

TEACHING SERIES // April 10–May 8, 2022

Pilgrim's Progress: Why Sanctification Really Matters

1 Peter 1:1-21

Pilgrim, exile, sojourner, temporary resident, foreigner, stranger, alien, take your pick. If you're a follower of Jesus, you're all of the above! Face it. You simply don't fit in here. You belong to another domain. You have a different address. Your inheritance is not here, your future is not here, your hope is not here, and therefore your heart must certainly not be here. This world is not our home. We shouldn't even think of it as a "home away from home," as if it were some vacation villa. Why not? People love their retreats at the coast and their cabins in the mountains. We, however, are clearly commanded not to love this world, nor the things that are in this world (1 John 2:15). Close attachments to this world order, whether they be spiritual, political, cultural, or material, are like powerful tides that can carry pilgrim travelers away from—not toward—their final destination.

So does this mean we pilgrims are sour, dour killjoys, prohibited from enjoying or delighting in anything this world has to offer? No! Absolutely not! Paul the Apostle wrote to Timothy his understudy and said, "Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy" (1 Timothy 6:17 NASB). That last phrase is a kill-shot to the self-flagellating ascetic or gnostic, who believe godliness and self-deprivation are synonymous. Why? Because "all things" covers everything God has created—including the materials used to build that delightful log cabin in the mountains! Sadly, we often focus only on the first part of this verse while ignoring the last phrase.

We pilgrims are not party poopers. We are joyful adventurers, curious, capable, and courageous. We, of all people, really do know how to party! We don't have hangovers because we don't get drunk. We aren't sad when the party ends because we know the feast we enjoyed is just an appetizer for the marriage supper just around the corner. We aren't ruined if the party doesn't perfectly meet our expectations because we know a finite world can never supply us with the infinite delights our hearts long for. We pilgrims are the best partiers because we are realists. But as realists, we also know this world is not just a party. It is a valley of suffering. And while suffering isn't the pleasant part of our journey, it is neither futile nor gratuitous. Of course, much of suffering remains a mystery, but God is somehow using it to prepare us for our final destination. Yes, we pilgrims know how to party hard and suffer well.

How then should we live? In the final analysis, what does it mean to be a pilgrim? It means we live by faith. It means we are looking for another place to call home. It means we gracefully accept the suffering our pilgrim path entails. It means we think and live differently. It means we acknowledge there is a world of difference between those of us who confess Jesus as Lord and those who do not. It means our values, morals, and aspirations differ radically from those of the

person who sees the world as an end in itself. And it means we truly appreciate what it took to put us on this pilgrim path: nothing less than the shed blood of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

In the next few weeks, we are going to carefully study the first chapter of 1 Peter. The entire letter of 1 Peter is, in many ways, a wonderful road map for the traveling pilgrim. (Does anyone use road maps anymore? Maybe I should say GPS guide!) It is a letter that not only identifies followers of Jesus as pilgrims, aliens, or strangers scattered throughout this world, it is a pastoral encouragement to those wayfarers to keep making significant progress on the journey away from their former way of living to the city whose Builder and Maker is God. In other words, it is a clarion call for holy living in preparation for the final destination. Are you ready for the journey?

April 10 / *Pilgrim's Progress* / 1 Peter 1:1-2

(See the above introduction.)

April 17 (Easter) / *Alive with Hope* / 1 Peter 1:3-5

What does it mean to be saved by God? Do we really have even an inkling of the full implications of this salvation? If we had any kind of a Sunday School background, we probably learned, at the very least, it means our sins are forgiven. But oh, it is so much more than this! Because Jesus lives, we have hope for today as well as for the future, and an inheritance that no one can take away from us.

April 24 / *Joy (and Suffering) for the Journey* / 1 Peter 1:6-9

Why do followers of Jesus suffer? Why, for that matter, does anyone suffer? And how, if at all, do we make any sense of suffering? Some have contended that suffering constitutes one of the strongest arguments against the existence of God. Yet this argument only works if you think suffering is wrong. And where does the idea that suffering is wrong come from if there is no God and if we are not living in a moral universe in which categories of right and wrong truly exist? And what are we to make of people who suffer and still retain their joy and their faith? How do we explain this? Jesus, Peter, and Paul all indicate suffering and joy are not mutually exclusive. But how can these things coexist?

As you can see, suffering raises more questions than we can answer, and in the presence of suffering, we would do well to humbly confess there are reasons for suffering beyond our comprehension. However, 1 Peter 1:6-9 seems to suggest it may actually be necessary to suffer temporarily in order to obtain the kind of faith that prepares us for eternity and enables us to more clearly perceive our Messiah, who is presently unseen. Will we ever be able to answer all the questions suffering sets before us? If the outcome is anything like what Job experienced, it's doubtful. But then, consider this: do you suppose maybe, just maybe, the questions we wrestle with are themselves the fertilizer needed to make our faith flower and flourish?

May 1 / *The End of Our Faith* / 1 Peter 1:10-16

Human sin did not take God by surprise. You might even say the potential was baked into creation! Don't get me wrong. All that God created was good and very good. Apparently, however, good and perfect are not the same. Human goodness, it would appear, has an expiration date. It can last only so long. Finite human beings inevitably regress and go off track—especially when they decide to declare their independence from the One who made them!

How then, do fallen, alienated, rebellious, once-good human beings (who are made in the image of God) come back to Him? We come back in a way so profound and mysterious that prophets and angels strained to understand it. God's marvelous plan is to reach out in grace and rescue us, making us perfect through the sanctifying power of the gospel. To be sanctified or holy or perfect is to be like God. This means more than simply being God's creation. It means bearing the family likeness. This happens through a two-step process. Since, through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are now related to God as His sons and daughters, we can now, too, through the power of the Holy Spirit, start living and acting like it. This is the meaning of holiness. This is the goal of our faith—to be like God on His terms, not ours.

May 8 / *Our Father and Judge* / 1 Peter 1:17-21

What does it mean to fear God? How can we call Him Abba (our loving Daddy) and at the same time tremble before His all-knowing judgments? The truth is, as we grow in holiness, we will live in the fear of God as well as in His love. This fear is much, much more than respect, awe, and wonder; it is our reasonable response to our Father's certain correction should we intentionally or ignorantly move away from the holiness His love produces. He loves us that much. And the evidence of this love is seen in both the price He paid for our sins as well as the loving discipline that comes when we make light of what it cost to make us holy.