

Sufferings and Glories, Past, Present and Future: An Introduction to 1 Peter

Written on: November 30, 2023

Article by: Paul Birston

Life in Anatolia

Peter's readers lived in Anatolia (which means "east") at the eastern end of the Roman Empire which comprises most of Turkey today. The people of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia had multi-cultural origins and diverse national identities.



They were a mixture of Jews and Gentiles. Synagogues, idols, stone pagan temples, mass sports and entertainment complexes and emperor worship surrounded them along with the lure of commercial wealth via local and major international trade routes. Religious and secular forces posed significant moral, spiritual and physical threats to new Christians. Thus Peter addresses them as aliens, scattered and chosen (1:1), separated and saved for a new and different life in Christ.

As a result of their faith, Christians in Anatolia experienced trials, distress and sufferings (1:6–7; 2:19–20; 3:14, 17; 4:13, 16; 5:19–20). Simultaneously, through God's mercy, grace, peace, the sanctifying work of His Spirit and the blood of Jesus shed on the cross, they also experienced foretastes of glories in the midst of their sufferings. Peter speaks more intensely of the connection between sufferings and glories than any other Bible book.

God the Father

God the Father is ever present in the thoughts of Peter, including His eternal will and His understanding of His people's sufferings and their ultimate outcome in glories.

Throughout 1 Peter, God the Father reveals His purposeful choosing of His people by His own foreknowledge (1:2). God the Father's eternal purposes include: saving and protecting His people (1:3–5), seeing them walk in Jesus' footsteps and following His example of patient endurance in suffering and service (2:18–25), having His people blessing others and inheriting a blessing (3:9), having them cease from sin and live for His will (4:1–2) and grasping and applying His purpose for prayer (4:7).

God's purposes begin and find fulfillment in eternity. God's eternal foreknowledge precedes time. He protects His people through time. He holds their imperishable inheritance beyond time in eternity. The central event of His redemptive purpose in time and eternity is the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son. The truths of God the Father's eternal plan that 1 Peter reveals, helps his readers understand their present plight and their future relief, vindication and glory.

Jesus Christ

Jesus' sufferings and glories and their temporal and eternal dimensions are central in the lives of Peter's readers. Jesus' suffering, death, resurrection, and sprinkled blood are the foundation of their salvation and future "living hope" (1:3; 3:18; 4:1). His sufferings and glories inspire "faith and hope in God" (1:17–21). Jesus is the Suffering Servant of God of whom Isaiah wrote (Isaiah 53:9; 1 Peter 2:22). Jesus receives glory from His Father and makes the glorification of His people possible.

Jesus also makes sense of their present predicament which otherwise would be incomprehensible from a worldly point of view. Jesus' example in suffering magnifies their appreciation and love for Him: "though you have not seen Him, you love Him" (1:8a).

Through His example, Jesus forges the new identity of Peter's readers' as the people of God and their purpose in His mission (2:9–10). His intentional example of suffering is a key motivator for Peter's readers to engage in the work God has for them and to steadfastly endure. Jesus is the perfect model for living in time with a view to eternity.

Through Jesus Christ and His Spirit, the eternal strength of God comes to aid Peter's readers in the present time. Jesus sufferings and glories strengthen them to bear up "under sorrows when suffering unjustly" as Jesus did (2:19).

Jesus Christ demonstrates His total commitment to His Father and His people by bearing their sins "in His body on the cross" (2:24). The cross of Jesus and His sufferings on it are the central focal point and object of their faith which in turn empower Peter's readers to endure.

Victorious over death, Jesus gives the people of God cause for rejoicing and the certainty of eternal victory and vindication. The fact that 1 Peter's readers live in an entirely new Messianic era is a profound dimension of 1 Peter. His readers' apprehension of God's Messiah and God's eternal purposes change their perspectives on eternity and the meaning of life in the present.

Holy Spirit

God's Holy Spirit works powerfully in the lives of Peter's readers through their present sufferings in preparing them for future glories. In the present, He works continuously to sanctify them (1:2). God's Spirit living in them from this point on immediately sets them apart from their former lives of sin and those still living in it. He affirms God's choosing

them. From this point on, the Spirit's ongoing sanctification moves them farther away from the licentiousness of their past and further into the holy character of God and living in reverent fear of Him (1:13–17).

It is by the Spirit's power they have hope of obeying Jesus (1:2) and living the sanctified life God requires of them. He sets them apart for God and His exclusive use for His mission. This means monumental change in the internal and external lives of those becoming Christians from out of the world. This change creates conflict without at the same time as God can bring forth hope, peace "in the fullest measure" (1:2), and glorious inexpressible joy within (1:8).

In the past, according to God's foreknowledge and work in His prophets, "the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow" (1:10–11). God sent His Holy Spirit from heaven as the One by which His servants preached the gospel to them (1:12).

God's blessing of the "Spirit of glory and of God" rests upon them as they suffer when being "reviled for the name of Christ" (4:14). This is a profound reality and paradox in several ways.

First, His people are never alone in their sufferings. God's Spirit is inwardly present but invisible both to Christians and those reviling them. The radiance and splendour of God's glory manifests itself visibly and invisibly in the moral excellence of His people. This is part of their new identity and purpose in Christ: "that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (2:9b).

Second, the fact He "rests on them" (4:14) through the reviling is a powerful affirmation of God's ongoing presence and His graceful sustaining power to endure.

