

EXERCISE YOUR CHRISTIAN FAITH

1 ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in accordance with his great mercy has given us new birth for a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead—⁴for an inheritance that is imperishable and unspoilable and permanent, reserved in heaven for you ⁵who by the power of God are being preserved through faith for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the last time. ⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, since it is necessary, you have been brought to grief by all kinds of trials. ⁷[This has happened] so that the genuineness of your faith—being of greater value than gold that perishes—having been tested by fire, may be verified, resulting in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, by believing in him you greatly rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible and glorious—⁹obtaining as the result of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet. 1:3-9)

Introduction

One afternoon I went to the ballgame with my friends, Al and Dan; and there I learned something about the rules of baseball.

In the first inning a batter hit a long drive to deep centerfield; the ball was just reaching the pinnacle of its height as it soared over the fence, landing deep in the bleacher seats.

“That’s a home run!” exclaimed my friend, Al.

“But wait a minute, Al,” I inquired, “if it’s a home run, why is the batter running around the bases?”

“That’s part of the rules,” Al explained.

“Oh, I see. If the centerfielder retrieves the ball before the batter rounds the bases he can throw him out.”

“No, no,” interrupted Dan. “Once the ball leaves the field of play it’s a home run. There’s nothing that the fielder can do.”

“But then why is the batter running around the bases?” I asked.

“That’s part of the rules,” Al again explained.

“You mean to tell me that once the ball clears the fence it is a home run?”

“That’s right!”

“And there is nothing the fielder can do about it?”

“That’s right!”

“But if the batter doesn’t run around the bases he’s out?”

“That’s right!”

“That’s one of the rules of baseball,” chimed in Dan. “That’s just the way it is.”

As I watched the runner safely cross home plate I thought aloud, “I wonder if there is a spiritual lesson for the Christian to be learned from all this.”

“Yes, there is,” said Al, “and this is what it is: Although our Christian salvation is sure, we must carry out our responsibility to exercise our Christian faith.”

This is the very lesson which we find expressed in the passage of 1 Peter 1:3-9; although our Christian salvation is sure, we must carry out our responsibility to exercise our Christian faith.

I. Exercise Your Christian Faith, ...As Your Responsibility in a Sure Salvation

The Apostle Peter informs us that God *“has given us new birth for a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”*

God has given us new birth. He has fathered us; He is our spiritual Father and we have become His spiritual children: *“to all who did receive him [Christ], to those who believe on his name, to them he gave the right to become children of God—¹³they were born, not by natural descent, nor by human will, nor by a husband’s desire, but by God”* (Jn. 1:12-13.) As the Apostle John exclaims, *“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”* (1 Jn. 3:1.) God has given us new birth *“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* When Jesus was raised from the dead and entered into the presence of God, He brought with Him all those who believe in Him: as a Christian, your soul/spirit/being has become united to Jesus:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of his great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in transgressions he made us alive with Christ (by grace you have been saved) ⁶and he raised us with him and seated us with him in the heavenly realms—in Christ Jesus. (Eph. 2:4-6)

When Jesus returned to God His Father it was almost like returning home from the hospital bringing His new born babes with Him and presenting them to the Father as His redeemed children, children whom the Father had given to Him and to whom He has given new birth (new life) by means of Christ’s resurrection.

God has given us new birth for “*a living hope.*” “*A living hope*” is a hope that is sure and certain, as opposed to one that is dead and worthless; note the promises contained in such passages as Jeremiah 29:11 and Romans 8:17a,

I know the plans I have for you, declares Jehovah, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jer. 29:11)

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ. (Rom. 8:17a)

Peter goes on to define this living hope as being “*an inheritance that is imperishable and unspoilable and permanent, reserved in heaven for you*” (vs. 4.) Here is an inheritance that is as pure and perfect and eternal as God Himself, an inheritance that shall never lose its luster or desirability. We shall never become tired or bored with this divine inheritance—because it is the creation of the infinite God and it consists of the giving of Himself to us, together with all of His blessing. As believers in Jesus the Messiah we share in the promise the LORD made to Abram: “*After these things the word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision, saying, ‘Fear not, Abram, I am your shield, and your reward shall be exceedingly great’*” (Gen. 15:1.)

