1 Peter 1:17–21 — Pass the Time of Your Sojourning in Fear

The Pilgrim Character, the Precious Blood, and the Foreordained Lamb

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Scripture Reading: 1 Peter 1:17–21

> *“And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear:*
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> *forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:*
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> *who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.”*

A Pilgrim Epistle

First Peter was written immediately to the sojourners of the dispersion — Jewish believers scattered abroad — but the principles it brings out apply to the whole people of God. The epistle is, along with Hebrews, one of the wilderness epistles. We are looked at as strangers and pilgrims here (2:11). This was something new for Jewish believers, for under the law they had been promised a portion in the land; they were not seen as pilgrims in that way. Now, in Christ, they are brought into a wholly different relationship to this world.

One theme running throughout 1 Peter is things that are pure. It is almost a reliable rule: read a verse in this epistle and look for something that is pure, and nine times out of ten it is right there. First Peter stands in instructive contrast with the second epistle, which returns again and again to corruption — false prophets, despisers of truth, the rot that sets in. The first epistle is full of light; the second, of darkness that needs exposing.

Invoking as Father: The Pilgrim's Foundation

J.N. Darby's translation of the opening of verse 17 renders it: "If ye invoke as Father." The difference is slight but significant. Not merely "call on the Father," but to invoke him as Father — owning the relationship, acknowledging it as yours. Implicit in that is the call of verse 16: "Be holy, for I am holy." You are invoking him as your Father; that invocation carries with it the acknowledgment of what such a Father is.

This Father judges without respect of persons according to every man's work. That is a governmental dealing — not the future judgment of the great white throne, which will be in the hands of the Son, but the Father's present governmental ways with his own in their earthly pathway. First Peter 4:17 confirms this present character: "The time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God." This is connected in spirit with Hebrews 12, where enduring chastening is the mark of sonship: "For what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not?" Both passages speak to the Father's faithful governing of his pilgrim people, and in both the relationship expressed by the word Father involves love and affection at its foundation.

To pass the time of one's sojourning in fear is the practical response to knowing both the relationship and the government. The time is not specified as short or long — it resists calculation entirely. What is specified is how it is to be passed: in the fear of God. As Proverbs says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of

wisdom.” In Nehemiah 5:15, Nehemiah declined a salary of bread and wine and forty shekels of silver — not because the money was tainted, but because of the fear of God. He was building a wall of separation from evil, and those Babylonian wages were somehow incompatible with that work in his conscience. That is the kind of thing the fear of God produces. It is not anxiety but a moral reverence that occasionally causes the believer to do things that seem strange to the world.

Corruptible and Incorruptible: Silver, Gold, and Blood

One of the great lessons of 1 Peter is the difference between things which are corruptible and things which are not. Silver and gold were, in the ancient world, the least corruptible of things — the most enduring of earthly values. Peter says they are corruptible. And against that corruptible ransom price, he sets the precious blood of Christ.

The word precious is exact. It is not possible to measure the preciousness of the blood of Christ the way gold and silver are weighed. They have weight, and weight can be calculated. But the blood of Christ has infinite value because the value of a person’s blood derives from the person who shed it. The Son of God took on humanity that he might shed his blood — and yet it is the blood of that one person, God and man united, so that while the shedding of blood is a thoroughly human act, it is the act of the Son of God’s own person. Thus all the value and glory of his person is imparted to that blood. It is moreover his life’s blood, carrying with it the value of his death and the giving of his life.

The vain manner of life from which they were redeemed was not simply personal wickedness but a system — the law as a principle of approach to God, handed down through generations, which in the end only provoked sin and showed man his nothingness. The Pharisee had a great stake in that tradition. To read “your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers” and swallow it easily

is easy for us; for one who had based everything on those ancestral traditions, it was not an easy verse at all. But the law was just and holy and good — the trouble lay entirely in man.

The Lamb Without Blemish

Christ is presented here as a lamb without blemish and without spot. In Matthew's gospel, four consecutive days can be traced on which various opposers came against the Lord Jesus to find a spot in him. It does not say they were looking for a blemish; we know what they were doing. But those four days correspond exactly to the four days in which the Passover lamb was to be kept up for examination. In Exodus, there is no instruction given for what to do if a blemish is found in the lamb after those four days — because the lamb that answers to Christ cannot have a blemish found in it. It is kept up not to discover a flaw but to demonstrate, openly and publicly, that there is none.

He was holy as God is holy — not merely "holy, for God is holy," as we are called to be. He was the standard itself. The verse distinguishes: "Be holy, for I am holy" is the call to us (v.16); but the lamb is "without blemish and without spot" — there is no qualifying "for." He is holy as God is holy, not merely in imitation of that holiness. This distinction is what imparts infinite value to the precious blood.

Foreordained Before the Foundation of the World

Nothing about the cross took God by surprise. The blood of Christ was not an emergency measure. Verse 20 declares that the lamb was foreordained before the foundation of the world. Foreknowledge in Scripture carries a determinative force — it is not merely that God's omniscience looked ahead and saw what would happen. There is the determinative will of God implicit in the word: this was his purpose before the world ever was.

There is a distinction between things which are from before the foundation of the world and those which are from the foundation of the world. The latter are earthly things, traceable to the creation; the former have an origin that antedates the world entirely. These Jewish saints who have been redeemed by the precious blood are now connected with things of the heavenly order — things that go back beyond the creation of Palestine and the promises to Abraham. A Jewish believer coming to verse 20 might have thought his heritage traceable all the way to the creation of the world; here he finds he is connected with something that goes back further still, before the foundation of the world.

The manifestation “at the end of times” (Darby) marks the terminal point of the times of trial of the first man. When those times reached their conclusion, God brought Christ in and revealed himself in the Son. They had both seen and hated both Christ and the Father; in rejecting Christ they rejected the Father also. And it was right at that conclusion that the precious blood was shed.

Faith and Hope in God

The last words of verse 21 gather up the purpose of all that precedes: “that your faith and hope might be in God.” Through Christ — not through the believer’s own will or resolution — God has raised him from among the dead (not a general resurrection, but a resurrection from among the dead, the out-resurrection) and given him glory. The object of faith and hope is the God who gave the Lamb, who raised his Son from among the dead, and who gave him glory. Faith and hope rest on that.

The word by at the beginning of the verse in J.N. Darby’s rendering is through: “who through him do believe in God.” This is not a support for Arminian notions. Faith here is not something that arises from the believer’s free will; it is something wrought through Christ, granted according to the will of God. Once this consciousness is raised, it becomes visible everywhere. God has raised Christ

from among the dead. God gave him glory. And through him, God grants faith and hope to his people.

How precious that blood. How sure that hope. How immovable that object.