

BUILDING BLOCKS OF FAITH I Peter 1.1-9

How many of you have ever been frustrated or disappointed in your faith. There are some believers who have admitted that. It's not that they're going to give up their faith...their faith just isn't all they want it to be or think that it should be.

Some times our Christian experience is a bit like getting a headache. You're in pain but you're not going to lop off your head. It just hurts to keep it.

So how can we best keep our faith?

Today we start a series on First Peter.

I Peter is a letter to believers, actually they're called strangers, strangers "*scattered throughout the providences of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.*" (I Peter 1.1)

These believers had to be frustrated and discouraged. They were persecuted throughout the Roman empire. They were the scapegoats for all the moral, social, and economic problems of the empire.

It is well documented that in 64 AD, Nero started fires that burned Rome and kept them burning. He wanted to rebuild the city. He wasn't able to take the heat, so he claimed the Christians were the arsonist and blamed them for burning Rome.

As a result lynch law prevailed. In Rome, Christians were tied in animal skins, turned loose among wild dogs, and torn to pieces. In Nero's garden they became human torches to light the night. We think Peter and Paul were both killed by Nero.

Obviously the people of faith needed some encouragement, their faith has produced-persecution. It was wrong, unfair...Why us? What did we do wrong?

Have any of you ever asked that question about faith?

Some of you have been "tortured or torn" by death or doubt, finances or fear, injury, illness, or joblessness. You've tried to live by the book, you have trusted but been burned by divorce or depression.unhealthy family or unwholesome friends.

You have tried to do what was right, tried to do what the doctor, teacher, counselor or coach, pastor or parent told you to do... and what good did it do?
In fact, it seemed to bring on more heartache-right?

The question is, how can you and I stand fast in faith so that, "*the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit will keep us obedient to Jesus Christ?*" (I Peter 1.2)

Translation...how can we keep the faith?

Before his death, Peter wrote reminding these early Christians that they don't have a pie in the sky faith, that they are not necessarily protected from hardship and heartache in this life.

He reminds them they are PROTECTED in faith. He encouraged them to remember what they do have in faith. I want to say that again because that's the key, "he encouraged them to remember what they do have in faith."

And I want to call those things that they had, that you and I have, **BUILDING BLOCKS OF FAITH.**

I look outside my office and see all these bricks being put into place for the new addition. The other day there were a few nine tons blocks of concrete swinging outside my window. I was relieved when they moved down and started swinging outside of Carol's window. Anyway those bricks will support walls. Those walls will set aside areas for more ministries. If we're going to build good solid walls, we need good solid bricks.

The same is true for our lives. If we want to build good solid spiritual lives, we need these good solid BUILDING BLOCKS OF FAITH.

What goes into making those blocks? These spiritual blocks? The DNA comes out of the heart of God. Just as sand, water, and whatever is poured into concrete bricks...God pours his mercy into us.

Listen to this, I Peter 1.3, "*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*"

Out of God's mercy has come a **NEW BIRTH**, a new birth into a **LIVING HOPE**.

Marilyn Eberhart is a missionary who works in Indonesia. She gave a wonderful presentation a couple of weeks ago to our adult classes. She said the Tsunami brought untold tragedy to the most northwestern region of the country. Because of weather and war many have lost family, their material possessions....and hope. They ended up feeling isolated, helpless and hopeless.

She said by sharing God's love in Jesus Christ in concrete ways, many had come to appreciate and accept the love of God in Jesus Christ. They experienced a new start, a new birth. That new birth spawned a new mindset and a new heart full of living hope.

Galvin Reid tells the story of a 17 year old that fell down some steps and shattered his back when he was one. He been in and out of hospitals almost his whole life.

Reid asked the boy, "Do you think that is fair?"
The boy smiled and said, "Well, God has eternity to make it up to me."
Isn't that a neat story. Talk about a living hope.

Let's add another brick, AN IMPERISHABLE INHERITANCE

Verse 4-and into an inheritance that can never perish (that means it can't be invaded-it's a military term-this inheritance is protected), *it can never spoil* (be polluted), *or fade* (*Peter quotes Isaiah later in this chapter, "all men are like grass, their glory is like the flowers of the field, the grass withers and the flowers fade but the word of the Lord endures forever."*) *This inheritance is kept in heaven for you*" (forever).

When you ask people if they're going to heaven...some say, "I hope so," or "I hope God wants me," or "I hope I'm good enough." How much hope is good enough?

Can you know? Can you know you will ultimately end up in heaven?

Now think about this, to receive an inheritance you have to be what? An heir, right? Your parents, at least in most cases have left you an inheritance. Most of you will leave an inheritance to your children.

You as children are heirs of their parent's estate, right? Have you asked for forgiveness and professed your faith in Jesus Christ? If so, then you're a child of God.

