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1 Peter 1:6-7

"Taking God's View On Trials"

May 10, 2015

Shall we open our Bibles this morning to 1 Peter 1:6, as we continue today in our study through this letter that Peter wrote?

We are told early on - to the saints who are of the Diaspora, the Dispersion - the ones who were running for their life because in the summer of 64 A.D. Nero, losing his mind, decided that he would blame the burning of Rome, which he had instituted, on the Christians. And a national persecution of the saints began - that would last all the way until 312 A.D., when things would get even worse. The church would be acceptable in all quarters, and everything would get in. But this was a horrible time for the young church.

This letter was written by Peter maybe a month or so before Nero's actions. It was written right after Paul's letter to the Ephesians. It was written thirty years after Jesus had ascended into heaven. And Peter's interest is pretty simple - get the church to keep their eyes on the Lord because this next season for them was going to be horrible. And it was. They were thrown to the lions in the entertainment area of the arena; they were burned at the stake; they were tarred and lit on fire to light the palace's grounds. Within three years, Peter would be dead - crucified by the Romans, upside down. Paul would be beheaded - same year. So this was an extremely difficult time for the church; something we probably can't relate to at all.

But we can relate to trials, and really, that's what the book is about. How do you hang in there when the trials seem to overwhelm you or when the world opposes you such that you wonder how you're supposed to reach a people that don't want to hear.

We spent the first three weeks (I know we're only in verse 6, so you'd think we'd be further along) looking at the opening paragraph as Peter, before he gets to the issues, wants to define for them how glorious their position is; that you've got to know how God sees you before you can then begin to work on how you view the world around you and the work that God sets before you. So, Peter talked to them about being pilgrims, here, who are going to heaven; about God choosing them and having washed them and having mercy upon them; and by His blood, having cleansed

them; they have a living hope, eternal in the heavens. And he tells them all kinds of really cool stuff. We spent, like I said, three weeks making an inventory of what we have in Christ.

While all of that is theologically correct, the reality is these folks to whom Peter was writing, were facing glory with hopefulness but facing extreme conditions in the meantime. It's kind of like, "Yeah, we're going to heaven, but what are we going to do today?" And so he now begins to talk to them about trials - how we should view them; that they could stay strong through them; that they wouldn't be convinced that God had forsaken them; that they could finish strong and not quit trying. Peter believed they needed to know what they had in Him first. But now he wants to talk to them about how they can view their life in Christ. So we've entitled the message this morning, "Taking God's View On Trials," and I'll give you a couple things to write down, to think about, in terms of what kinds of things you should keep in mind when you face difficulty - either for the Lord or just because you're in the world seeking to walk with God.

I guess if trials were open to popular demand, we'd have voted them out long ago. We hate suffering of any kind. That kind of seems normal to me. There is even an extremely popular (and you would know why) yet very false theology in the church that any lack of faith brings suffering: God wants you well and wants you rich. And these health and wealth folks who've been at it for years - it's an easy sell because everybody wants that; it's just not in the Bible. They're selling something that God's not selling.

Our trials are not what Peter's folks were facing. Unless you are in a place in the world (or going) that your life is on the line for your faith, it probably is not going to be to this severity. However, it is a trial nonetheless that God will use, and the process can be staggering, but the fruit is glorious. God has a purpose.

I read a Max Lucado story years ago that I, to this day, remember about a little bird named Chippy (maybe you've heard it), the parakeet. And the story starts out, "Chippy never saw it coming." And then it went on and said, "Chippy's owner decided one day to clean his cage with a vacuum cleaner. He removed the attachment, stuck in the hose, and as he was moving towards the stuff he needed to clean up, the phone rang, and so he kind of jerked around. And you guessed it. Chippy got caught in the hose and sucked right down into the vacuum cleaner. The owner gasped. He opened the vacuum, and there in the vacuum bag sat a stunned

bird - still alive but not looking at all too pleased. Seeing that he was filled with dust, he grabbed him, and he ran him to the bathroom to hold him under some running water, and soon he was soaked and shivering. Feeling bad, the person did what anyone would do. He put him under the hair dryer and blasted the poor pet with air." (Laughing) And then he wrote, "Poor Chippy never saw it coming. When asked how he was doing by neighbors a week later, he told them, 'Chippy doesn't sing much anymore. He just kind of sits in his cage and stares blankly off into space.'" And I thought what a great way to describe trials - sucked in, washed up, blown away. (Laughing) He never saw it coming. And I think that's usually what we feel about trials. We don't see them coming.

