

There is a story in the apocryphal manuscript known as The Acts of Peter that suggest that his death came by inverted crucifixion.

By the close of the second century early writers such as Tertullian and Origen held the same view. In fact, the latter wrote these words, “Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he had desired to suffer.”

Later St. Jerome agreed with this scenario and Michelangelo painted it onto stone in a chapel at the Vatican.

The tradition at least is accepted by most. If it is true, than we can say that Peter’s hope for exaltation and his entrance into heaven, came after one brief and final session of human humiliation. In the end his inheritance was gained only after being crucified head downward toward the earth. Remember his words that we looked at weeks ago in 1 Peter 1:3-4:

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by His great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation,⁴ and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay.

What an amazing exit Peter made from this world. He received a priceless inheritance “*kept in heaven, pure and undefiled beyond the reach of change and decay.*”

What we are going to look at today is not the end of Peter’s life but at the ending to this letter. We are going to discover four principles to wrap up this study. Here is the scripture:

So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time He will lift you up in honor.⁷ Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you.

⁸ *Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.⁹ Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.*

¹⁰ *In His kindness God called you to share in His eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, He will restore, support, and strengthen you, and He will place you on a firm foundation.¹¹ All power to Him forever! Amen.* 1 Peter 5:6-11 NLT

There are many ironies in the Christian faith. The way up has always been down. Throughout this epistle this inversion has been Peter’s theme. There will come a day of future inheritance and exaltation for the Christian but that promised day only comes after a *brief* season of present-day suffering.

Clearly Peter is bringing together two seeming incompatible truths: our status through and in Christ and our sufferings on earth. Remember 1 Peter 1:1 *I am writing to God’s chosen people who are living as foreigners*”

In 1:3-6 we read that “inheritance” is linked to “various trials.”

In 2:11-12 we read that we can be God’s chosen people and yet “aliens and sojourners” at the same time.

Ultimately Peter uses Christ’s vindication as proof for our future hope and present calling. Today we read that we are to humble ourselves and that later God may exalt us. We will learn that after suffering awhile God Himself will restore us.

We have seen this kind of connection over and over in these five chapters. Because this is his theme and the message he is trying to drive home he once again picks it up and chooses to end his letter this same way.

Listen, our life on this planet is not “our best life now.” Glory comes by the way of the ground. Attaining heaven will be by the way of an excruciating journey. We receive heaven’s gains by accepting and carrying our crosses here.

This counterintuitive gospel logic has never been more desperately needed in the church and especially the church in the west. If you can grasp this truth it will put your life and its ups and downs in perspective and heaven will never look more appealing and sweeter.

So here we have four principles that have the potential to be life-changing:

1. Choose to be childlike and gracious: Humility is the answer

Throughout the Bible we are called to be humble or to humble ourselves. In 1 Peter 5 it is given a little more description. Notice that the command or principle is followed by an encouraging answer or promise.

So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time He will lift you up in honor. 1 Peter 5:6 NLT

Peter says to humble ourselves “under the mighty power of God.” Everything in the normal person will rise up to resist such thinking. In fact, we are often taught that the more aggressive you are the more you will win. We are taught that we have to be tough and stand our ground with people or we will not be able to navigate the relationships in our life.

Vance Havner, a preacher and author from the mid nineteen hundreds said that when he started out: The devil said, ‘You mean well, but if you try to stay humble and childlike these days you’ll be run over by the steamroller.’

Peter is aware that figuratively speaking steamrollers will come into our lives. To survive it is critical that we learn to trust God like a small child would learn to trust their parents.

When we embrace our inability to do life on our own we come into a trusting childlike relationship with God.

2. Cast your cares on God: Healing is the answer

⁷ *Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about you.* 1 Peter 5:7 NLT

When we endure seasons of humiliation and challenges it is so good to know that God cares. Peter presses us on this and urges us to “Give all your worries and cares to God. . .”

In light of our personal knowledge of God and our ongoing relationship we are able to believe this verse no matter what life looks like or feels like. We can pour our hearts to God. Why? Simple, because He cares about you!

Try to wrap your mind around this principle so that when the tough times come you don’t allow yourself to get bitter or mad at God. You will be much better off by trusting God than turning against Him or thinking that He has turned against you. Again, Peter reminds us that “. . . He cares about you.”

3. Capture these commands and grow: Holiness is the answer

Peter now gives us some direct commands about how to build holiness into our lives as a normal expectation and character trait.

⁸ *Stay alert! Watch out for your great enemy, the devil. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour.* ⁹ *Stand firm against him, and be strong in your faith. Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.* 1 Peter 5:8-9 NLT

Interestingly enough Peter’s words are a reflection of his own life. In these commands we find Peter’s own story interwoven.

a. Stay alert

Remember this is Peter who couldn’t stay awake in the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus. Of all people he realizes the lost opportunities. He also slept through the Mt of Transfiguration! Of course here he is referring to staying alert or awake and being aware of the spiritual enemy we face every day.

The devil is our great enemy and prowls like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. How are we supposed to handle him? What is the one thing Peter would know about and push people to do?

b. Stand firm

Again, remember that Peter has his own story of not standing firm. Three times he denied that he knew Jesus. Three times in a row! And this was just a few hours after he had assured the Lord that he would never deny Him. By prayer and staying close to the Lord we can find the courage

and faith to stand firm when we are being tempted or pulled away from our relationship with God.

c. Be strong

Peter encourages us to be strong in our faith. We must realize that faith comes from God. I know there are people that try really hard on their own to have great faith but faith will never be found in your own strength. Our spiritual strength comes from the simple yet challenging exercise of staying close to God. If you want to be strong physically you must go through the discipline of hitting the weights at the gym. You have a regimen that you follow. It may include diet, exercise and even rest but you are committed to being strong. God gives us the gift of faith as we press in closer to Him. We pray. We read His word. We may memorize scripture. We may fast a meal once a week. We study. We discipline ourselves in the filth that we put in front of our eyes or that we hear in our ears, for all of those things lodge in our hearts and minds and battle our faith.

d. Remember others

Remember that your Christian brothers and sisters all over the world are going through the same kind of suffering you are.

