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A Final Word, 3

1 Peter 5:5-14

The teaching is found throughout Scripture: there is more to this world than meets the eye. Recall the message God gave to Samuel.

1 Samuel 16:7b, "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees...'"

That most certainly was the case for Elisha's servant when Elisha prayed for him!

2 Kings 6:17b, “O Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.’ And the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”

And so, what truly is going on oft-times is far different from what you and I see on the surface¹. For example, at one moment in their lives, the disciples couldn’t understand why Christ insisted on staying up so late, where He led them to a garden, where He told them to “watch and pray!” (Matthew 26:41). Think of it! They had just eaten a large Passover meal. Now was the time to sleep, NOT to stand in a garden and pray! But then Christ began sweating drops of blood (Luke 22:44), a mob then appeared (Luke 22:47) led by Judas, who kissed the Lord, and off Christ went in chains!

Truly, so often in our lives what is going on visibly does NOT match what is going on eternally in God’s kingdom, with the result that in this life we can be found making much of little and little of much!² Because we look at life from our temporal perspective revolving around what we want. And because God looks with an eternal perspective and gives us what we need!

If there is a place where this is exasperated, it is during times of suffering, which no doubt is why Peter took this topic up one more time in this final charge to his brethren. The Neronian persecution had settled into Asia Minor with a vengeance and many of God’s people at the writing of this epistle were being attacked, abused, incarcerated, tortured, and even executed! Therefore, in his closing words to the people of God as they went into battle, Peter took up the theme of suffering in which he endeavored to open our eyes to behold God’s perspective on our suffering. This brings us to see that our earthly sufferings are not unique. Speaking of their current persecution no doubt instigated by Satan and his demonic host, Peter wrote to his brethren

1 Peter 5:9b, “But resist him [Satan], firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world.”

It is a great comfort to know that what is going on in our lives is NOT strange! The attacks, trials, difficulties, doubts, and struggles to trust Christ are NOT unique to us, BUT “are being accomplished [being faced and so taken in] by our brethren who are in the world.”

Recall, part of the misery of suffering is thinking that we are alone, especially when it comes to our faith, “*No one is struggling with trust or the love of Christ like me!*” How miserable, especially when that thinking leads to the horrible conclusion, “*Maybe I’m not saved!*”

Christian you must see that NOT only the trials, BUT even the doubts that come to our mind are common to every genuine child of God! If that weren’t the case, why is there so much teaching in Scripture about how to suffer well? Again, you don’t command people to do what is natural. Commands/teachings are in Scripture because what is exhorted does NOT come naturally to us in the flesh!

So, let's be done thinking that the struggles and horrible thoughts that cross our minds in the midst of trial are unique to us! They are not! Get this: they are "such as is common to man"! (1 Corinthians 10:13a). That brings us to a second point that earthly suffering is not eternal.

1 Peter 5:10a, "And after you have suffered for a little while..."

Did you notice the phrase; "for a little while"? It is so important! Earthly trial and difficulty are only for a moment, and that is being generous! Think of it! What is 50, 60, 70 years in comparison to eternity?

Each year we all celebrate our birthdays. When one is 8, it is hard to imagine what it will be like to be 14, much less 50, 60, or 70. And yet from the perspective of an adult, one can honestly say the years fly by! And what will we say when we look back upon our lives in glory? From that vantage point, truly how long is 80 or 90 years?

Now I know that in the midst of pain, an hour can seem like a day. So, this is NOT to downplay the seriousness of suffering/pain. Yet from the perspective of God — for whom "a thousand years is as a day" (2 Peter 3:8) — our trials truly are "for a little while"! In fact, we've already been taught this truth. Peter speaks of our glorification:

1 Peter 1:6, "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials."

"For a little while" could be translated 'for a few moments' (ὀλίγος [*oligos*]). It is the same expression as in our text! From the perspective of God/Eternity, all earthly suffering "lasts on a few moments"! Paul gives us commentary on his trials, and he referred to them as "momentary and light"! (2 Corinthians 4:17a)

If you know your Bible, you know that from the perspective of man, there was nothing "momentary or light" about Paul's suffering! Recall his testimony in 2 Corinthians in response to the false teachers who spoke of Paul as one who was only after an "easy life," when they had "suffered" so much for Christ.

