

Preparing for Crisis

Intro: In the gospels we are given in vivid detail the events of the last night of the Lord with his disciples. Peter's name comes up often. The disciples all gathered for the Passover meal. Apparently no slaves were present for the common service of washing feet before the beginning of the meal. And none of the disciples thought about doing that for the Lord much less each other. Jesus arose and girded up his robe with the towel and began to wash their feet, trying to impress upon them the need for humility. Peter protested his action: he had enough respect for the Lord to know that such a job was not his to perform, but not enough humility to do it himself.

That night Jesus sought to prepare them for the catastrophe that was about to crash upon them. He insisted to them that all of them were not faithful to him; that one would betray him. Perhaps a sad hush came over the room as they thought to themselves, "I would never do a thing like that!" And as self-righteous thoughts continued, attention turns to others. "Who would the culprit be?" Before long, there were renewed discussions about who was the greatest among them. Peter's voice was heard in the discussion. Jesus had to once again remind them that in God's kingdom greatness is determined by voluntary and humble service, not power to be served and to control others!

Now the conversation turns again to the business at hand. I am leaving you, Jesus says. I'm going where you can't go and I want you to love each other. Peter speaks up and says, "Lord I'll go with you wherever you go. I'll go to prison for you. I'll die for you!" "Simon, Simon..." "The devil wants to have you that he may sift you like wheat and I have prayed for you that your faith fail not...but when you are converted strengthen your brethren. Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times!" Perhaps Peter just stared in incredulity. What did he mean by that?!!!

The disciples needed to know that the Lord's departure from them would make them vulnerable to trials and afflictions, they had not heretofore known. There was a time when they need not worry about money or protection. But now conditions were going to change. Both would be a concern. They missed the point. They informed the Lord of how many swords they had in the midst for protection. And the Lord could only say in what seems to be disappointment at their imperceptiveness, "It is enough!"

As the night went on Jesus instituted the Lord's supper, he spoke to them of the coming Spirit who would help them, of the new work they would be doing for them, and prayed with them for God's love and spiritual protection.

As they left the room that night, Jesus tried to tell them yet again that they would fail him. "like sheep that are shattered when their shepherd is killed".

Peter was particularly vocal about that. "Though all else fail you, I will not forsake you". "I am ready to die for you if necessary" Jesus said, "Peter before a rooster crows you will deny me three times". Inconceivable!

As they made their way to the garden Jesus took Peter and John with him into the Garden to watch as he prayed. He went beyond them and fell on his face. Returning after an hour drenched in a bloody sweat he found Peter and John sleeping. "Could you not watch with me one hour? Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation?" And again he returned to pray. But Peter and John again were overcome with sleep. "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest?"

The enemy approaches...with swords, and torches, and spears. Led by Judas the Lord is betrayed with a kiss. Peter was ready to play the hero. All of his carnal instincts for survival welled up in him, out came one of the two swords and Peter let go with a swing that was designed to take one man out of the action! After all hadn't the Lord just said, we needed swords for protection?! The Lord rebuked him and healed the injured man. The disciples were unnerved and fled like scared children...including Peter.

Now the scene changes from the garden to the court of the high priest. Peter could not resist seeing the events of the night. Not in the light but in the warmth of a fire on the outside he peered through the doors hoping to get a glimpse of the action. Harmless servants came by from time to time to warm their hands and they would look at Peter; and they would say, "I know you..." And each time Peter would act as if he were a curious by-stander. I do not know him. The third time he rooster crowed and Peter caught a glimpse of the Lord inside. His heart was broken...he had denied his Lord. Everything the Lord said was true! It is a sad story of failure under the pressure of trial, the possibility of suffering. That night he did about everything wrong. He ignored every warning and when the crisis came, he buckled.

As I read 1 Peter 5 cannot help but hear echoes of Peter's own experience with the Lord, of that sad night when he let the threat of persecution get to him. Peter knew the pressure of suffering; and he also knew where he had gone wrong; he was now really prepared to die for the Lord. And now he knew just what to say to his brothers and sisters to prepare them for crises like he had faced. Peter ends his letter with a summary of what he had learned from his sad experience and share it with the rest to help them prepare for crisis.