And yet notice in verse 6 Peter's use of words. He says, "In this you greatly rejoice though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials." He combines the words "greatly rejoiced" and "grieved" in the same sentence. We don't like those in the same sentence, do we? It's like airline food. It really doesn't apply very well. Or political science or pretty ugly or kind of pregnant or sort of dead. They just don't go together. But here's what God wants us to see. And so Peter connects (notice verse 6, "in this") what he has said to us about all of the good things we have in Christ, our standing, to say to us now, "In this you can greatly rejoice - in all that you have even if for the moment the trials are making you grieve." In other words, your foundation has to be established. Your position has to be strong. The problems of this church would soon turn deadly. They would need all the right perspective they could find.

So let me give you a couple of things to write down about trials.

First, trials are short. Verse 6, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while....." Within the context, whatever you and I face for Jesus, as Christians in this life, is pretty short. Temporary, if you will. Isaiah wrote in chapter 54:7-8, " 'For a mere moment I have forsaken you, but with great mercies I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting kindness I will have mercy on you,' says the LORD, your Redeemer." Whatever you're going through as a believer, for the sake of your faith, is short-lived. Peter will repeat this in chapter 5:10, when he will write, "after you have suffered a while." Sometimes the Bible uses the words "for a season." Paul will even write to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." So, it's short-lived. Make sure that you understand that. The problem is when you're

in the midst of difficulty, it's easy to lose that perspective because you feel like it's gone on forever. If you've been sick for a couple of weeks, it feels like a year, doesn't it? And then good things like vacations - they're over in 20 minutes! You can't make them last, it seems like. So, we know glory is coming, right? We want that for sure. But we all now see a lack of it because of our experience, and Peter says, "Look, get the big picture here. Even in your difficulty, rejoice in what you have and realize that what you're facing is short-lived. It's just for the moment." Paul would write to the Corinthians, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.....we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Corinthians 4:7-9,11).

God wants you to know trials are short. Now, let these trials work in you a greater eternal work. That's his key, really. Because we really don't value spiritual things until we're forced to. So, all of these things that Peter wrote in verse 2 and verse 3 and verse 4 and verse 5 - we agree with. "Oh, yeah, that's us." But we value when there's pressure. When you lose your job, prayer takes on greater meaning, doesn't it? When you lose a loved one, heaven becomes a lot more desirable. It has a face to it now, a person attached with it. When you lose hope, His promises stand far taller than they would have otherwise. So, it is important for us that all of the glory of verses 2-5 can keep us rejoicing during the short-lived trials now. But I want you to notice verse 6, "In this you greatly rejoice." That's attached to verses 2-5, to the present-tense "though now for a little while." Little while. Mark that down. Trials are short. That's God's view of them.

Second of all, trials are purposeful or helpful or needful. Again, verse 6, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be." If need be. If God sees purpose in the things He allows in your life, then we can be assured that there is necessity for us to go through them. My mom used to (since it's Mother's Day, I was thinking about my mom - who is in heaven today, by the way) stick cough medicine out in front of me. Nasty-tasting, red, ugly-looking junk. And she'd say, "Take this. It's good for you." And I never did believe it. And I guess I do the same thing with the Lord. "Hey, I've got a purpose - if need be." And you go, "Yeah, I don't believe it." But it's so. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "I want to send Timothy, our brother, to you to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves

know that we are appointed to this.....that we should suffer tribulation" (1 Thessalonians 3:2-4). God has a plan, and like everything else in our lives, there is a necessity sometimes to have to face difficulty so that we might come to know the Lord better. We wouldn't do it if we weren't forced to. It's just the way we are. So, that's why James tends to be everyone's favorite book, but it beats you over the head. And James will write God allows trials to humble us, to remind us to continue to trust in Him, to wean us from the dependence that we have on worldly things, to form in us an eternal outlook or mindset, if you will, to force us to act upon our love for the Lord, to teach us to value our blessing, to develop endurance. I mean, James just goes on and on. Hey, God has plans. God has plans. So says Peter of the Lord in our trials, and he'll say it often. Look, if need be, even though you're grieved for a little while by these various trials, rejoice. God won't let things just come your way needlessly. Trials would tell us that God has a desired result in mind, and this is the best way to get to it.