This inheritance is being reserved in heaven for us. The use of the Greek perfect tense in the verb, “being reserved,” emphasizes the fact that this inheritance continues to be held on reserve for us until the appointed day when it shall be bestowed upon us in full measure. By way of illustration: It is like holding reserve tickets to a sporting event or concert; so despite whatever holdups we encounter due to traffic, there is the assurance that the seats are being reserved for us.

We are further informed, “*by the power of God [we] are being preserved [or, guarded] ... for the salvation that is ready to be revealed*” (vs. 5.) Not only is our spiritual inheritance on unlimited reserve for us, but also we ourselves are being guarded until the day we shall receive that divine inheritance. We are being preserved, or, guarded, by nothing less than the power of God. Speaking of the city of God, which represents His people and His communion with them, the LORD declares, “*And I myself will be a wall of fire around it, declares Jehovah, and I will be its glory within*” (Zech. 2:5.) Consider, for example, the LORD’s protection of Old Testament Israel by means of the pillar of cloud and fire:

Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel’s army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, ²⁰coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long. (Ex. 14:19-20)

Consider the testimony of our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, concerning those who come to Him in faith: “*I give them eternal life—they shall never perish, and no one*

shall snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one" (Jn. 10:28-30.)

But we must also take careful note of what else Peter says, "*by the power of God you are being preserved **through faith***" (vs. 5.) In the midst of this divine certainty, and encouraged by it, comes the call for Christian responsibility: we are to exercise an active faith in (devotion to) the Lord Jesus Christ, note John 10:27-30,

My sheep respond to my voice; I know them and they follow me. ²⁸I give them eternal life—they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. ³⁰I and the Father are one. (Jn. 10:27-30)

Proverbs 16:20b informs us, "*whoever trusts in Jehovah, blessed is he.*" The Hebrew word translated "trust," (אֲחֻזָּה) literally means, "to cling to;" the term conveys both confidence and commitment. Again, by way of illustration: Suppose you were to get lost in the depths of a deep, dark cave, and a forest ranger were to come to your rescue. He instructs you to hang on to the back of his belt as he leads you out of the cave to safety. You cling to him because you have confidence in him, and that confidence inevitably translates into commitment. Because of your confidence in him you are not going to let go of him, you are going to hold on to him and follow him wherever he leads. So it is with the Christian's relationship to Christ our Savior.

Let us exercise our Christian faith (our commitment and devotion to Christ), as our God-given responsibility in a sure salvation.

*Jude, a servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James, to those who have been called, **loved by God the Father and kept for Jesus Christ ... ²¹Keep yourselves in the love of God as you wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.*** (Jude 1,21)

II. Exercise Your Christian Faith, ...Even in the Face of Difficulty

Notice the contrasts Peter presents in this passage: In verse 5 he looks to the future and speaks of the salvation that is ready to be revealed "*at the last time.*" In verse 6 he turns to the present and speaks of these Christians as "*now*" (in the present) being subjected to various trials. Then, too, there is the contrast between the great joy (verse 6a) experienced by the Christian as he fellowships with Christ and the grief (verse 6b) he experiences, a grief brought about by the various trials he must endure.