When trouble comes your way or you've messed up you still can have the confidence, have the assurance of AN IMPERISHABLE INHERITANCE because you are a child of God

I don't think you've been written out of God's will? At least not yet!

Do you believe you're a child of God? If so, respond, "I am God's child" and enjoy the moment:

I may be young, I may be old, I may be hot, I may be cold, but...I am God's child
I may be educated, I may be unlettered, I may be free, I may be fettered, but... I am God's child
I may be black, I may be brown, I may wear a brace, I may even be a clown, but...I am God's child
I may be rich, I may be poor, I may be white, I may even snore, but...I am God's child
I may be short, I may be tall, I may have hair, I may be bald, but...I am God's child
I may live in a house, I may live in a trailer, I may be successful, I may be a failure, but...I am God's child
I am a sinner, but I'm also a saint, And "nobody" I certainly ain't, because...I am God's child

Now this is important, make sure to remember that concept in your head and then let it move down about eight inches and to the left to awaken it in your heart in those times of doubt.

In verse 5 we find another building block, A GUARDED FAITH, "*who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*"

The word shield means guarded. The Secret Service provides a guard for the President. A guarded faith means God in some way is standing guard over your faith.

Have you ever heard anyone say, "I hope I can keep my faith when trouble comes my way.

If those are your thoughts, know God is with you and has provided for you, the operative word is has.

This isn't military example but will serve us well.

Hawa Ahmed was a Muslim student in North Africa.

One day she read a tract, converted to Christianity, and changed her name to Faith.

Her father an Emir, a ruler, exploded with rage.

He and her brothers bound her to a naked chair with a metal plate.

She asked for the Bible. They consented but mocked her saying "this will show your religion powerless." She touched the Bible. She felt a peace inside and a presence beside.

They tried four times with different cables to electrocute her. It didn't happen. Finally her father hit her and screamed, "You are no longer my daughter," then threw her into the streets.

Humiliated, she ran naked through the streets to a friend's house. The friend clothed her and sheltered her. The next day the friend asked the people on the streets what they thought. They said they wondered why a girl clothed in a beautiful white dress had to run through the streets.

Wow! God GUARDED Faith...Faith kept her faith...need we say more.

Now add another brick, A **GENUINE FAITH**, 6b- "*though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief* (ok-so suffering is a given)*had to suffer in all kinds of trials.* (The logical question-WHY?) 7-*These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold,*(Now, think about that-do we value our faith more than material things?)*of greater worth than gold which perishes even though refined by fire so it* (your faith) *may prove genuine and result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*"

Genuine means pure...so were talking about a purified faith, an unpolluted faith.

Refined by fire...Malachi 3.3 reminds us that, "***He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.***" Medals are put into intense heat to burn up the impurities. Our lives are put into the fires of experience to burn away the impurities and build a pure faith.

Real trials really test the sincerity of our faith, don't they?

You've heard Rick Warren say, "God is more concerned about our character than our comfort."

In the second century AD Christians were being killed and tortured in Smyrna.

Polycarp was a bishop of Smyrna at that time.

He was told to say "Caesar is Lord", sacrifice to Caesar and curse Christ.

People loved him. They pleaded with him to desert his faith and save his life.

Just before being burned at the stake he said, "Eighty and six years have I served Him.

He has done me no wrong. How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?"

A little seven-year old girl in Indonesia was asked to renounce her faith in Jesus Christ.

She refused. Her teacher threatened her with having to repeat the grade again next year.

The little girl said, "I don't care if I have to stay in second grade all my life, I love Jesus."

Let's quickly add a few more bricks we don't have time to talk about, **A LASTING LOVE**, a love for God. Verse 8a, "*though you have not seen him, you love him.*"

AN INEXPRESSIBLE JOY. Verse 8b, "*And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,*(laughing and singing)

And last but not least, at least today anyway, **THE SALVATION OF YOUR SOUL**. Verse 9, "*for you are receiving the end of your faith, the salvation of you souls.*"

It's tough to keep the faith when disappointment or trials come our way...
but God is faithful and God hath provided.

God reminds Joshua, "Be strong and have courage for I the Lord your God go with you.
And Peter reminds us we have these building blocks of faith.

Horatio Spafford writes about those building blocks. In 1871 he lost almost all he owned in the Chicago fire, one of his children had died earlier in their lives.

Then 1873 he, his wife, and his daughters were going on a trip to England. He was delayed. His wife and daughters went ahead of him. When their ship was struck by an iron sailing vessel, his four daughters were killed.

Spafford then took a ship to England. He was shown the place where his daughters had died. There he wrote the words, "let this blest assurance control...words to "It Is Well With My Soul."

Let's stand and sing this statement of faith.