

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Precious Things in 1 Peter: The Precious Faith - 1 Peter 1:7

How often the news today is concerned with difficulties! More recently it has been about Afghanistan and, before that, Northern Ireland frequently featured as a news item. Some of these problems often take on a 'religious context' but, at the heart of the matter, it rarely is that. This is so sad when we understand that Christianity, and other religions also, have a basis of peace. It is clear that, at the root, problems are stirred up by man's natural desires of power and greed and do not arise from any matter of faith.

THE PURPOSE OF THE EPISTLE

Our purpose today and in the coming weeks is to consider some precious things in 1 Peter. Today we want to think about 'precious faith'. Before we begin the subject in detail, we will remind ourselves that the apostle Peter wrote to Jewish believers who were being subject to persecution in one way or another, and who had been driven from their homes. We will find reference to 'the dispersion', as it is called, in Acts 8:1 and Acts 11:19. They were at the time living in what is now the western part of Turkey. Peter addresses this letter to the strangers scattered through the dispersion that had taken place. He refers on several occasions to their difficulties which he calls the 'trial of your faith' in 1:7. He sets out to cheer them up. What better way is there for him to do so than to refer to all their blessings as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. There are times when we will all know what it is to be attacked for our faith. Perhaps a colleague may sneer at our trust in the Lord Jesus or, if we are still at school, other children will laugh at the fact that we love Him. Sometimes we have heard of some who have been turned out of home because of their witness to the power of the Lord who can save from sin. So, in the same way, we can take encouragement from this same practical epistle.

So let us read verse 7 of our chapter: *'...the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ'*.

POSSESSORS OF FAITH

Right away the apostle brings these believers back to the basic fact that their problems were due to their faith. They were possessors of faith.

Faith had brought them into blessing. Their faith had brought them into trial. We must first ask ourselves 'what is faith'? How can we describe it? Perhaps our thoughts will go immediately to the great chapter of faithful people in Hebrews 11. But in this chapter we see what faith **does**, how those Old Testament believers in God lived out their lives because of their faith, but it does not tell us what faith is. Perhaps we can understand it better by reference to Romans 4:3, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness'. This is the simple way of putting it. 'Abraham believed God'. Here is the basic meaning of faith.

The Greek word for 'faith' in our chapter - '*pistis*' - is always used of trust in God or the Lord Jesus Christ and has three elements to it:

1. There is a firm persuasion or conviction, based on what we have heard, which produces a full acknowledgement of the truth that God has made known in the Scriptures. We realise the Bible is true. Abraham had not seen God but he knew the voice of God and he had believed what he had heard.
2. Next, this firm persuasion leads to a personal surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. Abraham also surrendered his life to God. This was particularly demonstrated when God asked him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Whatever God required he would do. Faith can never be complete without this surrender.
3. Lastly there will be a change of conduct. Abraham left the town of Ur; later he left Haran and followed the way God had chosen for him. Whatever we have been in the past, our lives too will be changed to be more fitting for the Lord who has saved us.

Now we can be quite sure that we did not achieve this faith by ourselves. The Holy Spirit was working in our hearts and minds when we heard the good news of all that God has done. He brought us to the desire to surrender our lives to the Lord Jesus and He is with us as we desire to live a Christian life. There are many incidents in the Gospel story of those who had faith. We read the story in Matthew 8:5-10, of the Roman centurion who had no right to Jewish blessings, yet he came to the Lord and asked for his servant to be healed. He came himself to Jesus but he felt himself so unworthy to receive the Lord into his house that he asked the Lord just to speak the word and the servant would be healed. What trust he showed! He had heard of the Lord Jesus and His power and he believed all that he heard, so much so that he himself came to Jesus. He had authority to direct his soldiers to go this way or that, but his surrender to the Lord was demonstrated in that he would not demand blessing but only plead for His help. His conduct was clear in that he came to the Lord for his servant. The Lord Jesus commented, *'I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel'*. Do you know true faith in your own life? Do we really trust the Lord completely?

