

Growing under Persecution

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Date: 24 November 2024

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[0 : 00] All right, 1 Peter chapter 2. 1 Peter chapter 2, and while you're turning there, just a reminder that Peter's whole book is written to people who are about to go under persecution, who are experiencing persecution, suffering of all kinds, and it is a way to help prepare them and shape them for this persecution.

And in the section that we're in, it's really from chapter 1 through chapter 2, verse 10. That's where this section will stop. In the middle, he, based upon all these glorious truths about salvation, gave them five commands.

And today we're going to hit the fifth of those five commands, just ways that we ought to live based upon the salvation that we have. He will close out this section in verses 4 through 10, describing again the greatness of our salvation.

Before he moves on in chapter 12, I mean chapter 2, verse 12, to start talking about practical things related to relationships. And so just know that he's going someplace with all of these things.

So today we're just going to look at this last command, verse 1, 2, and 3 of chapter 2. Here's the word of the Lord. Let's pray.

[1 : 43] Father, thank you for your word. Thank you for how you have given to us a perfect treasure of truth, a perfect treasure of your thoughts, a perfect treasure that we barely scratch the surface with.

And I pray, Father, that our hearts would be committed to you, committed to your word, and that you would teach us today. We pray in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. So the order of this sermon is going to be a little different.

Basically, we have three verses. I have three points, but I'm going to start in verse 3. Okay? I'm going to start in verse 3 because it's logically prior to verse 1 and 2 in terms of the experience that we have in this life.

You'll notice that he says in verse 2 that you're to long for the pure milk of the word if indeed you've tasted that the Lord is good. And the idea is that if you've tasted that the Lord is good, you should then long for this milk of the word.

And so I just want us to do it this way because I think it will help us to make sense of the passage as we go forward. Because what he's doing again is, again, how do you live well under persecution?

[2 : 55] How do you grow while you're going through persecution? And there's three things. Obviously, taste that the Lord is good, put away evil, and the third thing, crave the word.

So the first one, taste that the Lord is good. But verse 3, he says it right there, if indeed you've tasted that the Lord is good. Well, here's what you need to know. This is a quotation from the Old Testament.

That was what was on the screen just a second ago. Psalm 34, verse 8, O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.

Now, here's something you might not know. In the book of Psalms, if you will look at it, there are many of the Psalms that will just say, of David. And some of them will say more than that.

Like Psalm 34 says, A Psalm of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech, so that he drove him out and he went away.

[3 : 55] Now, that title is in the Hebrew, and we consider it to be a part of the original writing of that. So we consider it to be part of Scripture as well. So when you see those titles of the Psalms, it helps you understand a little something.

Now, you may not know what this story is about, so let me just give you a background real quick. David was not a king at this time. David was a general. He was a general in the army of King Saul.

And King Saul hated David. He hated David so much, he kept trying to kill him. Have you ever read the stories about where Saul had a spear, threw it and tried to pin David to the wall with the spear?

So this is the time period of David's life. He is running away from Saul because Saul is after him. Saul is trying to kill him. Well, he ends up in this nation where Abimelech is king, and Abimelech's advisors and all the people around him, they're about to go up in war against King Saul.

And though David has lived at peace for a season, all the advisors around Abimelech are saying, kill David. So if he goes home, they're wanting to kill him.

[5 : 09] If he stays where he is, they're wanting to kill him. And so in light of that, David begins to act like a crazy man. You know what I'm saying?

Like a crazy man. He just begins to act like he's completely out of his mind, and Abimelech is going like, oh, okay, well, you could go away. So he sends him away. And that's how David escapes.

Upon that escaping from that, David writes Psalm 34. God delivered him. As a matter of fact, the idea of God working to deliver his people from persecution is what Psalm 34 is about.

And in the middle of that Psalm, he says, taste and see that the Lord is good. If you're going to go through persecution, if you're going to go through a time of difficulty, if you're going to go through suffering, one of the things that is most needed in our lives is to taste and see that the Lord is good.