Now sometimes trials are like woodshed experiences. You just need to be corrected, and God takes you by the hand, and He takes you outside, and He gives you a good talking to. They're needful. When the Psalmist in 119, that long psalm, began to think about the trials in his life, he wrote in verse 67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word." Four verses later, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes." Four verses later, "I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me." I think it was C.S. Lewis who wrote, "Pain sets the flag of truth in the fortress of a rebellious heart."

God has a way of just getting our attention. Sometimes it's just simply to humble us. You remember that portion of 2 Corinthians 12 where Paul came back from a visit to heaven that God took him upon, and he had this abundant revelation? And Paul said because of that, "a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure" (verse 7). It does seem like this thorn in the flesh was an eyesight problem that Paul had. It seems to be supported, certainly, in the Scriptures. But Paul suffered and was humbled because of all of the things that God had given him. In fact, he wrote to the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 1:4, "I want to bring you comfort, the same comfort that God gave me when I was suffering."

So, trials are short, but they aren't without purpose. And if God allows them, you best believe He has an intention to use them. And I know, like mom with the cough

medicine, you're probably going to say, "I don't believe You," but you best believe Him. Trials are short. Trials, if need be, are purposeful or helpful.

Third of all, verse 6, even though for now "you have been grieved by various trials." Trials will bring grief. Now the word "grief" is "*lupeo*" in Greek. It means to be heavy-hearted or emotionally distressed. Sometimes it is translated discouraged. To be honest, trials upset us because I don't think we find good reason for them at all. I know the Lord says they're short, and there's a reason for them. We don't think there should be a reason at all. Just put that argument aside for a minute. Understand this - trials bring grief. It'll upset you, it'll discourage you. There's no sense denying it and pretending all is well so that you can appear more spiritual than the next guy. That's ridiculous. That doesn't work. It's extremely hard to be out of work. It's extremely hard to not be well. It's extremely hard to have internal family battles. It's not easy to be betrayed by your friends. As a pastor, I'm often discouraged by the lack of devotion that people have to the Lord. And I listen and watch them sit on Sundays or during the week and then do as they please the rest of the week, and I just go, "Oh, Lord, why? Why bother coming to church at all?" It can be very discouraging. But, look, He alone changes the heart. It doesn't mean that it's easy.

Jeremiah, when he was in the midst of his great difficulty, wrote in chapter 15:18 to the Lord, "Why is my pain perpetual and my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed? Will You surely be to me like an unreliable stream, as waters that fail?" Prophet - in the midst of doing the right thing, with a very heavy heart. Difficulty that he was facing.

Trials can bring tremendous grief. And I suppose, and I surmise, that if it doesn't bring pain, it's not working. Don't know. I think the Scriptures support that. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19). Psalm 66:12, listen to this, "You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but You brought us out to rich fulfillment." Grieving is a normal process of life, in the Lord. Oh, people in the world have grief too, but they have no hope. You have a grieving that says, "Well, it's just for a little while, and God has a purpose, and I've got to learn what I need to learn, and I'm going to draw near to Him." But even Solomon wrote there's, "A time to weep, a time to mourn" (Ecclesiastes 3:4). You know, in the Jewish culture, the death of a loved one would bring thirty days of mourning. In the Egyptian culture, it was seventy days. People would just mourn.

So, trials are short. Trials have purpose. Trials bring grief.

And then we are told, in verse 6, that there are "various trials" or multi-colored trials or diverse trials. Trials come in all shapes and sizes. Now the word for "trial" here, and it's a different one than you would find in many places, always refers to difficulty that comes from without. These aren't trials from within, where you're struggling with internal issues. These are things that come at you from without, and they are various. The word is "multi-colored." They come in all shapes and sizes. I don't know if you've ever seen one of those Pantone color wheels. There're 1114 colors on it, you get to choose from. They're made from thirteen basic pigments plus black. I'm color blind. I see three colors. I see blue and something else and a brownish some deal. I don't know. Multi-colored.

