

Route Sixty-Six

Part Sixty

1st Peter

*If God Cares So Much, Why Am I Going Through This?
(John 5:39; 1 Peter 5:6, 7)*

With Study Questions

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You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:6, 7).

Introduction

In my studies of 1 Peter I happened upon an interesting point of conjecture. The author was speculating regarding the type of response we might receive if we sought to express sympathy to Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego. If you recall, they were companions of Daniel who refused to worship the image constructed by Nebuchadnezzar under threat of being burned alive. They were supernaturally preserved from the burning and were joined by a fourth in the midst of the blaze (Daniel 3).

Upon our expressions of sympathy, that they would have had to endure such a horrifying event, he supposed that they would politely correct us. They likely looked back at that as the grandest experience of their lives because it was there, in the seven-times-heated furnace, that they found Christ Himself, transforming the burning fiery furnace into a dew-kissed Garden of Eden.¹

Peter would have, no doubt, been conversant with the account of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And as one pours over 1 Peter, we might conclude that a goal of Peter, in terms of the behavior of the recipients, would have been for his readers to have the resolve of these three Old Testament saints. How can we not be moved and inspired in this brief account found in the third chapter of Daniel! The king rages:

¹ *Explore the Book*, 1 Peter, p.302. Baxter.

But if you will not worship, you will immediately be cast into the midst of a furnace of blazing fire; and what god is there who can deliver you out of my hands?" 16 Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to give you an answer concerning this matter. 17 "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. 18 "But *even if He does not*, let it be known to you, O king, that we are not going to serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up" (Daniel 3:15-18).

In his letter, Peter moves back and forth between our eternal inheritance and how it has become ours and how to live in a world that may not be all that excited to have a gospel testimony in their midst.

Survey of 1 Peter

As we survey 1 Peter, we notice that the greeting is unlike the greetings we generally see in Paul's epistles. It is not written "to the church at..." but to "**the pilgrims of the Dispersion**" (1 Peter 1:1). Peter is writing to scattered Christians (Acts 8:1, 4; 11:19). He does not have the environment of a particular church in mind, but Christians in the everyday world living among fellow, and not always friendly, human beings.

They are under fire and will soon the fire will get hotter (1 Peter 4:12). It is so easy for us to lose our moorings in the midst of hostilities and temptations. Peter will seek to anchor us with the knowledge that Christians are "**elect according to the foreknowledge of God**" (1 Peter 1:2). A wonderfully comforting exhortation found in the fifth chapter.

Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, ⁷ casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you (1 Peter 5:6, 7).

The God who spoke the heavens and the earth into being from the mere words of His mouth cares for you! One might, in a very human moment, ask, 'if God cares so much, why am I going through this?'

Prior to answering that question, Peter reminds us of our eternal inheritance, purchased by the death and resurrection of Christ, which is

...incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you (1 Peter 1:4).

So why am I going through these fiery trials? It is because our grasping of these glorious, heavenly gifts, is by faith. And like a metal, crusted with rust, our faith must be tried. Perhaps we can use the comparison of a filthy windshield, so muddy and cloudy that we can only see the inside of the car. Trials are like a wiper, that our vision may extend beyond the confines of sin-tainted creaturely limitations.

We are, in a sense, with the world in the car. Yet we are called to **“be holy”** because God is holy (1 Peter 1:16). For the world, this journey is a sort of party bus to hell and Peter is explaining how God clears our vision, that we might more clearly perceive this great salvation, prophesied from the beginning of time, this work of redemption, **“things which the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12b).**

God’s caring for us involves clearing the dross. It is so easy in a world with devils filled, who threaten to undo us, to fall into worldliness. But it is with our eyes of faith on our heavenly reward that we can begin to lay...

...aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, ²as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby (1 Peter 2:1b, 2).

Buttressing us even further, Peter seeks to help us recognize our identity in Christ through the metaphor of a spiritual house, made of living stones, a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:4-10). But he is quick to point out that the chief cornerstone was rejected by the builders. But the Christian has been called out of the darkness into His marvelous light!

So now we find ourselves traversing this world in a counter-intuitive way. The world, our own flesh and the devil, who Peter compares to a **“roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8)**, would have us join them. If we are not willing, Peter presses the fact that the furnace will get hotter. And our natural temptation will be to retaliate. And in our

retaliation, we have played the dark game and have given the world some, albeit perverted, warrant to attack.

We need to be sure that if we suffer, we suffer for doing good.

But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God (1 Peter 2:20b).

It is precisely here that Peter calls us to follow in the steps of Christ.

...who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed *Himself* to Him who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23).

It is more than we can tackle here, but Peter will spend time specifically addressing how to interact in a less than what appears to be optimal environment (even though it is the sovereignly ordained environment).

We are to appropriately respond to governing authorities (1 Peter 2:13-17). We learn how believing wives are to win the souls of their disobedient husbands (1 Peter 3:1). Husbands are instructed how to dwell with their wives in an understanding, honoring manner (1 Peter 3:7). We are to be serious and watchful in our prayers and have a fervent love for one another (1 Peter 4:8). We are to be hospitable and use our gifts to minister to one another (1 Peter 4:9, 10). He gives instruction regarding the office of elders caring for the church (1 Peter 5:1-4).

Truly, Peter is seeking to inspire the scattered Christians to provide a God honoring, redemptive testimony to the surrounding world, being untainted by it and supportive of one another. But what strikes the reader is the means by which Peter seeks to strengthen us. He is not merely cheering us on or coaching us through the trials of life. He is directing our thoughts toward lofty, holy, heavenly and sacred things, **“things which the angels desire to look into” (1 Peter 1:12b).**

There is a mosquito in the room, and he is arming us with a flame-thrower. Let us close by briefly noticing what Peter references in order to arm us for battle.

We are not merely part of a club or a team. Christians are the...

...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:2).

We should live our lives, never losing focus on...

our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you (1 Peter 1:3b, 4).

We have been redeemed, not with corruptible things...

...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot (1 Peter 1:19).

We might wonder if Peter, as he grew in his own faith and contemplated his own foretold martyrdom, gained fresh and deep appreciation for his Savior,

...who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree – by whose stripes you were healed (1 Peter 2:24a, c).

You might venture a guess that Peter contemplated his own failure and unjust nature when he wrote:

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit (1 Peter 3:18).

All Christian behavior is done, not in order to win God's favor, but in the light of a favor purchased by Christ. And our refinement in this is the aim of our trials. It is in light of this truth that Peter can offer another benediction.

But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect,

establish, strengthen, and settle *you*. ¹¹ To Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 5:10, 11).

Questions for Study

1. Reflect upon how Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-Nego might honestly respond to questions about their ordeal (pages 2, 3)?
2. To whom is Peter writing? Why does it help to know this (page 3)?
3. If God cares, why do His children go through fiery trials (page 4)?
4. In what ways are we to imitate the suffering of Christ (page 5)?
5. Where does Peter direct our thoughts in seeking to strengthen us (pages 5, 6)?