realized the blessing of Daniel 12:2-3:

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.

In closing, we must be careful not to misunderstand the challenge of this parable. The *reason* we can pour out our wealth, time and energy in the cause of the Gospel is that the Lord Himself is so committed to making up our losses in such costly service. Read the words of hymn 689:

1 Be still, my soul; the Lord is on thy side; bear patiently the cross of grief or pain. Leave to thy God to order and provide; in every change He faithful will remain. Be still, my soul; thy best, thy heav'nly Friend through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

2 Be still, my soul; thy God doth undertake to guide the future as He has the past. Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake; all now mysterious shall be bright at last. Be still, my soul; the waves and winds still know His voice who ruled them while He dwelt below.

3 Be still, my soul; when dearest friends depart, and all is darkened in the veil of tears, then shalt thou better know His love, His heart, who comes to soothe thy sorrow and thy fears. Be still, my soul; thy Jesus can repay from His own fullness all He takes away.

4 Be still, my soul; the hour is hast'ning on when we shall be forever with the Lord, when disappointment, grief, and fear are gone, sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored. Be still, my soul; when change and tears are past, all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

Meditate and Pray: Father, give us faith to believe in your supply,

Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!” “Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”

Mark 10:28-31