Third, since He is the Spirit of glory, God's glory is manifest to His people and to their opponents. In the end, at the revelation of Jesus Christ, these antagonists will ironically by their slander bring glory to God through the morally excellent steadfast behaviour of His people who have suffered with and for Him (1:7; 2:12).

In addition to the Spirit of Glory, only Peter reveals God's promise that, "when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive *the unfading crown of glory*" (5:4).

Identity, Consolation and Purpose Now and to Eternity

As an Apostle and elder, Peter is keenly aware of the present realities his readers face daily. Their sufferings are real. Sufferings bring their focus sharply to the present. Suffering arouses strong desires for immediate relief through an end to its causes and effects as soon as possible whether from persecution for the gospel, pain, disease, or whatever adverse conditions life brings.

From a human perspective, suffering in the past and the future seem distant from present sufferings. From God's perspective, however, the past and the future are

crucially relevant to enduring sufferings according to God's will in the present and to fulfilling His eternal mission. The future hope of glory and with it total relief from suffering are built squarely upon the foundation of Christ's past sufferings and the knowledge of the glories that awaited Him. These are now a proven and secure eternal reality for His people.

The sharing of sufferings and glories among Christ and His people add significantly to our understanding of God and His purposes for His people, past, present, and future. To this end, 1 Peter is one of God's most powerful transforming tools for his people.

Through the revelations of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in 1 Peter, God gives His people a whole new identity in Christ. He shows them how vastly better they have become as His royal priesthood versus the limited temporary rewards of their former lives. God has broken open for them whole new infinite vistas of understanding, first of all regarding who He is, and second of all, who they have become in Him.

Leaving the physical stone temples of Jerusalem, of local idols and of emperors behind, they have become spiritual stones in a living spiritual house with Jesus Christ as the Chief Corner Stone (2:4–8). Christians no longer have to fear what their neighbours fear. With this new identity comes power to overcome. God gives His consolation in their present sufferings which enables them to look and move forward.

Further, God gives purpose and meaning to their lives. Christians of all ages have crucial roles to live out with Him in fulfilling His mission to reach out, proclaim the gospel and His excellencies and to call others into His marvelous light.

Golden, BC

“...Coming to Him as the Living Stone”...

Written on: November 30, 2023

Article by: Dave Knutson

Reading: 1 Peter 2:4-10

There are a lot of books out there on self-image. Most of them are all about how to improve it. Self-image is the personal view that we have of ourselves. It's the way that we picture ourselves – our self-portrait. It works as an internal point of self-reference, saying here's an asset – there's a liability. It's an ongoing assessment of who we are and what we are about. And while self-image is important, it can also deceive us. I might be better than what I think or a whole lot worse. It's not hard to get it wrong, because I am not impartial.



Well, the same thing may be true for God's people as a whole. Every group has a self-image. And when a group is small and its members are scattered, it's just natural to think that you are not important. Perhaps a better measure than self-image is the view that God has of us. He is impartial and He knows what He's talking about.

That is what the text for this article is all about. It's about how God sees His church. It's about the importance that God gives to His people. It's really about the high honour of belonging to God.

Now this image that God has of the church is expressed as a metaphor. A metaphor is a figure of speech comparing two things, by saying that one thing is the other. Like saying, that that man's a rock. Jesus himself said: 'I am the door of the sheepfold'. (Please refer to Chad Ramsey's article in this issue for other metaphors in 1 Peter)

Well, in 1 Peter 2:4, Jesus is a living stone and we are coming to him. Of course it is true that we cannot be Christians at all if we have not already come to him. If we have not already been sprinkled with his blood. If we have not already had our souls purified through obedience to the truth. If we have not already been redeemed by his sacrifice. And as we read what Peter has written it is also clear that we must continually come to Jesus. Once is not enough. We came to him the first time, in order to be saved, and we must keep coming to him, in order to live the saved life.

So it is not surprising that when Peter calls Jesus a stone, that He is also a 'living stone'. Peter has already said that we have been born again to a *living hope*. That

God's word is both *living and abiding*. So it makes sense that Jesus who is revealed by that word is a living stone. He is God and eternally alive. He is the giver of life and of new spiritual life.

As a living stone, Jesus has a history. He was rejected by men and still is. But he has always been choice and precious to God. As the Psalmist put it, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone" (118:22).

God knew that it would happen and said so in scripture. He also affirmed the value of that stone, making it the chief corner stone. So it is that when we come to Jesus as a living stone, we agree with God. We come to Him to receive all of the things which God set out to accomplish through Him. And when we do, when we come to Him in faith, we too become living stones. God makes us into living stones and shapes us for his purposes, one of which is to build a spiritual house...a new dwelling place for Himself.

This is a radically unexpected outcome. That God would not only condescend to dwell *among* his people but to dwell *within* them.

There is an obvious contrast between the church and the old temple in Jerusalem. That temple was built out of things that were not alive, things like stones and timber, silver and gold. It was a thing and not a person. And because it was not a person, it had nothing in common with God. But God's new temple is made up of people. It is alive and made up of living souls. Each is indwelt by God the Spirit and all together we are fashioned into God's dwelling place on earth.

And then to extend the metaphor just a bit, the temple is now also the priesthood. There is no traffic in and out of God's presence because the priests do not leave and neither does God.

