

Sermons
New Testament
I Peter
1:5-9

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Date written: June 26, 1947

Theme: The testing of faith

Proposition: Hardship and suffering but serve to test faith.

Places preached: *Huntsglen, Ark. 7/18/48*

I Peter 1:6-9 (Weymouth's New Testament)

Exult in the prospect of this, even if now, for a short time, you are compelled to sorrow amid various trials.

These happen in order that the testing of your faith -- being more precious than that of gold, which perishes, but yet is proved by fire -- may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

You love Him, though you have never seen Him. In Him, though at present you do not see Him, you yet trust, and triumph with a joy unspeakable and crowned with glory, while you are securing as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Introduction:

1. The letter of I Peter is one devoted to urging those to whom it is written to stand fast in the Christian faith.

2. In carrying out this theme, the question is brought out in the first few verses of why suffering, hardship, grief, happen.

3. To this question the Old Testament, with some few exceptions, of which the Book of Job is the notable one, would give the answer that hardship is a punishment for sin.

4. The New Testament writer of I Peter here gives another answer, the one for Christians.

5. That answer is our theme here. It is: The earthly cross tests and perfects our faith.

6. In following this theme, we will ask three questions: (1) Why must faith be tested, (2) How is it tested, and (3) To what end or for what purpose is it tested?

I. Why must faith be tested and perfected through suffering and hardship?

1. Jesus said there is no man perfect save the Father which is in heaven. We know, by that and by experience, that we won't reach perfection here on earth, either in works or faith. Yet, we should continue to try.

2. In teaching and leading games, one can't have a conception of how it will work out till he tries in introducing a new game. And repetition brings better and better results in directing. Still, no matter how good one becomes, perfection is never reached. There are always mistakes made, new techniques to master, new games to learn.

3. In this matter of faith in Christ as savior, we must recognize the need for such a savior. If all is constantly well and good, it is easy to come to pride in self as sufficient; easy to forget that this good time in which we live at present must come to an end.

4. So, hardship, suffering, persecution, bereavement, come and ~~xxx~~ we recognize our inability of ourselves to do anything about it. Then we look for help, and usually other people can't give it. Then there is only God.

5. One of the most notable preachers of the last century in England relates how he left his home in Liverpool one day to fill an engagement in the city of Glasgow. As he left the house to go to the station, the last sight on which his eye rested was that of his little daughter held up at the window in her grandmother's arms. As the carriage drove off, the child waved her father a fond and laughing farewell.

Many a time, he said, during the railroad trip to Glasgow, that vision of his little daughter rose up before his memory and filled his heart with joy. But he was never to see her again.

The next morning he was stunned by a telegram which told of her sudden death. At first it seemed to him a blow that staggered his faith and crushed his hopes, and put out the lamp of his joy. But as the years went by and the vision of that child waving him farewell came back to him, ~~it~~ seemed that God had set her in the window of heaven to beckon him upward to his eternal home. "I would not give that memory," he said, "for all the gold of earth. I would not part with the inspiration which it stirs within me for all the world could bestow."

And so it is that suffering, hardship, pain, ~~can~~ serve to give us a new vision and new grip on faith.

~~xxx~~ 6. We don't know whether or not we really do have faith in God through Christ until it has actually been tried.

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II. How is faith tested?

1. In the time of the writing of our Scripture, those to whom 1st. Peter was written were in danger of suffering, probably of suffering persecution because of their faith. Hence, they needed the advice of the letter, "Exult in the prospect of this, even if now, for a short time, you are compelled to sorrow among various trials." (Weymouth).

2. These words are similar to those by Jesus which are found in the last of the Beatitudes: (Weymouth's trans.): "Blessed are you when they have insulted and persecuted you, and have said every cruel thing about you falsely for my sake. Be joyful and triumphant, for great is your reward in heaven."

3. In the Old Testament Book of Job is a story like many we hear today. Job was a man who tried to obey God and honor him. When his family, his property and his health was taken away from him, he turned to question why these things must be -- as people who have tried to live righteously sometimes do today --. Of course, Job was not aware of that part of his story with which the reader is told that Satan had persuaded God to test him through these calamities.

4. Similarly, testing of our faith today comes through much the same types of thing: persecution because of our faith, though in this country at present we haven't had to face that; and loss of property, loved ones and health.

III. To what end, for what purpose, are persecutions and hardship borne?

1. Our Scripture in verse 7 says "These happen in order that the testing of your faith -- being more precious than that of gold, which perishes, yet is proved by fire -- may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

2. Job, who had thought himself good and faithful prior to his testing, but who in hardship mourned and questioned the Lord, was brought to see that God was strengthening his faith and must have other plans for him: "I know that thou canst do all things; and no plan is too difficult for thee." (AmericanTrans.).

And in relationship to his questioning and complaining he said: "Therefore, I have declared ~~without~~ understanding, things too wonderful for me, without knowing. I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye has seen thee. Therefore, I retract and repent, in dust and ashes."

3. In the above words, Job pointed out the truth that hardship often clears away the scales from our eyes so that we can for the first time see God.

4. Hardship also brings about a more sympathetic and understanding attitude toward others.

(From Macartney's Illustrations, p.257): In one of the frontier countries a settler's child was lost in the wilderness, which was still infested by wild animals. The father took his rifle, and set out to find his child. Presently he came to a cabin, and in the woods near the cabin he saw prowling leopards. He knew that those leopards threatened the life of any children who might live in the cabin, but his heart was wild with anxiety about his own child. "Why should I stop and shoot these leopards and save these unknown children, when my own child is yonder in the wilderness

in peril?" So he started to press on. But his kindlier feelings got the better of him, and he stopped and shot the leopards about the cabin. He then entered the cabin, and lo, there was his own child!

The loss of his own child had made this man stop, even in the frenzy of the first shock of loss, to realize that other children might too be in danger, and he had acted on this understanding. His act brought him happiness, by restoration of his own child, but also brought him new friends in those children around whose home the leopards had been playing.

Conclusion:

1. Since Christ gave two great commandments as the basic sign of Christian faith -- love of God and of man -- that which strengthens either strengthens faith.

2. As hardship strengthens both faith in ~~God~~ and love of God as well as understanding and love of others, it therefore strengthens faith.

3. And so, we may know that suffering grief and hardship strengthens faith of those who have any faith, so that they might say with Peter in the words of our Scripture: "these happen that the testing of your faith may result in praise, glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

