

Our Father's Heart

1 Peter 1:3-12

Dave Simmons was a mentor of mine during my mid-20s. Dave owned the camp where Brenda and I worked for three years after graduating from college. Dave's father was a very harsh and demanding man. One Christmas when they were stationed at Ft. Riley (in the 40s) Dave got a bicycle that came unassembled. Even though Dave was too young to read, his dad told him that if he wanted to ride that bike he would have to put it together. Dave did the best he could but he eventually got so frustrated that he started crying. His dad's response was to knock him aside, saying, "Get away, stupid, I knew you couldn't do it" (*Dad the Family Coach*, p. 33). His dad's nickname for him eventually became "Stoop" which was short for stupid.

Not surprisingly, Dave wasn't a particularly obedient or respectful son. When it was time to decide where to go to college, he had full scholarship offers at his dad's two favorite schools: LSU and West Point. His dad would have been bursting with pride if he'd gone to either of those schools. But instead he went to Georgia Tech in Atlanta because it was 1,500 miles away from his dad.

When I knew Dave, he had been an all-American linebacker at Georgia Tech, had played pro football for the Saints, Cardinals, and Cowboys, had built a youth camp from the ground up, written books, and had spoken to crowds all over the world. Even though Dave was successful and brilliant in many ways, he had a hard time not thinking of himself as stupid. His father's words and attitudes toward him not only shaped the way he related to his dad; they also shaped the way he thought about himself.

A similar thing is true in the spiritual realm. What you think your heavenly Father thinks about you affects the way you relate to Him. This is relevant in our study of 1 Peter because in chapter 1 Peter will tell his readers to be "obedient children"; he will write, "If you address as Father" the One who judges impartially. . . If you think your heavenly Father is gracious and merciful and **for** you, you will hear that command very differently than if you think He's harsh and demanding. Therefore, before he commands us to be obedient children, Peter gives a staggering description of God's great affection toward us. That's what we'll consider today in verses 3 through 12.

Last week we discussed that Peter addressed believers as "exiles" because we are living in a place that isn't really home. Our citizenship is in heaven. We love and seek and obey our Father who is in heaven. If our loyalty to Him and to Jesus and to the Holy Spirit mean that we're out of step with society around us, so be it. We're in good company; the same thing was true of Abraham, David, the prophets, the apostles, and Jesus Himself. While we're living in exile, we have to understand our Father's heart or we'll misinterpret and misdiagnose all sort of circumstances we face. Today's passage makes three grand statements that reveal our Father's heart.

God has welcomed us into His family in a way that is more comprehensive and generous than we can fathom. (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Peter begins with a doxology, a burst of praise to God. He then gives a sweeping overview of the blessings associated with salvation.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In verse 3 Peter refers to "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

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Throughout the gospels Jesus referred to God as His "Father." Those of us who follow Christ have the right to call God **our** Father also (as we'll see later in the chapter). According to His "great mercy" (there is nothing stingy or tentative about God's compassion toward us), God has "caused us to be born again." Peter surely got this imagery from Jesus Himself who told Nicodemus (John 3) that "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." We are born physically into this world into a biological family; when we trust in Jesus alone we are born into God's spiritual family. Peter stresses that God **caused** us to be born again; He makes those who believe His very sons and daughters.

Peter qualifies that God "has caused us to be born again" in several ways. First, we are "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead." A working definition of hope is "confident expectation" about the future. If your hope is dead, your future looks bleak. If your hope is alive, you are confident and expectant about your future. Being born into God's family, you now have a **living hope** because you have a **living Savior**. Your hope is alive because your Savior is alive. Even though you may be living in exile now, you are confident that you'll make it home safely.

4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Second, we are born again "to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" for us. In biblical times, your inheritance was often tied to the land your family owned. If you were sent into exile, your inheritance was gone. We see this today when people are forced from their home countries with only the clothes on their backs. As we mentioned last week, the original recipients of Peter's letter might have literally been exiled from Rome; if so, they knew firsthand the hopelessness of losing an earthly inheritance.

