

Community Church of Issaquah

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## Believing in the Unseen

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Today we're focusing on the writing we find in the book of First Peter, which begins with these words, "Peter, and apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia." And from those words we would assume that Peter is laying claim to the writings. Interesting. Because no one who studies the Scriptures believes that Peter actually wrote it. Some say it could have been written by Peter's secretary as Peter dictated the words. By the way, that kind of personal recorder in Scriptures is called an 'amanuensis.' I know that word because it appeared on my New Testament final exam in seminary and I had no idea what it was, so I just wrote – refrigerator – like the Amana brand. I got half a point credit for being creative. Anyway.

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Peter was an uneducated fisherman, a common man who left his work to follow Christ and eventually could lay claim to being the best friend to Jesus. There is no evidence that Peter ever spoke Greek, much less wrote in that language. The two books attributed to Peter seem to bear more similarity to Paul's writings in his epistles. So, we begin our look at these beautiful words of encouragement found in First Peter uncertain who wrote them. Perhaps that doesn't even matter. We do know that they were written

and directed toward the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. Do those places sound familiar to you today? Could you locate them on a current world atlas? Today, all five of these places are found in one country on the map -- the country of modern-day Turkey.

Whoever wrote these verses wrote them for a purpose, so let's give Peter the benefit of the doubt and credit the writings to him. These were troubled times and those who had become believers of Christ were facing a great challenge and it was at times hard to keep their faith in God. When Peter wrote his letter, things were changing. In the beginning of the first century church, the government remained unconcerned about this new religious sect. As the church grew, the constrictions of the government increased. Peter is writing to a people who are finding it increasingly difficult to live their faith. Even today it is not easy being a Christian, but we must find a way to live our faith without compromise. Peter helps us gain some insight into how to live an authentic Christ centered faith in the midst of some difficult times. That brings to mind this question: "What is faith anyway?"

The book of Hebrews chapter 11, verse 1 is probably familiar to all of us. It goes like this: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." The world around us takes the things that are seen as real. Things that can be touched, tasted, heard, can be measured scientifically. Things that cannot be measured in this way are taken to be of less value. God does everything inside out from the way we do things. Let me give you some examples.

When we receive some visible reward or recognition that the world uses to measure success and satisfaction, we also derive a reward in our soul from that. So, if a parent gave us a dollar for a good grade in school, we would also receive affirmation in my soul. If you were to prepare a meal for me, it would feed my body, but it would also feed my soul with your love and acceptance. Most people will see the dollar or the meal as the substantial thing, the real thing, and the result in my soul as the insubstantial or less-than-real. It's unseen and can't be measured scientifically.

But God works from the inside out. So, in His reality, the affirmation, the security, the love and acceptance are the real substantial things. They are the things that give form and shape to your soul in this life and in the next. In truth, faith is unseen because it is intangible, but it is very real. Our faith grows as we grow in our relationship to the Lord and in our desire to do His work.

Peter talks about how we love Christ even though we have not seen Him. Let me repeat that definition of faith from Hebrews, "Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen." The essence of faith is that it does not require our sight or proof. But notice that faith is "reality". Just because something is not seen does not negate its existence. If it did all of us would be brainless, for I doubt that you have seen your own brain. But we know we have a brain. Peter says that real faith is loving a Christ, you have never seen, but still know exists.

The end result of a Christ centered faith is that our lives are shaped and molded by Him. Our faith begins to reflect

that deeper knowledge of Jesus, our lives will begin to change. When you and I live differently, because our faith is growing, those around us will see the difference. Quite literally, your life begins to reflect the image of Christ. Every person who professes faith in Christ shows their faith in such different ways. Let me give you two examples.

Martin Luther was a priest in the Roman Catholic church. His devotion to the work to which he was called led him to express his deep faith in an unusual way. In the year 1517, Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of a cathedral. These theses called for dramatic change in the Church which the Pope rejected. Instead, Luther chose to express his faith in Christ by marrying and leaving the Church. This began what was called The Protestant Reformation and led to the founding of more diverse congregations. He truly lived his deep faith which was shown by his work.