And what's interesting is that most of 1 Peter is Peter's reading Psalm 34 and writing a letter to the churches.

[6 : 26] He's taking that which was written and under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, giving interpretation and application to the text of Scripture from hundreds of years before so that these people would know how they ought to live and act under persecution.

I think that is a glorious truth. But here we are, 2,000 years later or more, taking what Peter wrote to try to help us. And yet this is exactly what Peter was doing in taking Psalm 34.

Matter of fact, I would encourage you that as you read through 1 Peter, keep Psalm 34 open and notice the connections that are there. Some of them are really slight. This one's a really big one.

That's why I'm mentioning it here because it's just almost a direct quote. And so what is Peter getting at as he's taking this inspired Scripture and giving an inspired interpretation, an inspired application of Scripture?

He's telling us to taste and see if the Lord is good. Have you really tasted and seen that the Lord is good? And my question is, who does he mean by the Lord? And if you read, if you read verse 3, he says, if indeed you've tasted that the Lord is good, verse 4 follows and says, as you come to him, a living stone rejected by men, but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you have only two options.

[7 : 56] The Lord here is either the Father or the Son. And as you read verse 4, the Lord there in Psalm 34, verse 8 is the second person of the triune God.

Remember, the Father is Yahweh, the Son is Yahweh, the Spirit is Yahweh. And sometimes the Old Testament is making reference to one of the members of the triune God.

And that is what Peter is letting us know, is that the psalmist David, as he was writing this, was making reference to the second person of the Trinity. And so now, Peter comes and tells us the same thing, as he tells us that we need to know, have we tasted that the Lord is good?

And he says it almost like an invitation, almost inviting us to say, have we tasted and seen that the Lord is good?

Because what he's going to say as he gets into verse 4 and following is that there are some who've tasted and seen that he is good, and there are some who haven't. And those who haven't, they're going to trip over him like they're tripping over a rock.

[9 : 08] Have you ever been on a construction site and didn't have a very tidy construction site? You can turn around and trip over tools or materials just very easily. And that's sort of the image that there are some that Christ is there and to them he is sweet because he's completely changed their life.

But there are some who see the same thing and they trip over him and fall. They stumble and they fall. And so what he's doing is he's inviting you to ask this question of your own heart.

Have you tasted of the Lord Jesus Christ and seen that he is good in such a way that you're happy, your life has been turned upside down and is completely different?

Have you tasted and seen that the Lord Jesus Christ is good? To endure suffering as a Christian, Jesus must be sweeter to you than anything else in the world.

To endure suffering in a way that honors the Lord, Jesus must be sweeter to you than anything else in the world. This is the very reason that the rich young ruler walked away so sad because the riches were sweeter to him than Jesus.

[10 : 42] I know that it's possible that even as a Christian who has seen that Jesus is sweet and Jesus is sweet, that we can have times in our lives that we grow a little apathetic about these things and we have a challenge.

Jesus is sweet to us but something comes along and challenges us and sometimes we can be apathetic in that battle and not really fighting it as much as we need to but the point is that as Christians he ought to be, he ought to be the sweetest thing to us.

And so I just want you to ask yourself this question. Christian, if you could have the deepest desire of your heart right here, right now, I want you to think about it.

The deepest desire of your heart right here, right now, no negative consequences to having it. If you could have that right now but you couldn't have Jesus, would you take it?

And the Christian's answer is no, I wouldn't. But there are some, there are some who you do not count Jesus as the sweetest thing in the world to you and which is really the first and great commandment to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, right?

[12 : 04] To love him that way is for him to be sweeter to you than anything else. It's for him to taste good. And there are many people, they love to be around Christians because they love the morals that Christians have.

They love the standing that Christians have. And yet, if you get down to it and ask them, is Jesus sweeter to you than anything in the world? That's a hard question for them to answer because they've never trusted Christ.