Blood sacrifice is over and done with and those that remain are the spiritual kind. The blood of Jesus was shed once for all. It was acceptable to God and atoned for our sins – for all time. Therefore there are no more blood sacrifices. Those that remain express unity and fellowship with God in obedience to His will. The praise and prayers that we offer in worship come up before him as acceptable sacrifices. We are empowered to make them because the blood of Jesus has qualified us to do so.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus has now taken his seat at the right hand of God. That he intercedes on our behalf, and does so on the basis of his sacrifice. He is our high priest and through him we enter the immediate presence of the Father. And so it is that "through him (Jesus) our spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God" (vs 5). They are pleasing to God because we are *in Christ*.

But the things that we now offer to God are spiritual. When we worship God in spirit and truth, that is a spiritual sacrifice. When we honour him, obey him and serve him, these are more spiritual sacrifices. When we pray to him, acknowledging him as God and thanking him, we offer spiritual sacrifices. And with these, God is pleased.

Peter turns next to scriptures that foresaw the coming of Jesus and which also anticipated a new spiritual house. They predicted that not everyone would agree with God's assessment of his Son (I Pet. 2:6-8)

For this is contained in Scripture: "BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER stone, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone," and, "A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE"; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.

The first passage is a citation from Isaiah 28:16 – but it is not a quote. Peter gives the sense of what Isaiah said.

Picture a construction project where God is the builder. He is at work again in Zion as the only one able to build the sort of dwelling fit for his presence. Instead of using blocks of stone, God is shaping a building out of people. The person that He starts with is chosen and precious. It's the only one suitable, the only one qualified to do the job. It is God's cornerstone and as such, governs every aspect of the building. All of the other stones find their place relative to this one.

In this chosen one God is laying the cornerstone. In the Hebrew text, Isaiah 28:16 reads – "He who believes in it will not be in a hurry" (or disturbed). But Peter quotes from the Greek O.T., the Septuagint which says – "He who believes in Him will not be ashamed"

The gist of both readings is, that God is laying a new foundation. The focus is on the one who puts his trust in the Lord. And if a person who has trusted in the Lord must then must hurry away in haste, then it is clear that he has been disappointed. Both versions capture the same idea. That we will never be put to shame when we put our trust in God and especially so when we put our trust in His new cornerstone.

Did you notice that Peter refers to the stone as a person and not a thing. He changes the word from '*it*' to '*him*'. So Peter says that "whoever believes in *Him* will not be disappointed". That pretty much sums up the two possible reactions. God said that this stone is precious. I chose it. The question is, will it be so for you and me?

For those who agree with God, that stone *is* precious. It has made all of the others into *living* stones. It has shaped them into the temple of the Lord.

But for those who disbelieve, it makes them trip and fall. It is their downfall. They are disappointed by it, for it is not the one that they were looking for. It does not measure up, because it can never be used to build what they want.

Peter is speaking historically when he says that: "THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER stone". Jesus quoted from Psalm

118:22. He said that this passage predicted – that the leaders of Israel would not accept him as the messiah (Mt. 21:42, Mk. 12:10, Lk 20:17)

Standing before the Sanhedrin, Peter said the same thing in Acts 4:11:

...let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by this name this man stands here before you in good health. “He is the STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED by you, THE BUILDERS, but WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone. “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved.”

There is no question about what this metaphor means. Jesus was the stone and the Jewish leaders were the builders. God chose and sent him. They rejected and killed him. God raised him from the dead and has elevated him to the highest place in the new temple that He is building. Apart from the sacrifice of Jesus, there is no other way to be saved.

Returning to our passage in 1 Peter, consider the last sentence in 1st Pet 2:8. Peter writes – “for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this doom they were also appointed.”

What does he mean?

Is Peter saying that the leaders had no choice? That God put them up to it or in some way limited their choices? In what sense were they appointed to do this?

If we look closely, we will notice that they were appointed to stumble. They were not appointed to disobey. They stumbled *because* they disobeyed and not the other way around. When God destined Christ to be the kind of king that he was, he also destined that a certain kind of person would stumble over him. He was not the messiah that they were looking for. He was good and righteous. He pointed out their sins and sometimes embarrassed them. He said “love your enemies”, which they were not about to do. So they hated him enough, to put him on a cross.

God knew that they would. He knew, that even though as Israelites they *were* his people, yet as sinners they were not. Those who had bought the priesthood from the Romans were not the kind of priests that God wanted. They didn’t know what it was to *be* holy and didn’t recognize God when He lived among them as a man.

But it didn’t have to be like that. And those who stumbled at first, could well have changed their minds. As a matter of fact, some did. We read in Acts 6:7 that at that time, many priests were becoming obedient to the faith. The point is, that God did not consign the leaders to unbelief. They chose that for themselves.

What a difference, faith makes. We are now God’s chosen race, His family here on earth. We have been born into it, conceived by the word of God. As God’s children,

we're part of a royal family, qualified also to offer spiritual sacrifices, since God has appointed us to His priesthood.

God has taken us and made us his own. We are a people for his own possession and he has just the one. In return, we belong to him and to no one else. Therefore our task on earth is to proclaim the excellence of the one who has called us from darkness into the light of his presence.