WE NEED TO BE HUMBLE

Those who lead (the elders) need humility.

Three things an elder must not have: a swelling head, a grasping hand, a dragging foot

What God wants elders to humbly serve His people, not lord it over them.

Younger men need the humility to arrange themselves under the wisdom and guidance of the older (and perhaps elders here are intended as a special application of the principle) (v. 5)

All of us need to clothe ourselves with humility toward each other (v. 5)

Could Peter remember how the disciples could not give each other the support that they needed because they were so jealous of one another and so competitive of position?

Gird yourselves! The very word used of Jesus when he "girded himself with a towel!"

Most importantly all of us need to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God!

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, (1 Peter 5:6)

That's where Peter made his mistake. Do you think he might have thought of all the boastful things he has said that night he failed the Lord? 1 Cor. 10:13

But humility not only prepares us for the trial, it sustains us in the trial.

And when suffering comes one of greatest dangers we face is pride. It is so easy to be filled with self-importance and let our pride get the best of us. So we need the humility to accept what God in His providence purposes for us without proud resentment.

WE NEED TO BE PRAYERFUL

casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you. (1 Peter 5:7)

Your remember the Lord's exhortation to the disciples, "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation".

Prayer is a powerful source of strength with which to anticipate temptation!

The night Peter failed the Lord he had neglected to pray!

But now he knows the value of prayer! So much so that the apostles made it as much a part of their lives as teaching the word! (Ac. 6:4)

Prayer is a powerful source of strength while we suffer. In suffering, we are urged to cast our care upon a God. In trial it is comforting to know two things about God

...that He is powerful enough to handle our problems

...that He cares enough to do what is best for us! "Oh, yes he cares, I know he cares, his heart is touched with my grief"

WE NEED TO BE WATCHFUL

Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

The night after the last supper Jesus took the disciples to the garden. Their physical weakness took control. They were tired. They were sleepy. And Jesus kept saying, "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation" We need to be "sober"--that is self-controlled (v. 8).

We need to be "vigilant" (v. 8) Be watchful!

Why? We have an enemy. Satan derives his name from the fact that he is our enemy and God's enemy. Satan in Hebrew means "adversary". In Greek he is called "diabalos"--slanderer, accuser".

He goes as a roaring lion. He's hungry! He thrives on the destruction of Christians! He had devoured Peter the night of the betrayal; but not this time. Peter was ready.

WE NEED TO BE FAITHFUL (RESIST THE DEVIL, KNOWING THAT OTHERS SHARE YOUR TEMPATIONS)

But resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. (1 Peter 5:9)

We need to stand our ground! Be courageous! Peter now did not need a sword to fight his way out. He was fighting with weapons that could not be taken away from him! The shield of faith, the helmet of salvation! The sword of the Spirit!

Steadfast (in the old English sense of "stuck in place")--To withstand with firmness.

A military term for the solid mass of soldiers marching together with shields, a phalanx. (Long a)

So it came to convey the strength of such an army! Be strong! Be firm! Get your shield in front of you and don't give up!

And we can do that when we remember that we are in a struggle that all Christians have to deal with.

It is so easy to think only we have problems.

Look around and see that there are other people who fight the same battles we are fighting.

WE NEED TO BE HOPEFUL (LOOK PAST THE PAIN TO THE BLESSINGS THAT WILL COME OUT OF OUR TRIALS)

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, strengthen and establish you. (1 Peter 5:10)

Peter reminds us that our problems will not last forever. Suffering is measured by God. Like discipline of a Father, it is not continual but measured. "a little while"!

But rather the God of all grace (who shows us all favor) and who wants us to be in heaven with him (eternal glory) uses suffering to:

Perfect--the word here is not the word in 1 Cor. 13 but another word conveying the idea of putting the parts together!

Adjustment. Cf. chiapractor!

Confirm--To ground one on a foundation

Strengthen

Establish

Conclusion: I can imagine that it must have been painful for Peter to speak these words realizing how he had failed once to practice them. But God had used Peter's persecutions to make him a better man! And this time there would be no denials. If we can trust the traditions of the early church, Peter faced death with a powerful faith based on humility, prayer, watchfulness, strength, and understanding of God's purpose.

And so must we!