Peter's point here is not to try to find someone worse off than you and compare yourself. We've all done that I am sure. For those of us with weight issues and I consider myself in that group, I can tell you that you can always find someone heavier. You can always find someone poorer or richer; better looking or uglier I suppose. Peter is not suggesting that kind of immature comparison. He is merely pointing out that we are not alone in our suffering but that it is indeed common and should be expected.

Remember that a lot of this is based on the fact that the devil prowls around looking to destroy you and your faith.

C.S. Lewis in his final book in the Chronicles series writes about a donkey and an ape traveling together. They find an old lion skin and the ape sews it together and parades the donkey around in it. Of course the beauty of Lewis's writing in this series is the metaphoric nature of every word and story.

"Come and try on your beautiful new lion-skin coat," said Shift.

"Oh bother that old skin," said Puzzle. "I'll try it on in the morning. I'm too tired tonight."

"You are unkind, Puzzle," said Shift. "If you're tired what do you think I am? All day long, while you've been having a lovely refreshing walk down the valley, I've been working hard to make you a coat. My paws are so tired I can hardly hold these scissors. And you won't say thank you - and you won't even look at the coat - and you don't care - and - and -"

"My dear Shift," said Puzzle getting up at once, "I am so sorry. I've been horrid. Of course I'd love to try it on. And it looks simply splendid. Do try it on me at once. Please do."

Picture

"Well, stand still then," said the Ape. The skin was very heavy for him to lift, but in the end, with a lot of pulling and pushing and puffing and blowing, he got it on to the donkey. He tied it underneath Puzzle's body and he tied the legs to Puzzle's legs and the tail to Puzzle's tail. A good deal of Puzzle's grey nose and face could be seen through the open mouth of the lion's head. No one who had ever seen a real lion would have been taken in for a moment. But if someone who had never seen a lion looked at Puzzle in his lion-skin he just might mistake him for a lion, if he didn't come too close, and if the light was not too good, and if Puzzle didn't let out a bray and didn't make any noise with his hoofs.

"You look wonderful, wonderful," said the Ape. "If anyone saw you now, they'd think you were Aslan, the Great Lion, himself."

Later, the King, sees the pretend lion for what he is and Lewis writes, "Then the yellow thing turned around clumsily and walked, you might almost say he waddled back into the stable." Puzzle and Shift tried to pull off the impossible. And so it is with Satan. He is a cheap imitation of the Great Lion. (GOD) We should not be overwhelmed by him or overcome. Even though Satan prowls like a great lion he is really nothing more than a stubborn and rebellious donkey living out his rebellion against God.

Stay alert, stand firm, be strong. . .

Now let's wrap up this letter with one last call and promise.

4. Called to be like Christ by God: Hope is the answer

¹⁰ In his kindness God called you to share in His eternal glory by means of Christ Jesus. So after you have suffered a little while, He will restore, support, and strengthen you, and He will place you on a firm foundation. ¹¹ All power to Him forever! Amen. 1 Peter 5:10-11 NLT

This is true grace at work. True grace looks like this: present sufferings are intimately connected to eternal glory. And the one always precedes the other.

"In His kindness" Peter says that God has called us to share in His eternal glory through Christ. He is our model and what Jesus walked on this earth is the life we are to embrace. Was every moment a bad one for Jesus? No, but the overall theme of His earthly walk was to literally pick up His cross and we are invited and commanded to do the same throughout the Bible.

Okay so we know that crosses come and we bare them by faith and trusting God but Peter says that there is a better day coming. It may be today or tomorrow or it may be in eternity but after we have suffered for a season we are promised that Jesus Christ will restore support and strengthen you.

He will restore you from destruction that may come.

He will restore you from the ashes of things that have happened in your life.

He will restore you when your life has been broken by the ending of a marriage or a relationship that you can't believe you lost.

He will restore you when all seems hopeless and you are out of work and feeling lost.

He will support you when all around seems like sinking sand.

He will support you when you are convinced that no one else cares.

He will strengthen you when you have reached the end of your hoarded resources.

He will strengthen you when your soul gives way and He will become your hope and stay.

He will strengthen you and give you the ability to stand up when you have no strength to stand.

Bill Scheibler wrote these words, "I served as an airborne Ranger platoon leader (paratrooper) in the First Air Cavalry Division during the Vietnam War.

Our company was hacked up pretty badly by the enemy during one mission. When our platoon's survivors returned to base camp, we all trudged down the muddy path to our tent. As the men took their places in their bunks, the number of empty bunks became apparent. Men put their faces in their hands and sobbed like children. Each of us wondered if our bunk would be empty at the end of the next mission.

Fortunately, there was something we could always count on to help keep our sanity...late in the evening, long after the sun had gone down, a distant bugle could be heard playing "Taps." When that haunting, nostalgic song was played, all activity in the battalion area came to a screeching halt. Conversations would stop and men would sit back in their bunks, listening to what had to be the most poignant sound I have ever heard.

Now, years later, as I look back on the horrors of that combat, I remember that unknown bugler who played "Taps" so late every night. It seemed that, if only for a few moments, we were assured that someone was up there, sending us renewed hope through those twenty-four simple notes.

THE WORDS TO "TAPS"

Day is Done,

Gone the sun,

From the lakes, from the hills, from the sky.

All is well,

Safely rest,

God is nigh."