God has called us by his own glory and excellence. 2nd Pt. 1:3. He is not only sovereign in dimensions of his deity, he is also perfect in person and character. He is righteous and just, forgiving and gracious. And in the person of Jesus, he never let go of goodness, to take hold of sin.

He *was* perfect and he *is* perfect, excellent through and through. He has made us anew and it is up to us to broadcast His excellence. When our lives display the excellence promised by the gospel of Jesus Christ, it may then be heard with the force that God intends.

It is then as part of the Lord's temple, that we tell the story of Jesus. We tell how God has broken the grip of sin in our lives and has taken us to a realm where it has lost its appeal. Its a place of light and hope where forgiveness is never in short supply. It's a marvelous place, a place of wonder where we are constantly amazed by God's goodness toward us.

Because, there was a time when none of this was true. We have always been people, but not always God's people. We needed mercy, long before 'the Word became flesh', we were not his people and he was not our God.

But God wants us to know, that all of that has changed. If you are not his people, you can be. And if we do belong to him, then God wants us to live in the power of his presence, every moment of every day. He wants us to proclaim the excellence of the One who calls all people on earth to Himself, so that all may come.

Above and Beyond: Christian Conduct in a Contrary World – From 1 Peter

Written on: November 30, 2023
Article by: Kevin Cleary

Peter writes to Christians who are called to live faithfully in the face of mounting opposition (1 Pet 1:6) In the face of persecution and suffering, Peter wants to encourage faithfulness and to enable the effectiveness of God's people. He doesn't want them just to hang on and get by, but wants them to grow and thrive as they achieve God's good purposes in the world.



One of my favorite stories of Christian love is one that comes from a trip that my family calls *the worst vacation ever*. I was not with them but most of the rest of my family was. They were traveling to Alabama to attend a wedding, but while they were in route Hurricane Katrina hit destroying the venue and much of the coast. Thankfully they realized what had happened and stopped heading south while in Tennessee. But as they started back, they ran into car trouble in Franklin Kentucky. This was Saturday night, and they found a motel but were at a loss as to what to do – except for Sunday morning. Everyone knows what to do then. They found the local congregation of the Lord's people and showed up for Sunday services. Thankfully the Church in Franklin also knew what to do. They were friendly and welcoming and made sure that before services were over, they knew who these strangers were and what they were doing. When they learned the situation one of the members (a manager at the local Ford dealership) opened the auto shop where he worked and got the repairs done on the mini van. The members there also made sure that everyone was fed and comfortable and had extra money to cover added expenses including the car repair which they also paid for.

If you had never heard the phrase “going above and beyond” you might invent it just to describe the care and hospitality demonstrated by the Franklin Ky Church of Christ. I would suggest though that it describes or should describe the attitude and behaviour of all Christians as they live their Christian duty and demonstrate their love one for another. I might further suggest that this is exactly the kind of thing that Peter has in mind as he reaches out to the struggling faithful.

God always Goes Above and Beyond Expectations – Consider:

- That He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
- You're Not Just Forgiven, so don't just forgive. I Peter 1:18-19 Knowing you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from you forefathers not with perishable things such as silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ, like a lamb without spot of blemish. We might ask, what does it mean to forgive and who do you know who has done it? When was the last time you forgave someone?
- *How* Jesus forgives: It required great cost and enormous sacrifice in order for Jesus to forgive. "For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life." (Rom 5:8-10) What about Phil 2:6-8, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross". Jesus had to go on a rescue mission. He had to leave the glory of heaven and then suffer humiliation, torture and death and guess what? This was all for people who weren't asking. Is that what forgiveness looks like for us? Do we seek forgiveness and reconciliation while the person who wronged us is still doing it? Do we go to the person who has wronged us, or do we sit back and wait? Do we reach out to offer forgiveness to those who don't like us or want us? What about when we need forgiveness, who do we want to go to? If you have wronged someone stop what you're doing and go apologise and seek reconciliation.
- You're Not Just Cared For, so don't just care. We can read in I Pet 5:7 that we should cast our cares upon God because he cares for us. How much does he care? In everyone's favorite verse we can read "God so loved the world that he gave his only son." In Rom 8:32ff "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" Some have asked "does God care about the suffering, death, hardship, anguish the cruelty that people may endure in this life?" What I can tell you is that people who ask that question don't know Him. They don't know his plan, and they don't know his people.

What about us though, do we care?

James describes a man who sees his brother in need James 2:15-16 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? I must add that I hear another story every day of some brother or sister who called or picked something up or took time to check in on someone else. I also

know that there are times when I withdraw my concern when I think to myself, I don't have time to help with that or I don't have the means. God didn't just care, he invested his heart in us, he sees us in need, separated and alone and he doesn't just give us a hand – he provided a way to make us all that we could be. He has redeemed us and then added us to his family, secured our eternity and made us Holy as Priests I Pet 2:9-12. It would be like paying someone's debt then buying them a new house.

You're Not Just Righteous, so don't just be right (I Peter 1:14-15) "As obedient children do not be conformed to the passions of you former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct".

Remember when Jesus said, that unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Mat 5:20)? Maybe you read that and thought, what? how is that even possible? certainly the original hearers would have thought this. This is a key concept that we need to understand. God is perfect I Jn 1:5. "In him is no darkness at all." So only those who are perfect can be in his Kingdom. The scribes and Pharisees certainly didn't qualify. But Jesus wasn't talking about a person who did all the right stuff at all the right times. The righteousness that comes from God is not about being right it's about being made anew. I Peter 2:9 "But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light".