We also see the effect of this change in the lives of the Thessalonian believers, 1 Thessalonians 1. *'For our glad tidings were not with you in word only (yes, they had heard) but also in power...and ye became our imitators and of the Lord, having accepted the word in much tribulation with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that ye became models to all that believe in Macedonia and in Achaia'*. (JN Darby translation). Here are Christian believers who had heard, and believed, and surrendered and were following the Lord Jesus to the point of being models of what Christianity should be. This is where faith should bring us also.

Peter is writing to these believers who had this faith but it was now under severe trial. Behind it all was the power of Satan. He attacks faith. In chapter 5 of this letter the apostle desires these believers to be balanced, *'be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour'*. Their faith was so valuable that the devil himself must attack it. Let us be clear, there is nothing so distressing to our adversary than the clear demonstration of our faith in the Lord Jesus. Sometimes he comes to us as an angel of light, 2 Corinthians 11:14, anxious to deceive us particularly concerning the truth. At other times he comes as a roaring lion, 1 Peter 5:8, to destroy any faith and testimony we have. So let us hold fast to this trust we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul refers to this as he writes in Ephesians 6:16, *'Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked'*. At all times, with our eyes on the Lord Jesus, the strength of our faith in Him acts as a shield which the darts of the enemy will never pierce.

PRIVILEGE OF GOD'S PROVISION.

So we pass on and find that those to whom the apostle writes were already enjoying the privilege of God's provision. Knowing that they had this faith, the apostle in his letter, revels in all that this meant, both to him and to them. He speaks of:

The manner in which it was achieved. Verse 2 reminds us that the whole Godhead, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, were involved. No believer achieves the blessing but by obedience to the will of God and the blood of Christ, which was shed on the cross and which covers all our sin. The more we appreciate the wonders of the grace of God, (and we have never deserved what He has given) the more we shall enjoy the peace with which He alone can fill us.

Faith has its roots in **the mercy of God** which has brought about our salvation, verse 3. Mercy is abundant. Were it not so we must surely have been judged for our own sins. This can never happen now because the Lord Jesus has paid the penalty and has demonstrated His mercy for us. The story is told of a judge, who sat in a court where a man, known to him, was to be tried. This man was guilty and the judge exacted a fair punishment of a large fine. The man admitted it to be fair but was quite unable to pay. The judge knew this but he stepped down from the bench, made his way to the clerk of the court and wrote out his cheque in full payment. What mercy the Lord Jesus has shown in taking our punishment upon Himself!

The magnitude of the work, verse 3. We have a living hope, certain and sure, and this is confirmed by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus from the dead. It is vital that the work of the cross was completed. Salvation comes by no other way. But salvation has only been assured to us by the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. *'This Jesus hath God raised up'*, Peter preached, Acts 2:32. The hymn writer said, 'God is satisfied with Jesus, we are satisfied as well'. The tremendous work of the cross is completely assured because the Lord Jesus rose again.

The material blessing which has been given, verse 4. We now have an inheritance, although it is a spiritual inheritance. It is a fact not a mirage. These people were Jews and had an earthly inheritance before, but they have never fully entered into it. It is now deferred until their King comes to reign. Now, as believers, they have a new inheritance, far better than the old one for it is fully assured. What words Peter uses to describe it. It is *incorruptible* - it cannot be destroyed or corrupted; it is *undefiled* - it cannot be stained and always will remain pure; and it will never *fade away*. This last expression encourages us to appreciate the loveliness of the heavenly inheritance which will never be affected by any blight, through which a bloom slowly fades. What grace and beauty is expressed in this statement! What more can we want?

The maintenance of the promise, free from any destruction, verse 4. It is so good to remember that it is *reserved* in heaven. We were once invited to a Christian carol concert. Within the large hall there were many seats, some in good positions and some not so good. We wondered what our situation would be. But our seats were reserved by those who had full authority for the evening. So we discovered that our seats were not just allocated to us from anywhere in the hall, but the best seats were provided. What has the Lord Jesus in mind? What He has is for those for whom He died. Nothing but the best will do. Your inheritance is reserved 'in heaven'. No one outside of heaven has any jurisdiction whatever to spoil the purpose of the Master Himself. It is reserved for *you, and no-one else*. What a blessing!

