

“Sandcastles”

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Conversation Starter: *Whenever we go on a family vacation near the beach, there is always the time-honored tradition of building a sandcastle. We invest in different tools to make it bigger and better than ever before. Now, we know the water can help shape the sand; but too much will destroy our work. So we build trenches around to divert the water when it starts to rise. As the tide comes in, the water level rises and regardless of how big or beautiful the sandcastle is, nor all of our effort to divert the water away, the inevitable will happen. When we come back to the beach tomorrow there will not be anything left of our sandcastle.*

Let's Dig In! “*What is Happening*”

Turn to **I Peter 1:1-12**. Early followers of Jesus were confused and discouraged by all of the persecution they were experiencing. *Like trying to build a sandcastle in a storm, rain, wind and waves kept destroying anything they were building.* Knowing this, Peter from Rome writes this letter to bring them encouragement. It was not a letter promising suffering would lesson, but an invitation trust Jesus, and endure all things with our eyes on the eternal Hope we have in Him.

In *verses 1-2* we find followers of Jesus scattered all over the Roman map; but this is not outside of God at all. In fact, this is the *how* of God sending the Gospel into all the world. His Agents of Hope are sent out into a world that is hostile to Jesus; a world that crucified its rightful king. They were placed of God for such a time as this.

There is an important theological note here in verse 2. Here we are invited into the spiritual realm of our Tri-une God at work. The Father has ordained this journey, the Spirit is at work transforming the pilgrims on this journey, and Jesus's blood secures their steps from this world into that which is to come. Because of this we can have *Grace and Peace*. ***This is a picture of the Sanctifying work of Jesus through His blood; without it God is not our Father and the Spirit is not present within us.***

What is happening? We are being transformed. What is meant to be destroyed actually is purged or refined in order to shine brightly that which cannot be destroyed. *In a sense, suffering reveals who God is through us, and reveals who we are in Him.*

Time to Go Deeper! “*Faith must be Tested*”

Peter continues (verses 3-5) to write that our investment is not to be in this world; if it is we will loose heart when our faith is tested. Echoed in this encouragement are Jesus' words found in **Matthew 6:19-24**. What we are being transformed into will inherit something that is secured by God Himself. This life is a shadow of what is coming; we live and enjoy all things in Him but keep our Hope anchored in Jesus alone.

Why is our faith tested?

This is a good, important question to ask. In fact, it is being asked all around us right now. It tends to be phrased as “If God is all powerful and all loving, why is there suffering in the world”? If He is all powerful, then He must be unloving. Or, if He is all loving then He cannot be all powerful.

An important piece to that reason is missing. Sin. We brought sin into this world which birthed suffering (**Romans 5:12**). We broke God’s Law and live now condemned. For God to remove suffering He would need to remove sin. He has judged sin and it will be removed. The closer we get to this moment the worse the suffering will become (**2 Timothy 3:1**).

“In Adam the person corrupts the [human] nature; in other humans the [human] nature corrupts the person.” -Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica.

God stayed with us despite this; birthing Hope leading up into Jesus (Old Testament) and resulting onward from Jesus (New Testament). Hope exists within the world or context of suffering. *Hope* along with *Faith* do not exist outside of it; for then there would not be a need for hope (**1 Corinthians 13:11-13**).

How do we see God’s Control?

Turn to **Job 1:1-2:10**. Satan desired to show Job’s faith was conditioned by what God gave Him, not by love for God. In this God allowed Satan to bring suffering into his life. This suffering was intentional- to break Job. Did God ever leave Job? *No. But the waves destroyed his sandcastle.* Note Job’s response in **1:21-22; 2:10**.

How do we see God’s Love?

For Believers: **Luke 22:31-34**. Jesus prayed that Peter’s faith would not fail. This went beyond his self-assertion to not leave Jesus on into the man now writing believers in 1 Peter.

For the World: **2 Peter 3:9-13**. It’s not God’s desire to see anyone perish; suffering continues until sin is removed. But the suffering refines believers to shine bright as His Agents of Hope that is still present in this world with God’s invitation to salvation in Jesus.

Understand, when we come to Jesus as our Savior, we have turned from sin and are now following Jesus into Eternal life- life beyond this world and its present state. **Not only will we continue to suffer, at times it will be targeted suffering called persecution.** In this we recognize everything here is a temporary shadow- *our Hope and Faith reside with Jesus in the eternal Heavenly City.*

Like when someone comes up and attacks your sandcastle with a super soaker squirt gun!

Aha Moment “Love Endures”

Coming now to **1 Peter 1:6-12** we can understand better the Apostles words for us today. As we suffer we will get tired- even grieved in the very core of our being. We feel each and every loss. God isn’t saying that it is not real pain; He’s saying its momentary.

Unlike Peter, most of his audience had not seen Jesus. Most of us have not either today. But we love Him. Our love is cultivated through the intimacy of a God who goes through our testing with us as a Father does His child.

God endures the temporary with us. As a dad, I sit with my girls and put effort into each moment of building that sandcastle. Playing and loving them as we do this, knowing it will be washed away. We work hard, often for hours. As time passes, the reality comes. This is going to pass. But, what continues onward is the love- the time we had together through the temporary moment of building that sandcastle. All of the fun, work, laughter and even moments of pain or sorrow (when sand gets in the eyes)- these moments live on with each person.

It is in this moment they realize their value in my eyes. It is in moments of suffering or testing that we see God with us, realizing our value in His eyes. In both cases Love increases.

And one day, they will build sandcastles with their children. My prayer is that they value the temporary, investing well as they keep their eyes on the eternal banking into the love that endures onward.

This is the heart of what Peter is saying in **verses 9-12**. Out of the suffering God would bring Jesus who would bridge from this world to that which is to come. They men and women of the past lived faithful in order to pass on the love of God what would ultimately be accomplished in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

Application Time (You knew this was coming)

It's one thing to tell people our Hope is in Jesus; it can be another thing to show people that our Hope is in Jesus.

When life, like it was for Job is going well and we've got a whole sandcastle kingdom going on, the world can see the ease in loving God. But when suffering removes the things God gives, to still love God no longer makes sense to the world watching us. And it's in this moment we shine the brightest for the Gospel is the clearest.

Suffering is an invitation for us as believers to gage whether we are too invested in sandcastles of this world. Peter continues in verses **13-25** with encouragement to ensure we are living as members of God's family rather than the world we have been saved from. We are to be holy; purified in our obedience to Jesus. We received such love from God through Jesus, let this received love overflow into how we love each other.

In this season of quarantine, many of us will experience squirt guns, rain and waves that may wash away some of our sandcastles. It is in this season that we can show the world our Hope in God is not conditioned by sand, but the most precious treasure of God's Kingdom- His own Son's blood.

As the waves may come closer and wash down what you built, may the memories made building with God take center stage as we praise amidst the storm.

As we walk away may the love we have experienced and cultivated with our Father continue to be more than enough as we leave behind and trust for what is coming.

May you love well the people around you, invest well with the gifts God has given you and trust His decisions as the shadows of this world are disappearing into an eternal day where our eternal treasure awaits.

You are more than sand, and your life with Jesus is more than a sandcastle .

We are His Agents of Hope placed uniquely for such a time as this. We have told the world of our faith in Jesus. Now, let us illustrate our Faith in Jesus. Allow God to work and refine you. Allow His invitation to be seen through you more clearly than ever before.

Keep your eyes on His, never letting go of His Hand.

Blessings.