Do we read that and say "wow I'm pretty impressive!" I must really be something to be qualified for all that. Of course not, we understand that our own efforts are worthless and hopeless unless empowered by God. I unapologetically work as hard as I can to obey God and live according to his word and I believe every Christian must do that. However, I don't for one second think that I am doing it alone or that I have achieved anything. I obey because of who I am because of what God's grace has done in my life. A truly righteous person lives God's will to the best of their ability because of what God has done, because of who they are in Christ. They do not do so in order to accomplish their own salvation. You can't get there by your own efforts. So don't just be right, understand that you are God's child...that you are freed from sin and death and then live like it!

When God works he does more than we can ask or imagine . He goes so far beyond what we need and beyond what we can even understand. As we live this life we are to be a manifestation of the God whom we serve. People need to look at us and see a reflection of our Saviour. If that is to be the case then his Church has to look as special as he says it is. His people need to look as sanctified as he says they are. Jesus said that "I when I am lifted up will draw all men unto me". Are we lifting him up in our lives in our churches to the extent that people can see the light that they so desperately need and experience the Love and Grace that God wants to show them.

Barrie ON

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We speak and serve to the glory of God!

Written on: November 30, 2023
Article by: Roy Davison

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4:10, 11

Peter tells us to use God's gifts to serve others. "As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Peter 4:10).

By the grace of God, every Christian has abilities that can contribute to the well-being of the church. Along with ability comes responsibility to use that ability for the good of others.

God expects us to be good stewards of the gifts He has given us. Being a good steward means taking responsibility for something and making good use of it.

Because our abilities are God-given, we may not use them for our own glory. Paul told the Corinthians, who were misusing spiritual gifts, that they had no reason to be puffed up. "For who makes you differ *from another*? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received *it*?" (1 Corinthians 4:7).

We must glorify God, not ourselves.

When we glorify God we give Him what is due because to Him "belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever" (1 Peter 4:11). As our Creator, He deserves our worship and adoration.

We owe God glory because everything we have, including our abilities and gifts, comes from Him. He is the source of all good things in our lives, and by giving Him glory, we acknowledge His greatness and express our gratitude for His blessings.

We glorify God in our speech and service.

"If anyone speaks, *let him speak* as the oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11). To speak as he oracles of God, our message must be in complete agreement with the Scriptures, what we say must align with the teachings and principles found in the Bible.

When we speak as the oracles of God, we glorify God.

Jesus explained: "He who speaks from himself seeks his own glory; but He who seeks the glory of the One who sent Him is true, and no unrighteousness is in Him" (John 7:18).

Even Jesus did not bring His “own” doctrine but spoke the message God gave Him. “For I have not spoken on My own *authority*; but the Father who sent Me gave Me a command, what I should say and what I should speak. And I know that His command is everlasting life. Therefore, whatever I speak, just as the Father has told Me, so I speak” (John 12:49, 50).

How dare we then be so presumptuous as to speak other than in complete agreement with the oracles of God? Those who speak otherwise, seek their own glory, not the glory of the Father.

“If anyone ministers, *let him do it* as with the ability which God supplies” (1 Peter 4:11).

We can serve only because God has enabled us to serve. We must therefore give Him credit for all we do. “And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him” (Colossians 3:17). We thank God for everything He enables us to do by the power of Christ. Paul says: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).

We speak as the oracles of God and we serve as with the ability God supplies “that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Peter 4:11).

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METAPHORS FOR CHRISTIANS: A STUDY OF 1 PETER 2:1-12

Written on: November 30, 2023

Article by: Chad Ramsey

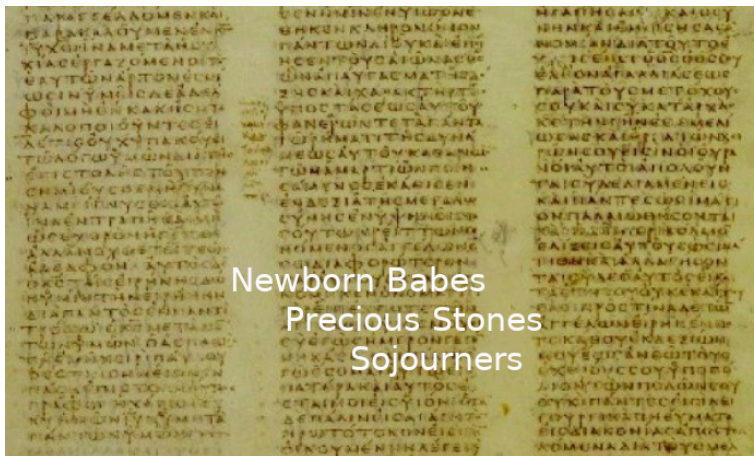
A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes one thing as if it is another.

Metaphors help us understand lesser-known concepts by comparing them to known truths. David used a metaphor when he famously wrote, “The Lord is my shepherd” (Psalm 23:1). In that statement, he was

comparing God’s relationship with him to the relationship a shepherd has with his flock. The statement was used to emphasize God’s ability to provide for and protect His people. It helps us understand the kind of relationship the Lord is willing to have with His followers.