If this is still not enough, Peter further adds that in the meanwhile, before that takes place all believers are 'kept by the power of God'. It is out of our hands! The whole sense of being kept is that there is a garrison, a guard, surrounding you as an heir of God's promise, assuredly keeping you for your blessed inheritance. The faith that you have, which you enjoy because you have salvation, also gives you the certainty of all these promises. Furthermore, the day is coming when all will be revealed; it is prepared, all is ready. The Lord will soon come for His own and then there will be much praise and glory.

It is no wonder that, in spite of their trials, which might dampen their joy a little, these Christians 'greatly rejoiced', verse 6. Their faith gave them a joy that bubbled over. They were exulting in such great salvation and all that it gave them. Do you feel like this? If not, why not just spend a little time thinking of the great Lord and of this great salvation. The hymn tells us, 'The love that Jesus had for me is more than tongue can tell'. All these blessings are summed up in their faith. They are for you, too, trusting believer. They may have wondered if maintaining their faith was really worth while in all their problems.

PRECIOUS OWNERSHIP

So the apostle now adds more to what he has said. He speaks of the precious ownership of this faith. The apostle is not satisfied to speak only of the blessings which are received by those with faith but he now demonstrates the real value of it. Different Greek words are translated 'precious' in the Bible but this word really demonstrates that it is valued at a great price, or costly. Their faith was to be regarded as of real value, not just a passing phase that can be forgotten as we may regard a toy, once a joy to handle and later to be thrown away.

In our verse 7, Peter remarks concerning faith, being '*much more precious*'. So we have the superlative quality of faith. For the Christian it is one of the most valued things we possess. These Jewish believers, in the midst of their trials, must never get to the point where they should think of giving it all up and forget what their faith meant. They must hold on at all costs. How should they give up something so full of blessing from the whole Godhead? Faith is very valuable, a precious possession.

Peter compares it with gold. When gold is mined it is surrounded by impurities. It is placed in the smelting pot and heated by the fire. Gradually the dross is separated and can be removed, leaving the gold absolutely pure. How brilliant is that burnished gold! Man estimates gold as the least perishable and the least corruptible metal. It can be 'tried with fire'. But when this is compared with spiritual things, Peter passes it off with the comment 'gold that perisheth'. All that brilliance and attraction but of so little worth as compared with faith! Your faith is much more precious than gold. Faith can be tried with fire. Faith is strengthened through testing.

Tested faith brings out praise to God. Do you remember those three men whom Nebuchadnezzar cast into the furnace, Daniel 3:20? Their faith was sufficient for them not to bow down to the king's image. It was Nebuchadnezzar who had to give way. The king was most astonished that the three men were not immediately incinerated by the fire. He said, '*Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God*', verse 25. The Lord stood by those with faith to trust Him.

There is a day coming, when the inheritance will become a reality, when the precious faith will be vindicated. There will be praise and honour and glory linked to the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. The world then will acknowledge Him as King of kings. What a time of glad rejoicing it will be for all who are with Him then! What a blessing your faith will be shown to be then! Before we finish our consideration of this faith which is so precious, we will refer to 2 Peter 1:1. Here the apostle refers '*to them that have obtained like precious faith with us...*' So, again, we have here

PRECIOUS FAITH.

The apostle writes 'to them...with us' and speaks of 'like precious faith'. I just want to say one thing about this now. The apostle Peter is, in effect, saying, 'the faith I have is exactly the faith you have'. The great apostle and the youngest believer may not have the same *measure* of faith but faith is of equal value to all. It is of the same value,

irrespective of nationality, age, colour, rank or education. How wonderful for us to remember that there is absolutely no difference between any one on the basis of faith in God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us rejoice in this.

May we today give all honour and praise to the Lord Jesus for all He has done and achieved for us and that we can have a part in Him, both now and in eternity.

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