Trials can be short. Trials can be long. Trials can go longer. They can be small, or they can be huge. They come at us daily for our faith which needs to be developed. It's a treasure to the Lord that He gets you to a place where, "without faith it is impossible to please Him" (Hebrews 11:6). "Hey, I've got to bring him to faith." But they come in all shapes and sizes. Because of what I do as a pastor, there are few days that go by that I am not confronted by the trials in the lives of God's people - whether it's divorce or children going astray or financial troubles or shaky walks with the Lord or conflict or crime or sickness or death or funerals or hospital visits. I'll suggest that not a week has gone by in thirty years that those haven't popped up mostly every day. Pain wears a lot of faces: whether it is physical trials where you find out you have cancer or someone has a stroke or they are just getting older or there's been an auto accident. Job suffered a debilitating disease for years yet loved the Lord with all that he had. Paul had a thorn in the flesh. Simon was a leper. There was a man who was born blind that God used to bring him to Himself. There were some lame, some in the Bible unable to bear children. For some in Peter's generation, death came as a relief to the things that they were facing. They were various trials. They were short and purposeful, if need be. They brought grief. And they came in all kinds of packages.

Sometimes people's greatest trials are emotional ones. I think about Moses saying to the Lord, "Just kill me!" and I'm thinking he's having a hard week. I mean, he's seen more than every man upon the face of the planet, as far as God's presence and work, and he cries out, "God, just take my life!" If you read the Psalms, they are filled with David and others crying out oftentimes in great emotional distress to the Lord. He writes in Psalm 6:6, "I am weary with my groaning; all night I make

my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears." That's not a happy guy. But he knew the Lord. And yet here he faced some difficulties that he had to bring back to lay at God's feet. Elijah felt alone enough in 1 Kings 19:10 to say, "I'm the only one left that's been faithful to you, and they want to take my life." And the Lord said, "Shut up. Get up. You're ridiculous." I think that's exactly what it says. You go read it. (Laughing) 1 Kings 19. "I've got thousands more just like you." But these were dedicated saints that were battling emotional difficulties because of their trials.

Various trials. Sometimes the trials are just spiritual. We see people all the time who just come in guilt over their sin, and we say, "Look, Jesus forgave you." "Well, I can't forgive myself." We face the accusations of the devil. We doubt God. We come to the Lord with unreasonable expectations, and then, when He doesn't deliver, we wonder what's going on. We don't know what to make of what's going on with us. Yet I want to trust God in everything. I watch John the Baptist, a faithful man - the most faithful of all men is what Jesus said (Matthew 11:11), finding great doubt, sitting in prison wondering if this is the guy that we're supposed to follow, and, "Why hasn't He busted me out of jail yet?" Spiritual struggle.

And then all of the verbal onslaughts that can come your way; all of the difficulties that you face and the opinions of others. Peter will write in 1 Peter 4:4, "They think it strange that you do not run with them.....speaking evil of you." You are pressured by the society to conform. You're not really politically correct. You're a hateful person and a wicked person and a judgmental person because you want to walk with Jesus. Look, the troubles are diverse, but God's grace is sufficient for all. In fact, the same word that you find here for the word "various" is found in 1 Peter 4:10, where it says we are "good stewards of the manifold grace of God." Same word. For every color of difficulty, God has an answer and has a help.

So, we grieve for a time, but we have an attitude that you can only find in the lives of the people. We have an eternal view, so we have a spiritual advantage. Suffering has an end. Sin does not.

Trials are short. Trials are purposeful, they're needful. Trials bring grief. Trials come in all sizes.