Metaphors are used in the New Testament to help describe the church. For example, Paul told Timothy: “These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:14-15). In this statement the church is said to be “the house of God” and “the pillar and ground of the truth.” Both comparisons help us understand something about the church. As “the house of God,” the church, like the temple, must be a place of worship characterized by holiness; as “the pillar and ground of the truth,” it must provide the basis from which truth radiates. Elsewhere, the church is compared to a body (1 Corinthians 12:12-27; Ephesians 1:22-23), a flock (Acts 20:28), a bride (Ephesians 5:22-33), and a family (Ephesians 3:14-15). The analogies drawn between the church and these known concepts help us better understand the purpose and identity of the church.

In 1 Peter 2:1-12, Christians are described in three specific ways: as newborn babes (verses 1-3), as precious stones (verses 4-10), and as sojourners (verses 11-12). Each description helps us appreciate an aspect of our identity as God’s people. Like newborn babes, we must seek to grow and develop. Like precious stones, we are extremely valuable, because we “are now the people of God” (verse 10). Like sojourners and pilgrims, we are not at home in this world and therefore should not live for it. All three comparisons were helpful to individuals whose faith was being “tested by fire” (1 Peter 1:7), and they continue to be needed today. Those who face persecution must grow



Newborn Babes
Precious Stones
Sojourners

spiritually, lest they become too weak to go on. Those who face persecution must realize their value to God, lest they become discouraged. And those who face persecution must focus on the ultimate goal, lest they become entrapped in worldly pursuits. Whether we ever have to endure physical opposition to our faith, these are lessons we should learn.

Newborn Babes (1 Peter 2:1-3)

Those who have obeyed the truth (cf. 1 Peter 2:22) are supposed to live differently from people of the world. Stressing this point, Peter noted that we are to remove “all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking” from our lives (1 Peter 2:1). These sinful behaviours are characteristic of unbelievers, but such should not be true of Christians.

The sins Peter warns his audience about all impact relationships in one way or another. The phrase translated “all evil speaking” (1 Peter 2:1 NKJV) is also rendered “all slander” (ESV). Rather than sinning against and harming one another, Christians are to “love one another fervently with a pure heart” (1 Peter 1:22).

The transformation from malicious to loving behaviour requires growth. Because Peter wrote to those who had “been born again” (1 Peter 1:23), he compared them to “newborn babes” (1 Peter 2:2). This comparison is important, for it reminds us of both our need for growth and the dependance we must have on God’s word. We must, as Peter noted, “desire the pure milk of the word” in order to grow (verse 2). Our desire for the milk of God’s word is made stronger when we develop an appreciation for His gracious plan (1 Peter 2:3).

Precious Stones (1 Peter 2:4-10)

Those who long for the nourishment God’s word provides will seek to develop a relationship with His Son—Jesus Christ. Encouraging this, Peter wrote: “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious” (1 Peter 2:4). That Jesus is under consideration is made clear by the Old Testament passages quoted in verses 6-8 (cf. Isaiah 28:16; Psalm 118:22; Isaiah 8:14). He is indeed a “living stone” because death could not hold Him!

Followers of Jesus are also described as “living stones” (1 Peter 2:5). This designation reminds us that we can enjoy eternal life because He lives. Those who unite with Jesus “are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5). The metaphor calls to mind the temple and the worship that takes place therein. This does not mean the church is identical to the temple, for there are differences, as Guy N. Woods recognized. He wrote: “In this spiritual house—the church—there is a ‘holy priesthood.’ Here the figure changes from a building contemplated as a structure composed of many stones to a house occupied by servants. The servants are designated as priests. Under the law of Moses the priests constituted a special class empowered to officiate in worship. Inasmuch as all Christians are authorized to engage in the worship of God, all

Christians are priests, and thus together constitute a priesthood of believers. This priesthood is 'holy,' because its members have been separated to the sacred purpose of worship before the altar of God" (*A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles, Volume VIII*, 58). Those to whom Peter wrote correctly recognized Jesus as the precious stone that He is. Because of this, the believers are also precious (1 Peter 2:7 NASB). According to Woods, "The preciousness of the stone of the foundation is acquired by the 'living stones' (children of God) which rest upon it" (60).

Unlike believers, those who rejected Jesus and crucified Him failed to recognize His worth. This was not unforeseen. Instead, it was prophesied (1 Peter 2:7-8). So Peter wrote: "They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed" (verse 8). This does not mean the disobedient had no choice. Rather, it means they chose the wrong path. In contrast, believers are described as "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy" (1 Peter 2:9-10).

Sojourners (1 Peter 2:11-12)

Having affirmed the relationship Christians enjoy with Jesus, Peter reminded his audience of their temporary status, both on earth and among those who persecute them. He described them as "sojourners and pilgrims" (1 Peter 2:11 NKJV), "aliens and strangers" (NASB), or "foreigners and exiles" (NIV). Regardless of the translation, the terms convey that Christians are in a temporary situation.

Given their status as sojourners, Peter urged his readers to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11). Because time is limited, we must serve the Lord rather than destructive lusts. When we behave properly, we make an impact on our community. Those who do so are able to withstand the critical examination of outsiders. In fact, Christians who live properly not only deflect the attacks of the world but also give critics a reason to "glorify God in the day of visitation" (verse 12). This occurs when enemies of Christianity are led to consider and obey its demands by the godly lives of the faithful (cf. Matthew 5:16).