But when you are born into God's family, God keeps an inheritance for you in heaven that is untouchable. It won't decay; it cannot be polluted; it won't fade with time. This

inheritance includes every spiritual and personal blessing you can imagine: face-to-face fellowship with Jesus Himself, a place in the new heaven and new earth, a glorified body, etc.

We not only have an inheritance that is untouchable. Third, in verse 5 we learn that in the mean time - while we're living in exile - we are "being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Our faith and God's protection go hand in hand; God guards us as we trust in Him. When Christ returns our full salvation (including our inheritance) will be revealed.

If you want theological overview/summary of your heavenly Father's heart, this is it: **God has welcomed us into His family in a way that is more comprehensive and generous than we can fathom.** When you trust in Jesus, you are born again into God's family; you have the full status as a son or daughter of the one, true living God. Our souls are being guarded by God as we trust Him through this life, while in exile. When Christ is revealed, we will receive an inheritance that makes any riches on this earth look pitiful by comparison. God wants us to know that He has welcomed us into His family in a comprehensive and lavish way.

But what about all the terrible things that happen in this world? Is Peter suggesting that we stay positive and ignore our own suffering and the suffering all around us because one day we'll be home? To the contrary, Peter says we should face our trials very directly, understanding that our suffering is valuable both now and when Christ returns.

The trials of this life do not quench our joy; rather, they prove the genuineness of our faith and will result in praise, glory, and honor. (1 Peter 1:6-9)

Peter is probably referring to everything he just wrote about being born again to a living hope, having an untouchable inheritance, etc. when he wrote:

6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Throughout 1 Peter (and the NT really), the trials of this life are "for a little while"; as difficult as it is to endure, 70 or 80 years are "a little while" compared to eternity. In this life we have been "grieved by various trials"; we experience difficulties and sufferings that cause grief and heartache. Nobody needs to be convinced of this reality, right?

- We experience trials/hardship in marriage and parenting.
- Physical, emotional, and mental illness.
- Financial distress and poverty.
- Peter will mention being reviled for the name of Christ (simply because we're seeking to follow Him).

Lest we misinterpret our trials as evidence of God's displeasure or neglect, Peter is eager to explain in verse 7 that these trials are necessary to test and prove that our faith

is genuine. It's relatively easy to trust God when everything is going your way. But when you're living in exile and you experience trials that rock your world, your faith is **tested**; that's when you find out whether or not your faith is **genuine**.

Peter writes that this type of faith is "more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire." Gold was among the most precious commodities in Peter's day, but its' preciousness pales in comparison to genuine faith. That type of faith, Peter writes, will be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus. I think Peter is talking about the praise, glory, and honor that will be ours when Christ returns. Once again Peter has us consider our time in exile in light of our eventual rescue. This doesn't lead to escapism or triumphalism; it leads to perseverance because **faith tested by trials and found genuine will be rewarded**. When Jesus returns, nobody whose faith has been proven genuine through trials will look back with regrets.

8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Verse 8 reminds us of the account recorded in John 20. Jesus had appeared to all of the disciples but Thomas. Thomas had told the others that he wouldn't believe Jesus had been raised from the dead unless he saw Jesus and touched the wounds in his hands and side. Jesus graciously told Thomas that he could look at his hands and could touch the wounds in his side. Thomas declared, "My Lord and my God!" In response to Thomas, we read in John 20:29:

29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The recipients of 1 Peter were in that category, and we're in that category. We love Him, believe in Him, and take joy in our salvation even though we've never seen Him.

What Peter is describing here should be experienced in community. We are supposed to see each other's faith proven genuine through trials. Honestly, one thing that helps me persevere is seeing the preciousness of the faith of others in this very church.

- I have seen people continue to trust God in the midst of intense, prolonged physical and emotional suffering. They have continued to trust, worship, and serve God.
- I've seen people handle financial setbacks with calm, reasonable faith. I know a man who is genuinely fascinated by the things God is teaching him through his financial trials.
- I have seen people share the gospel with family and friends only to be ridiculed. As difficult as it is, they continue to have faith and joy.
- Our Recovery Ministries at Faith (Pure Desire, Griefshare, Divorce Care, Stephen Ministry) are all led and staffed by people whose faith has been refined through trials. None of them would claim that they've "arrived," but they can give firsthand accounts of how their faith has been tested through trials and been proven genuine.