That being a Christian is not about being inside of a church building. It's not about hanging out with Christian people. It's about having a life-altering encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ in which he becomes sweeter to you than everything.

And so I would say to you, if we're going to grow and be prepared for persecution, if you're a Christian, you need to make sure that Jesus is sweeter to you than anything.

And if you're not a Christian, then you need to stop being the boss of your own life and turn to Christ and realize what he's done for you. Well, the second thing that he says goes back up to verse 1, right?

[13 : 10] And here in verse 1, I'm just calling this put away evil because he lists a bunch of things, but I want you to notice that really this verse 1 carries over and connects to verses 22 through 25.

We talked about 22 through 25 last week where the main point was to love one another, right? We're to love one another with all of our heart, eagerly, right?

And he says in the very first part of verse 1, so, that is therefore, because of what I've just said. And so, the connection is that because we are loving one another, because we're striving to love one another, we need to put away these other things.

And he lists them, right? Malice. Malice is a hateful feeling, a hostility. He says we're to put away deceit. Deceit is this idea of treachery, trickery, guile, right?

It's not just about lying, but it's lying in order to scheme, in order to take advantage of somebody, manipulate somebody, if you will. Hypocrisy. That's this pretense and insincerity, wanting someone to believe something about you that's perhaps not true.

[14 : 21] Envy. Envy is just that jealousy. Slander is that speaking evil about someone, that defamation. And here's what's interesting. He goes from saying, you need to love one another to you need to put these things away because putting these things away helps to protect these relationships that you're already having to love, right?

I mean, it does no good to say that you love someone and then actually treat them with one of these sins. As a matter of fact, you can't really commit these sins without someone else being involved.

I mean, can you imagine if you were the only person on the planet and you were slandering somebody? That'd be weird. But Peter is saying, listen, put away.

His language is the language of like, just be done with it. Take a moment to be completely and entirely done with it. Make up your mind now that this is not the way you're going to live because this is the way the world lives.

The world lives in malice and deception and hypocrisy and envy and slander. It comes naturally to us because we're natural born sinners. But he's saying, listen, choose to be done with this.

[15 : 36] As a matter of fact, the word is the kind of word that if your clothes were on fire and you were to yank them off real quick to get them off of you to keep from burning, it's that kind of urgency about it.

It's that kind of action about it. Take that off. Get that away from you because it's just going to hurt you. We as Christians, if we're going to be prepared to live a life that pleases God and we're going to be able to grow under persecution, we've got to be able to love one another.

We've got to be able to know that we're not going to sin against one another because we're going to need one another. And what he does is he kind of places verse 1 and verse 2 in such a way as to say that listen, yes, as an expression of love, put these things away, but you can't put these things away and crave the pure milk of the word.

To crave the pure milk of the word means you also have to put these things away. You can't hold on to both. It's like trying to drive and text. It's dangerous. Both hands have got to be holding on to this craving of the milk of the word.

So you've got to get away with these things, make a decisive break with these sins, treat one another the way that you're supposed to treat them. And so here's what we're going to do.

[16 : 57] Just for application's sake, we're going to revisit a little bit last week and bring it in because here's what we said last week. Hang on. Peter expects Christians to be prepared for suffering and persecution by loving one another and that love shows up by avoiding sinning against each other.

and how does that work? Well, can you imagine being in a life raft with a group of people? This is your only way of survival and everybody's got a harpoon trying to skewer one another.

What's eventually going to happen? You're going to pop the life raft. You see, here's the thing. What he's expecting is not only to love one another but to not sin against one another because you need one another because you're supposed to be building biblical community that can help you withstand the storms of life.

You're supposed to be building a biblical support base, a biblical community that when persecution and suffering comes your way, you have got a support system there to help you through those times.

And I've heard stories from you of some of you who've been in those moments of difficulty and suffering. Maybe it's because of medical issues or maybe it's because of emotional issues but I've heard the stories from you how together as a church they came around you and supported you in that time.