Peter now turns our attention to the present trials encountered by the Christian. We encounter *“all kinds of trials.”* That is to say, the trials a Christian may encounter come in many different shapes and forms. There are spiritual, physical, emotional, financial trials. There are trials that are intimately personal and private, or those affecting our immediate family. There are trials that affect the church as a whole, or the nation in which the church is residing. Whatever their form, these trials are painful: they pierce the soul; they minister *“grief”* to the Christian’s heart. Note: To be guarded by God, (as verse 5 indicates that we are,) does not mean that we will be protected from trials—but it does mean that our souls will be preserved no matter how great the trials. With regard to the LORD’s allowing Job to be subjected to testing by the devil, we read, *“Then Jehovah said to Satan, ‘Look; he is in your hand; only spare his life’”* (Job 2:6.) The Apostle Paul gives this testimony: *“The Lord will deliver me out of every evil work, and will save me for his heavenly kingdom, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen”* (2 Tim. 4:18.) The Christian’s experience in this present world consists of both the joy of heaven as well as grievous trials on earth: *“Beloved, do not be surprised by the fiery trials among you (that have come for the purpose of testing you), as though a strange thing has happened to you”* (1 Pet. 4:12.)

The Apostle Peter defines these present trials as being necessary, and the necessary function they serve is explained in verse 7, *“[This has happened] so that the genuineness of your faith—being of greater value than gold that perishes—having been tested by fire, may be verified, resulting in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* It is God’s prerogative to prove the genuineness of our Christian faith—and He does so by means of exposing us to a variety of trials. The Christian’s faith is compared to gold; like gold, our faith will be exposed to the flame of trial to ascertain its genuineness. The Christian’s faith is also contrasted to gold; even gold perishes, but true Christian faith is made by God to endure.

Furthermore, it is God’s purpose to purify our Christian faith—His objective is to purify our faith for *“praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”* Our purified Christian faith will finally result in *“praise and glory”* to God, for creating a being who is voluntarily true to Him no matter what God sees fit to bring into his life. Our purified Christian faith will finally result in *“honor”* for us, as the reward for being true to God no matter what He has ordained to be the experiences of our present earthly life.

It is a great comfort to know not only the divine purpose being accomplished by means of trial, but also to know that the duration of these manifold earthly trials is only *“for a little while,”* (literally, *“for the brief present.”*) At the end of this present epistle, the Apostle Peter will assure these Christians who were undergoing severe trials: *“But after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will personally restore you, support you, strengthen you, and establish you”* (1 Pet. 5:10.) The Apostle

Paul gives this assurance to Christians as we seek to live for Christ in this present world that is filled with trials:

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷Our light and momentary afflictions are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸So we focus our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen; for what is seen is temporal, but what is unseen is eternal. (2 Cor. 4:16-18)

Like Paul (writing in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18), Peter, too, teaches us that the key to endurance in the midst of trial is to focus on the Lord Jesus Christ:

[Although] you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, by believing in him you greatly rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible and glorious—⁹obtaining as the result of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1 Pet. 1:8-9)

As you focus on Christ, rather than on the trial, you will experience a taste of heaven itself. Note: These Christians were exercising faith in Jesus Christ in the midst of severe trials, and as they did so they rejoiced greatly. Why? They rejoiced because they were receiving *“as the result of [their] faith the salvation of [their] souls;”*—i.e.; the experience of heavenly fellowship with Christ in His glory. The hymn writer, Jean Sophia Pigott, seems to be expressing something of this spiritual experience when he writes:

Simply trusting you, Lord Jesus,
I behold you as you are,
And your love, so pure, so changeless,
Satisfies my heart.
Satisfies its deepest longings,
Meets, supplies its every need,
It surrounds me with blessings:
Yours is love indeed.

Let us exercise our Christian faith, even in the face of difficulty. As the writer to the Hebrews gently exhorts the Christians of his day who encountered much trial: *“We do not want you to become sluggish, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised”* (Heb. 6:12.) Again, he writes, *“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who made the promise is faithful”* (Heb. 10:23.)

Conclusion

Thanks to my good friends, Al and Dan, I learned something about the rules of baseball. And I also learned an important lesson about the Christian life. May God grant each of us to learn this vital lesson: Although our Christian salvation is sure

and certain, we must, in reliance upon the grace of God, carry out our responsibility to exercise our Christian faith, even in the face of difficulty.