Conclusion

From our study of the metaphors used in 1 Peter 2:1-12, we learn three important lessons. First, *spiritual growth is not optional*. Each Christian should desire to feed upon and grow from God's word. This will not occur if we fail to read, study, and meditate upon Scripture. Neither will it occur if we fail to properly apply what we learn. As the psalmist declared, God's word must be a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105). As James wrote, we must "be doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). Second, *our value is derived from Jesus*. Because He lives, we can live. We become "acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). Consequently, we delight in being "His own special people" (verse 9). Third, *this world is not our home*. Whatever trials or struggles we face here are temporary. Paul made

this point when he wrote: “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal” (2 Corinthians 4:17-18). Because we are “sojourners and pilgrims” (1 Peter 2:11), we must live for more than just the present moment.

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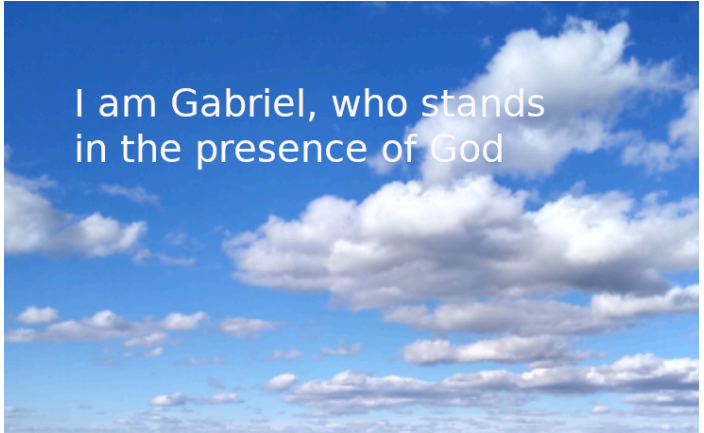
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God at work in Ordinary People

Written on: November 30, 2023

Article by: Dave Knutson



I am Gabriel, who stands
in the presence of God

Text: Luke 1:8-25

We are fast approaching that time of year when many people celebrate Christmas. The passage in this article serves as something of a prequel to the birth of Jesus...and if possible, I would like for us to read it again as it were – for the first time.

When I last spent time in the gospel of Luke, I was struck by the tone of voice in which it is written. It is remarkably unremarkable. It is low-key, without hype or exaggeration. As it begins, nothing really seems out of the ordinary – for the person who believes in the God of the Bible. The God who shapes history and has written Himself into every page. As long as that is the God that you believe in, then the book is not remarkable even when accepted as a factual account. Luke starts out like Sergeant Friday with the facts...just the facts. But the facts that he relates are far from ordinary. They're all about the amazing things that God has done and was doing in history, yet these come out in a matter-of-fact way.

I don't think that Luke was trying to say that history is boring or everyday, though of course it is made up of a series of days. But his factual account conveys the idea that everyday is a day created by God. Every day is filled with his presence. And every day is made to order by the one who created order out of chaos and who holds the world together as he works in the lives of ordinary people. This is especially true as God has come to dwell within those who are His and whom he uses as agents for the spread of the gospel.

As we look at Chapter One, let's recognize that the events in it took place on one such day, even though it chronicles the conception and birth of John the Baptist and the conception of Jesus. It is hard to read this story as if we don't know it... because we do. We know that John and Jesus will change the course of history. We know that John will prepare Israel for the coming of God's Son. And we know that Jesus will one day die for the sins of the world. The trajectory of history will be permanently altered, but you'd never guess that from the way that Luke starts.

Verse 5, sets the story within history, naming kings and governors before directing our attention to two ordinary people. He begins with a middle-aged couple who in the eyes of society are nothing special. Luke singles them out because they're special to God. Both were righteous and blameless. It is not hard to see why God *chose them* to raise

the prophet who would go before His son to announce his arrival and call for repentance.

Now it turns out that Zechariah and Elisabeth desperately wanted a son. They had wanted one for years. Zechariah had been praying for his wife and God had heard those prayers.

Zechariah was a priest. He served in the temple on a rotating schedule and that's where we find him.

"Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering. And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. (VS. 8-12)

It seems that Zechariah was alone in the temple. It would have been dark in there...lit only by the lamp-stands. Suddenly a man appeared next to him. I don't think that he was dressed like a priest, but for sure...he was a stranger. So Zechariah was afraid.

How this man had gotten past the temple police and into the holy place? After all, there were warning signs all around the perimeter. And where did he come from? He just seemed to appear out of nothing? No wonder Zechariah was afraid. And then, he'd have to report it, and depending on how desperate this man was, things could get ugly. So Zechariah had good reason to be afraid, perhaps especially when he learned that this one was not be a man at all.

Then the angel said to him.

"Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. "You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. "For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb."And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God. "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, TO TURN THE HEARTS OF THE FATHERS BACK TO THE CHILDREN, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

To paraphrase:

- God has heard your prayers. I know what you've been praying for and the answer is yes. I'm telling you that the answer is yes so that when it happens you'll know that it didn't just happen. God made it so.
- But just to be clear about this, the boy's name is John. You are to name him John.