[18 : 35] That's exactly what we're supposed to do. But we can't do that while we're also slandering one another. We can't do that while we have malice and envy or we're being deceitful with one another.

We're to be building this community together in order to be able to support one another. But I want you to imagine just this just for a second just one thing.

Just think about this. I want you to think about the thing that in your life you've struggled with the most. It's been the hardest thing. It's been the gut wrenching thing.

It's been the dread sitting at the bottom of your stomach. Maybe it's a relationship that's gone sour. Maybe it's some sort of emotional difficulty. Maybe it's some problem at work or maybe I don't know what it is but I want you to think about that difficulty for just a moment.

Now I want you to imagine that you're doing this. You get to have a microphone in front of the whole town and share that burden with them.

[19 : 40] Would you do it? Now imagine that everybody that is in front of you is someone that you know is thoroughly biblically godly committed to you.

Would you then share that problem? You see I think I think one of the things that we struggle with is often is that we're afraid that if we share this thing that burdens us it's going to make its way around town and people are going to talk about it behind our backs because that's what sinners do.

But when we come together as a body of Christ that shouldn't be the way we act. That shouldn't be the thing that we do. We shouldn't take the burden that you share and go share it with others under the guise of a prayer request if you haven't asked us to do so.

But instead we should build this community together by not sinning against one another. Now I've put the challenge to you. The challenge and we'll talk about it again here in a little bit the challenge that you need to find somebody that you've not spent much time with and spend some time with them before Christmas.

Before Christmas right? Invite them to your house for a meal. Invite them out for a cup of coffee. Whatever it is do something to get together with someone in here that you've not gotten together with before because the only way to love one another is to spend time with one another.

[21 : 12] But let me just ask you to take up another challenge and that is this. Do you need somebody in your life now? You have some struggles you have some difficulties that you're keeping to yourself.

Could you find some one person who's a member of this church and call them this week and say could you pray for me? Would you be willing to be vulnerable and open up?

And then if someone calls you this week and says listen I have this burden to share would you take and make this commitment that the only thing you'll do is pray for them.

Say listen I'm going to pray for you and right there on the phone pray for them. Don't just say you'll pray for them stop right then and pray for them. Beloved here's the thing we cannot sin against one another and love one another.

We cannot sin against one another and build any kind of biblical community. We can't even really get into the word of God and get it into our lives as we're also sinning against one another.

[22 : 22] So I want you to ask yourself this question do you struggle with some of these sins with malice and envy and slander with deceit? If so then today when we get to the response time you need to pray and ask God to forgive you and help you to change.

But it comes up with a third thing the third thing is to crave the word. There in verse 2 it's a command it's really the only command in the three verses the others just play off of this and I want to break down this command because it's got several words in it we just need to really identify the first word I want to look at is the word milk and he's using this analogy this is a mother's milk for her baby and so he's looking at it not as a bad thing but as a nourishing thing it's what gives nourishment to us.

In the ESV the next word is the word spiritual but here's the problem the word spiritual is really not the word spiritual it's the word word or truth or reason or thought and give credit to the King James here because King James has got it right it is the milk of the word that's really the way you need to understand it the reason for that is because it's the same Greek word that's behind John 1.1 and 2 Timothy chapter 4 where it talks about preaching the word or in the beginning was the word it's this Greek word logos and the one that's here is a very similar word to that it's from the same root and so what it means is the truth of God the reason or the thoughts of God and so we could easily just say this is the scriptures this is the word of God this is the nourishing word in other words right this is what we're supposed to be longing for then it uses the word pure in the ESV and there's a lot of different images for purity in the New Testament let me just give you two one has to do both of them have to do with a snake let me just give it to you this way so imagine you have a snake that's venomous but it has no fangs it's not a coral snake either it just has no teeth