2 Corinthians 11:23-27, "Are they servants of Christ? (I speak as if insane) I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine *lashes* [recall if they gave a convict 40 lashes and he lived, Jewish law required that he be released!!] Three times I was beaten with rods [this was the Roman equivalent of '39 lashes'], once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep [that means in one of the shipwrecks, he hung on to drift wood until he was rescued]. *I have been* on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from *my* countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; *I have been* in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure."

From this I hope you see that there was nothing “momentary or light” about Paul’s suffering!

Yet when Paul beheld God’s ETERNAL kingdom and all that is waiting for us there, he professed whole-heartily that in comparison to it, any and all earthly suffering is “momentary and light”! He declared the same in the book of Romans.

Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”

Recall the words of David Livingstone in an address to Cambridge University where he spoke of the transitory nature of suffering:

Anxiety, sickness, suffering, or danger, now and then, with a foregoing of the common conveniences and charities of this life, may make us pause, and cause the spirit to waver, and the soul to sink, but let this only be for a moment. All these are nothing when compared with the glory which shall hereafter be revealed in, and for, us. I never made a sacrifice. Of this we ought not to talk, when we remember the great sacrifice which He made who left His Father’s throne on high to give Himself for us. (Winter & Hawthorne, 1981, p. 259)

Let us view the crucible from the perspective of God. Yes, it is painful such that you’d have to be mad to look for it or court it! Nevertheless, when it comes in our lives, we must view it as God does, something that truly is but for a moment!

Peter’s concern here is one and the same as Moses when he prayed:

Psalm 90:12, “So teach us to number our days, that we may present to Thee a heart of wisdom.”

That being said, notice a third truth about suffering, that earthly suffering is not without divine aid.

1 Peter 5:10b, “And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace...”

It is of note that this final section (vv. 10-11) is much like the closings of other New Testament epistles (like 2 Timothy 4:22; Colossians 4:18; Hebrews 13:25). Yet there is a marked difference between those passages and the one before us. Whereas they all close with a wish/prayer, Peter here closes with a promise/a guarantee! And that guarantee begins with the expression before us, “The God of all grace... will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” What a wonderful guarantee!

For now, what is meant by “the God of all grace”? As you know, grace leads to moral purity in the life of a believer. We are saved by grace! So, how it is that we are sanctified by it? To

answer this, Scripture teaches that grace is much bigger than a principle of unmerited forgiveness.

Ephesians 2:8-9, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no one should boast."

Truly when it comes to a saving relationship with God, it only can be enjoyed on account of Christ's work, NOT our own! We are accepted by God NOT because our good deeds outweigh the bad, BUT because Christ's cross work was applied to us! And so truly, we are saved by grace that is, unmerited and free forgiveness! Yet the Bible speaks of grace as much more than this! Jerry Bridges describes it this way:

When we think of grace, we almost always think of being saved by grace. That is why Ephesians 2:8-9 is so familiar to us. Even Christian literature available on the subject of grace seems to deal almost exclusively with salvation. But the Bible teaches we are not only saved by grace, but we also live by grace every day of our lives. It is this important aspect of grace that seems to be so little understood or practiced by Christians. (Bridges, 2008, p. 11)

Truly, "grace" is much larger than a principle of unmerited forgiveness (Ephesians 2:8-9). For example, in Scripture:

- It is a Teaching/Curriculum, Acts 14:3; 20:32.
- It is a Teacher, Titus 2:11-12a.
- It is a Worldview, 2 Corinthians 1:12.
- It is a Pou Sto, Romans 5:2.
- It is Divine Enabling!

Listen to the testimony of Paul:

1 Corinthians 15:9-10, "For I am the least of the apostles, who am not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me."

Here "grace" is used of Divine "favor"/enabling by which Paul became the man God wanted him to become.

Consider, when we ask someone to do us a "favor" what are we asking for. We are asking them to do something for us. Grace is used that way in the Bible — as unmerited favor and so ability!

2 Corinthians 8:1-2, "Now, brethren, we *wish to* make known to you the grace of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia, that in a great ordeal of affliction their

abundance of joy and their deep poverty overflowed in the wealth of their liberality.”