- Let me tell you about your son. God has big plans for him. You're going to be so proud, because God will make him great. What I mean is – that he will be great in the eyes of God.
- Your son will be filled with the Spirit of God – starting in the womb. So, don't ever let him drink wine or alcohol. The boy belongs to God. His life is going to count for something and he has to live life on God's terms.
- Do you remember the words of Malachi? The part about Elijah? Well, your son is the new Elijah. The same Spirit of God who worked in Elijah will work through John. He is going to turn a lot of people back to God to get them ready for the son of God

Imagine Zechariah trying to get his head around all of that!

- I am going to have a son
- I am going to have a son who will be filled with the Holy Spirit
- My son will be, the Elijah to come
- My son will prepare the way for God's Son. He will do what no other prophet has ever done or ever will...

With all that going on in his head, do you know what Zechariah heard? Do you know which part he got stuck on? What he heard loud and clear was – you and Elizabeth are going to have a son. He heard, that an old man and his equally old and barren wife were going to do what they could not do when they were young and fertile.

Zechariah heard about a son and about the salvation of the world but he got stuck on the physical. Why was that? And why is it that that not just true of Zechariah? Why do we all get stuck on physical things that we think are impossible? Why are the obstacles that we can see always bigger and tougher than the ones that belong to the unseen world?

So when the angel said: God is going to make your son into a spiritual giant and play a pivotal role in saving the world...Zechariah thought ...Are we talking about a baby?
“Did you say that Elizabeth and I are going to have a baby?”

Perhaps, not knowing what to say...he came out with: “How will I *know this for certain*? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years.” Can you give me a sign?

Imagine that – a sign. An angel appeared out of nowhere – smack dab in the temple. The angel had called him and his wife by name and announced that God had answered their prayers for a son. Yes, but, can you give me a sign? I guess it's just human nature...I'm not going to believe unless you make an exception just for me and give me a sign.

For 40 years in the wilderness, Israel demanded one sign after another. They doubted, complained and rebelled, all the while demanding signs. And when the 40 years were over God said ‘**you're it**’. You are the sign. For 40 years you didn't get sick, your clothes didn't wear out, your wives did not miscarry, the manna never failed, you drank water out of a rock and and you still want a sign? (Deut 8:1-3)

Just open your eyes...you are the sign.

God's people have not stopped asking for signs. Its so easy to miss the fact that God has made us into a sign to the world. The church is God's kingdom come to earth. It is a refuge from sin and God's kingdom of light. It is the place on earth where God has taken up residence. This is the reason that God expects the church to be a community of truth and love, of forgiveness and righteousness. The church is God's sign to a world lost in sin...that there is salvation in Jesus and a better way to live. It's time to stop asking for a sign and to start *being* God's sign to the world

The angel answered Zechariah...and said to him

"I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news. "And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

You want a sign? Okay, I'll give you two. First of all, you need to know who you're talking to. I'm the angel Gabriel. I serve in the very presence of almighty God. I have come from God with this message for you...and I'm not used to being doubted. So, from now until John is born, you'll not be able to say a word. Because you didn't believe my words, you won't be saying any, for as long as it takes for my words to come to pass.

How's that for sign? So, for the better part of a year, Zechariah lived the sign and was the sign. It humbled him, muzzled him and put him in his place. Those who ask for signs ought to very sure that they are ready for whatever God might send.

What if God simply shut the mouths of those who refuse to believe in Him? Our world would be a much quieter place...wouldn't it?

Well, imagine the frustration – to have the most amazing news to tell and not be able to say a word. It seems to me that the only thing worse than that, is to have the most amazing news to tell and not be *willing* to say a word. To be embarrassed to speak a good word for the one who has saved us. That's us, if we are unwilling to share the gospel of Jesus. A weak faith silences us in much the same way that it did Zechariah.

Zechariah finally did come out of the temple and by that time people were getting worried. And wouldn't you know it, the first thing that he did was to try to talk. When nothing came out, he made signs and gestures with his hands. The people concluded that he'd seen a vision – but didn't know what it was.

Zechariah finished his tenure at the temple in silence. When they arrived back home, Elizabeth conceived, but she kept that knowledge to herself for five months. I don't know why she did that. Maybe she didn't want to get her hopes up about carrying the child to term. But she did feel vindicated. All of her life, men and women had looked down on her. Perhaps they wondered what she had done – why God was punishing her? But from now on, things were going to be different.

Luke tells us what she thought. “This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men.”

In other words...I’ve been waiting for this all of my life....thank you lord. It’s interesting isn’t it – how each of us personalizes the work of God. God was sending John into the world – to help save it from sin. But his mother thought first of all, about what a baby meant to her. It was vindication and satisfaction at last. God was righting of a long-standing wrong.

Maybe that’s just natural. That while the salvation of the world hangs in the balance, each of us tends to think about about ourselves first. It’s hard to see our lives and to live them in the full context of God’s eternal plan of salvation.

In time, it happened as Gabriel had promised. God really did send a second Elijah. He used a set of godly parents to raise that boy and to shape his character. And God did that despite their doubts. That same plan of God to save the world is still being worked out. God is still using imperfect men and women, because there are no other kind.

The question is, are we willing for God to use us? Are we willing for Him to use our children? Are we willing to give them back to God so that we might keep them forever?

That’s a tough question. So few Christians pray that God will use *their* children to minister and serve. Fewer still pray that they will become missionaries. Children and grandchildren in a distant land is a price that few are willing to pay.

On our very best day we are not so different from Zechariah and Elizabeth. Yet may God still use us for the progress of the Gospel and the salvation of the world.