I saw some of you so it has no fangs so it's harmless it's harmless that's one of the images behind one of the words in the New Testament for purity is the idea of it's harmless because it's had all of its teeth taken away it has no teeth to it but another word for purity and the one that's right here in our text has to do a little bit with the snake as well and this snake has its fangs has its venom but has zero guile in other words think of the serpent in the garden that as he began to talk his whole point was to beguile and trick and scheme he saw them and had plans for them and talked and did things in such a way as to beguile Eve well this word is the word no guile or not guile or not deceit as a matter of fact it's just the opposite word of the sins that are listed right there in verse 1 that there's no deceit and so what we have then is we have this idea that the word of God is without guile that the word of God is without trickery that the word of God is without schemes the word of God is the real truth it is the actual truth the word of God is reality on paper because it is the word of God we come to the word and we say we need something from God we want to know something

God is never there to trick us God is never there to scheme against us and his word will lead us in the right way and what he says is that we are to long for that unadulterated word and when you see the word longing you think of an infant that is crying because he is hungry and he wants and needs nourishment this is what Peter is telling us that as Christians we need to be craving the word of God like a newborn infant craves their mother milk we need to crave God's word now listen we could talk all day long about you need to read your word you need to study the bible you need all the tasks right those are tasks that we do with God's word but what Peter is after is not telling you do a bunch of tasks he's telling you to have this desire that overwhelms you that you long for

[27 : 30] God's word more than anything and of course if Jesus is sweeter to you than anything then the word of God will be sweeter to you than anything now why does he tell us to do this go back and look at verse two he gives us this purpose clause that says so that or that by it you may grow up into salvation you cannot grow in your salvation without craving the word of God when you have moments in your life that you're not craving the word of God those are moments that you're not growing Peter just like Paul and Jesus is picturing salvation as that process that starts with birth and moves through maturity and the key to growing in maturity in your faith is the degree to which you long for the word of

God now I think I can illustrate what I mean by this but I don't know you might get lost in my illustration so if you do I apologize ahead of time but when you start talking about how to mature in your faith there have been a lot of people throughout church history who had lots of ideas and usually they fall into one of two camps either it's sort of a rational idea or a mystical idea it's either a rational idea or a mystical idea the rational idea I absolutely fall into that sort of camp and that is you use your mind you read the words you understand it and God uses that to change you I don't have to go on mystical journeys I want you to think about like Hercules for just a second in order to accomplish a thing he had to go on all these journeys and defeat all these quests throughout the church there have been many mystics who have said there are several things that they have done or they could do or they've seen others do that have helped them to grow in their faith because they've done these things now I have a tendency to look at mystics with a lot of skepticism but let me just give you a couple of thoughts about this there have been a lot of mystical pathways such as

Celtic prayer circles a Celtic prayer circle is basically this labyrinth in a circle and as you walk it you pray certain things and supposedly people have really been able to grow in their faith through that there's this idea of some sort of soul meditation there's an idea of having a dream and then trying to seek out from that dream certain truths that maybe might help you as you grow in your faith or there's just even the idea in a lot of Baptist life of sitting still like Elijah and trying to listen for the still small voice that speaks I want to hear that voice I want to hear from God and in hearing from God then that helps me to grow in my faith you could even get into things like bowing before relics and going on journeys there have been people who said if they do these things they're going to grow in their faith and all of this is an attempt by the mystics to hear something from God and I just want you to think about that for a second let me make a comment because even though I would heartily disagree with the mystics about their approach because I think you need to go with what the word says here's what

I'll say in all of their attempts what they're after is some sort of truth from God I don't think God gives us truth that way but that's okay we can argue about that later the point is is that even the mystics understand they've got to have truth from God in order to grow and that's what they're after my only question to the mystics would be I can't even scratch the surface of what's in the word of God why would I need to some other ephemeral thing out here I need to just stick to the word but the point is this without truth we don't grow without truth we don't grow and so what we need to do is we need to crave the word of God and I know that there are many people and there have been many people throughout my whole ministry career who've told me well I'm not a reader well the point is not for you to be a reader the point is for you to crave the word of