Next point. Trials will reveal and test and refine your faith. We'll read with verse 6, "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." So, here's another insight into the "if need be," which is attached to every trial that God asks us to endure. He doesn't waste us suffering. "All things work together for good" (Romans 8:28). You believe that? So, the trial will reveal, will test, will refine your faith in God. You know what often happens when you go through it, and you're not sure why? People go, "Why is this happening to me?" Well here's one reason. God wants your faith to grow. He wants to test your faith. He wants to prove the genuineness or the realness of your belief. He wants to refine you so one day when you stand in heaven, you're going to be a shiny example of glory for God. You're going to bring Him honor and praise. Your life is going to be a testimony to what He accomplished in you.

And Peter, notice, compares our faith being refined to the purifying of precious metals and the burning off of the impurities so that it can be left all the more valuable. The trials are the fire of purification of our faith, if you will. The word "tested," "*dokimazo*" in Greek, means to prove. It's a word that they use for metal assaying. So you might take a certification test to prove that you're capable of whatever it is that you're wanting to do. Trials are designed by God to purify your faith in Him and to show how strong you've become in your trust. Precious metals, if they are being purified, are heated. The specific weight of the precious metal will allow the metal to sink to the bottom. The impurities (or the dross), because they are lighter, will float at the top. And if you burn them hot enough and long enough, you can begin to skim off all of these impurities so that when the metal hardens again, it'll be all the more pure. And it comes with repeated effort. So fire separates true gold from useless impurities.

Trials of fire in your life separate faith from the superficial attempts to live spiritually. God will make sure that your faith is real. But in order to do that, like a muscle, it has to be exercised, and you're not going to do that unless you have to. That's something that is almost forced. So faith is refined in the fire. We'll find out what we believe, what we'll pay, how long we'll hang in there, are we going to trust in Him, what we're made of - when we begin to see pressure applied. So, if the Lord is way down your list of priorities, and the pressure comes, you're either going to drop off, or you're going to put Him right at the top. When Jesus told

that parable of the sower, He said, "There are those who receive the word of God into stony ground. They have no root. They only endure for a time. When persecution or tribulation comes for the word's sake, immediately they stumble" (Matthew 13:20-21). That's the pressure that God applies to make sure that your life is where it needs to be.

So the reality of your faith this morning is best seen when it is put under pressure or heat, if you will. Trials will burn away any hindrances. "Oh, I'll go to church if I have time." Oh, yeah, unless there's pressure. Then you'll be here. "I've just found time." It'll drive you to your knees. It'll bring you into fellowship. It'll challenge your lack of commitment and selfishness or worldliness. Under stress, I will pray, I will run through the Scriptures, I will look to be all that God wants me to be. And notice what Peter says here - that your faith to God is of greater value than pure gold. Now, pure gold was certainly the most valuable commodity of the day. But it will perish in the world. You will stand to God's glory one day. It is the most precious possession you have. It pleases the Lord. The end of your life should be one of saying, "I served God. I believed Him. I trusted Him. I followed Him - even when I didn't see Him." One day you will stand, and "you will not be ashamed before Him," as John writes in 1 John 2:28, "at His coming."

So, Peter writes to this very pressured church, who were being murdered for their faith. You can't read this and go, "Oh, you don't know what I'm going through." You don't know what they were going through! They get it worse so that you can hear the message, I think.

In the end, you're going to stand to God's glory for genuine faith. So, trials are short-lived. They are driven by God's purposes, if need be. They will bring you grief and heartache. They come in every shape and size. Not everyone faces the same kind of trials. And yet they are used by God to ultimately reveal and test and refine your faith so that one day you can just stand before the Lord and honor Him.

I have a toaster at home. Maybe you have one too that, no matter what I set it at, it comes out the same (Laughing) unless you turn the little button at the bottom all the way to the right, and then it just cooks it like you couldn't eat it. I'm not sure why that setting is on. Every toaster I've ever had, there's a setting - it just says "burn," I'm pretty sure. Warren Wiersbe, years ago, wrote, "If God puts you in the toaster, His eye is on the clock, and His hand is on the thermostat." And I think

that that's so. "He knows the way that I take," Job would write in Job 23:10, "when He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold."

Here's one thing you can do with trials. You can stop telling God how big the storm is, and turn around and start telling the storm how big God is. That's for sure. I hate trials. They grieve me. But hopefully one day we will come out the other end to the praise of His glory.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson

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