When I see the tested genuineness of others' faith, I am instructed and encouraged to trust God in the midst of my trials.

In verses 10 through 12 Peter stresses the privilege of living after Easter.

Living after the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are more privileged than both prophets and angels. (1 Peter 1:10-12)

Even though his readers were living in exile, they were experiencing spiritual realities that attracted the attention of both prophets and angels.

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, 11 inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

Prophets such as Isaiah prophesied about the grace that they didn't personally experience, grace that is only experienced by those who lived after the death and resurrection of Jesus. Peter said that they sought to know "what person or time" to which their prophecies referred. They weren't trying to predict a date; they wanted to know the general circumstances that "the Spirit of Christ in them" was indicating.

So, for example, in Isaiah 53, Isaiah prophesied that the Suffering Servant would be "pierced through for our transgressions," "crushed for our iniquities," and that He would "justify the many." Peter suggests that Isaiah would have been intensely interested in whether or not this Messiah would appear in his own day or a future generation; in this way Isaiah could set his expectations accordingly and could give wise counsel to others.

12 It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

Prophets such as Isaiah were serving others, not themselves. Even though Isaiah didn't live to experience the blessings described in Isaiah 53, he recorded them so that we might have confirmation that God is faithful to provide the salvation He promised. Even though we're living in exile, we are more privileged than the prophets; we are experiencing what they only anticipated. Verse 12 says that "the Holy Spirit sent from heaven" guided and empowered people to explain these "things" to us. If you have heard the truth about Jesus and believed, it wasn't by happenstance; your Father in heaven sent His very Spirit to empower people to bring this message to you. Your Father in heaven wanted you.

At the end of verse 12 Peter mentions that the things that have been announced to us (i.e., the truths of the gospel) are "things into which angels long to look." We have statements throughout Scripture that the angels have an interest in the things that happen on this earth. In Luke 15:10, for example, we're told that angels in heaven

rejoice “over one sinner who repents.” The fact that angels have a longing to peer into the outworking of the gospel on earth is further confirmation that we are privileged people. Even though we are temporarily living in exile, we are people of privilege living in days of fulfillment.

Conclusion. Let me remind you why all of this is important for us. If you don’t understand your Father’s heart, you won’t be inclined to trust Him, you won’t want to obey Him, you won’t really want to spend time with Him, etc. You will misinterpret all sorts of things you’re experiencing in exile.

I’m really describing my own spiritual journey here. When I came to Christ, obeying a rule made sense to me, but “obeying my heavenly Father” was an empty concept - largely because of the nature of my relationship with my earthly father. I can’t remember a single time I thought, “I’m going to do (or not do) something because my dad told me to.” He just didn’t make any demands on me. I can’t blame all my pathologies on my dad, but I do find that I instinctively relate to my heavenly Father as I did to my earthly father. A comment at his funeral in 1990 makes the point. . .

My dad died at the age of 59 when I was 31 years old; I’d been a pastor here for two years. He and my mom had gotten divorced a couple of years earlier. My entire life I had heard people praise my dad for all the wonderful things he had done for them and others. At his funeral one of his friends gave a eulogy in which he mentioned some of these things, concluding with the statement, “Craig was always there for us.” In my cynicism and pain, I thought, “So that’s where he was. . . there with them.” I had very few memories of my dad being *with* me. Consequently I don’t have an intuitive understanding of a relationship with a “father” - earthly or heavenly.

This means that a passage such as the one we’ve studied today is incredibly rich and instructive for me. It tells me that any demands my heavenly Father makes on me (and as we’ll see next week, there are many) flow from a heart of compassion and wisdom. God uses the trials that I experience to prove the genuineness of my faith. I am not a bother or an afterthought to God; He sent His Spirit from heaven to lead and empower Bob Bowen and Joel Piper to explain the good news to me. Even though I’m living in exile, I am guarded through faith until the day that He brings me safely home.