Paul attributes the Macedonians’ act of “liberality” in the face of great need to the grace of God! It was by God’s divine enabling — His grace — that they did what they did! speaking of the Corinthians, Paul said

2 Corinthians 9:8, “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, that always having all sufficiency in everything, you may have an abundance for every good deed.”

It is God’s grace that enabled the Corinthians to abound in good deeds!

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12, “To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power; in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

What a fantastic prayer... imagine the elements of this prayer being worked out in your life! Now if that occurred, it would only be “according to the [the working of the] grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ”!

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, “Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.”

Hebrews 4:16, “Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need.”

There is no question in Scripture that an important part of God’s grace is divine enablement by which the saved sinner is able to grow in their walk, serve the Lord, bring about His kingdom work, and so glorify God! And it is this facet of grace that is being used in the text before us. Notice the larger text. This is the rationale for why younger men ought to submit to the pastoral care of their elders.

1 Peter 5:5, “You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

Recall, if you want to enjoy the enabling grace of God, it begins as we understand that in ourselves we do NOT have the ability to do any spiritual good! It is only when we see this, that God’s “power is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9) that is, that we receive the enabling grace of God! With this in his mind, Peter gave the promise of our text.

1 Peter 5:10, “And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace...will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.”

C. H. Spurgeon wrote of this:

This is not the God of the little graces we have received already alone, but the God of the great boundless grace that is stored up for us in the promise, but that as yet we have not received in our experience. “The God of all grace”- of quickening grace, of convincing grace, of pardoning grace, of believing grace, the God of comforting, supporting, sustaining grace. Surely when we come to Him we cannot come for too much. If He is the God, not of one grace, or of two graces, but of all graces; if in Him there is stored up an infinite, boundless, limitless supply, how can we ask too much, even though we ask that we may be perfect? (Spurgeon, 2014, p. 1 Peter 5:10)

The point Peter is making is that while God in His providence might place us in the crucible, nevertheless His grace — His divine enabling — will be there by which we NOT ONLY will endure, BUT we will be “perfected, confirmed, strengthened, and established” in our faith!³

Why is this important? We need to know when we are in the crucible, God is there, caring for us, working in us, strengthening and protecting us! Look at the text one more time.

1 Peter 5:10, “And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm...”

And so, yes, “in the world you will have tribulation” (John 16:33), but as with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego (Daniel 3), you are NEVER be alone; Christ will be with you!

- That is the glorious promise that accompanied the first Advent of Christ (He is “Immanuel”- God with us, Matthew 1:23)!
- Was reflected throughout Christ’s time amidst the disciples, “No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends...” (John 15:15)
- Was given as our Lord sent us out into this world to make disciples, “...and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20b)
- Will be one of the themes of eternity as John wrote, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.’” (Revelation 21:3)

In light of this glorious truth, we must understand that no matter where God in His providence leads us, He will be there in our midst enabling us to stand!⁴

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End Note(s)

¹ What we think is so important in this life, so weighty, of a crisis nature- its trials, tribulations, and tragedies- oft-times are of little substance in the Kingdom of God! It is like Fog! Did you know a dense fog covering 7 city blocks, 100 feet deep, crippling the city, is composed of less than 1 glass of water?! (According to Bureau of Standards in Washington D.C.) In the same way, on account of our limited perspective, we can make so much of so little and so miss what God really is doing at any given moment in our lives!

² For example, do you recall the rebellion of Saul? God told him to vanquish the Amalekites leaving nothing behind. Yet, he wanted to make a statement, and so he held back some of the sheep and oxen. Surely God would be more pleased with a massive sacrifice than simply killing the animals where they were found. Yet Saul failed to recognize that delayed obedience is disobedience! We read in 1 Samuel 15:22, "And Samuel said, 'Has the Lord as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *and* to heed than the fat of rams.'" Truly, "man sees not as God sees"!

³ In the words of James, "...did not God choose the poor of this world *to be* rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?" (James 2:5b)

⁴ Peter Davids wrote of this, "While this letter knows about the judgment of God (4:17), it is primarily concerned with letting the readers know that God is to them a God of love and grace. This is the God 'who has called you into his eternal glory in Christ Jesus.'" (Davids, 1990, p. 194)