Now let me tell you a different story. A devoted Christian from Indiana founded his own church and grew his congregation to large numbers. Fearing a nuclear attack, he moved his church from Indiana to California where he presented himself as someone with prophetic abilities to see the future and to heal. Eventually he took his followers to the nation of Guyana and established Jonestown. Jim Jones had a following of more than 900 until he claimed that to have faith in Christ, his followers must see him as the messiah. Due to complex circumstances, Jones led his entire following to drink poisoned kool-aid and more than 900 women, men and children died at this direction. Two very different expressions of living out your faith.

As our faith begins to reflect that deeper knowledge of Jesus, our lives will begin to change. When you and I live

differently, because our faith is growing, those around us will see the difference. Quite literally, your life begins to reflect the image of Christ. When a goldsmith refines gold as Peter mentions, he melts it, discards the impurities and melts it again and again until he has pure gold. When he looks into the pure gold, he can see his own reflection. Jesus desires His reflection in our lives. That can only happen in a refined faith that has been tested.

That's the difficult part for all believers, keeping our faith strong even when it is tested. There have been life experiences for all of us in which our faith is tested. Health issues, family crises, work disruptions, financial problems, church changes – you name it, and we all have had it. Peter's message is clear. Let me re-read verses 8 and 9 for you. "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your soul."

There is a Christian writer I've often read named Max Lucado. In one of his books, *Six Hours One Friday*, he tells the story of how he and his boat survived a hurricane. He wrote that an older sailor gave him the advice to take his boat to deep water, drop four anchors off each corner of the boat, and pray that the anchors would hold. Max survived the storm which taught him a very important life lesson: all of us need an anchor that will hold during the storms of life. That anchor is our faith.

That's the message of Peter's words. He knows how important faith is and he gives a great picture of that faith, a faith that we can anchor deep with, and a faith that will

keep us afloat during the storms of life. Do you remember the words to that old hymn some of us grew up hearing? “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.” We could easily substitute the word ‘faith’ for ‘hope’ and it will have the same meaning.

Faith in Christ is imperishable. Wait! How can that be? Well look where faith in Christ is kept, in Heaven. Jesus says that we are to put our treasures in heaven where moth and rust cannot destroy or the thief steal. If our faith is set upon the things of this world, then our faith will perish. Countless kingdoms have come and fallen, economies have been built and destroyed, and nations have been established and vanished. All that is left of some of those kingdoms are the ruins you can see in a museum. Only the kingdom of God has remained constant in the past two thousand years. Our faith is to be set in heaven, and not on the things of this world. That is the only way that we know our faith is imperishable.

Our faith must be anchored in the timeless nature of Christ. But I can hear the question now. How do you know that a faith in Christ will hold up during the storms of life? Why should I trust Christ? Because, this is no ordinary faith, it is a tested faith. Countless people have placed their faith in Christ and found the anchor holds. Peter survived some incredible storms of life, and he says what he found is that faith in Christ is strongest when it is put to the test. Because a tested faith is centered on love.

The message of the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, can be summarized like this, "Hang on. God is working and the Messiah is coming. Get ready, your deliverer is coming." Doesn't that sound like a message for people at the end of their rope, for people who don't know where to turn? It is a message of hope and encouragement. It is a promise. How many people do you know that need to be encouraged not to give up. Perhaps you are one of them. My message is simple. Our time to live our faith is now.

It is not a question of if you have a faith. It's not a question of if the storms of life will come. It is the question Max Lucado asked, "Will your anchor of faith hold through the storms of life? This is a time of anchor our hope and faith to Christ now. I'm definitely not a prophet, but I'll simply close by saying, "The storm's a'brewin."

May God bless the words of faith. Amen