God and get it into your life and so I tell people you can't read I had a guy in our church one time his education was so low that he literally could not read but he could listen to it and in listening to it he could get the word of God in his life and so what I'm saying to you is that you need to crave the word of God so much so that I just want you to understand that if you were to come to me and say to me listen I've got a problem in my life I need some help with this my first question and my first assignment to you is going to be do you have the word of God in your life on a regular basis if not that's homework assignment number one before we start asking questions before we start trying to understand all the if you're not in the word and there's a problem in your life the first step is let's get the word in your life now we can come back and talk about things so we must learn to crave the word of God and I want to give you three things I think might help you as you do that because I want you to think of three

- [33 : 24] D's you need to start with a duty you need to start with a duty and that is that you need to crave the word of God as though it is your duty to crave the word of God you need to understand that it's something that you ought to do it's something that you need to do as a matter of fact it's a command right here in this passage to long for it to crave for it and so there is a part where you need to start at a place where this is something I must do and without that sense of ought without that sense of duty you're never going to get to the place that you crave the word of God the way you should you must start there which means you've got to read it or listen to it and you've got to listen to sermons as they're preached and understand what the word is saying there but the second thing is that not only do you need to start as a duty but you need to continue as a discipline right anything anything worthwhile any way we want to grow in our lives we must discipline ourselves for it

I was chaplain at a children's home and the guy who ran the children's home his son was about 12 years old and he had never picked up a guitar in his life but he wanted to learn the guitar and so they bought a guitar that was in the vehicle they had a guitar that was in his room and they lived about a half a mile from where their house was to the school there on the campus of this children's home and so when they would drive to the school the son would pick up the guitar and would play it for that half mile and then the father would come get him for lunch and as he drove back to the house he would play the guitar and as he finished lunch and he drove back to school he would play the guitar and when he picked him up from school and drove him back to the house he would play the guitar and then he would spend two hours every evening playing the guitar and on the weekends every Friday they would drive to Fort Worth South South Fort Worth about an hour from where we lived and he would play the guitar the whole way and then when he got back on Saturday he spent extended time playing the guitar and that young man became one of the greatest guitarists

I've ever heard in my life why because he was talented no but because he was disciplined you want to learn anything in life you want to do anything in life you must be disciplined and a part of craving God's word once you understand it's your duty to do so is having the discipline in your life to be in the word of God whether it's the idea that you're not going to miss reading the word in the morning because the word of God is more important than coffee some people are like that's blasphemy listen if you had to make a choice between getting that cup of coffee or reading God's word if you're a Christian you ought to read God's word that's a hard choice especially if you love coffee as much as I do but we have to be disciplined it means never missing the preaching of the word wherever you go on vacation or whatever it is you do that you're not here you need to plan things so that you are under the preaching of the word every single

Sunday never missing a day you say well I don't know what church to go to there's a thing called G3 church search and also non-marks church search church finder church finder both of those will yield churches all over the United States that you can go to that I would say you're probably going to find a pretty good church you know why is that is that because I want to hold something over you no it's because I know I know that if you crave God's word enough that you organize your vacations around the preaching of the word God is going to bless your life he's going to bless your life and the third step of this is that when you do these things when you start as a duty and you discipline yourself to take seriously the word of God in your life it will become a delight and I've never heard of anyone who's taken both steps really really seriously who've never ended up in delight but you got to start and when you delight it then you're going to be one of those weirdos that's going to be listening to sermons on your drive to

San Antonio and back you know who the weirdos are that I'm talking about that's Michelle I mean like as we go places that's what we'll do we will open up and we will listen to sermons there's so many sermons out there there's so many things out there you just need to crave the word of God crave it because that's where the truth is if you are not in the word of God the word of God is not in you when persecution suffering comes you will not be ready so my prayer is that you would you would crave God's word put away the evil taste and see that the Lord is good let's pray