

Series: "Saving Our Soul from Wasting Our Life"

Sermon: "Look! It's a Squirrel!"

Text: 1 Peter 1:3-9

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- There was an old saying. It isn't used much anymore. The way the church in general often operates in the world today makes the accusation in the saying far less necessary.
- It goes like this: "***You are too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good.***"
- This accusation, "*too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good,*" was usually hurled to suggest all we cared about was getting people to heaven. We supposedly had no concern at all for the earthly—day-to-day needs and the pain of the people we evangelized.
- Frankly, that was sometimes true. Sometimes against the strong pull of love and personal concern we felt when we encountered someone in great need, we moved on to the next house to tell the Gospel message. The issue of heaven and hell seemed to outweigh any earthly pain we might try to help alleviate.
- The *emphatic* focus of the words the Apostle Peter has to say next in his first epistle might mistakenly raise the issue of too heavenly mindedness over earthly good. That would be a misunderstanding.
- Peter would say we "***must always*** be heavenly minded (*focused*) to be of any earthly good at all." Otherwise, we will waste our lives as believers. He wants us to "*save our lives*" rather than waste them.
- Remember, from last week, that Peter speaks in terms of "*saving our souls.*" Again, that might automatically sound to some of us like he is talking eternal destiny matters of heaven or hell. However, for Peter, this is "*saving our lives*" as believers from being wasted in meaningless living rather than fulfilling the reason God has left us on this earth for a time.
- In the address of his letter in verses 1 and 2, the Apostle identified his readers in some very important ways. **First**, these believers are

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**chosen by God**, as are all humans who have trusted Jesus Christ for everlasting life.

- God has chosen them and us as believers, to be part of His ongoing redemptive mission to restore humans to their wonderful created purpose of being the imagers of God in the creation. This redemption is possible because of all that Jesus accomplished.
- **Second**, even though these believers and we are "chosen people," this does not make us the "kings" of this world. In fact, our identity, with regard to this world, is that of aliens, strangers, people who don't belong in this world forever and people to whom this world does not belong. Tritely, and maybe a little misleading, "*This world is not my home. I'm just a passin' through!*"
- We talked last week of how believers can make the mistake of thinking this world with its ways and its metrics of success—with all of its stuff and all of its potential comforts—with all the choices its wealth can offer—we can make the mistake of thinking that this is what life for God is supposed to be about. We can easily make the mistake that we are here to be successful, wholly healed of all brokenness and failure, relatively comfortable in our circumstances and always safe by this world's ways and standards today.
- This mistake is probably easier to make in wealthier contexts. It is the model set before us by the world around us from the day we are old enough to hold up our own heads and focus our own eyes on the people and things around us.
- It takes a proactive life of truth from God's Word and the wisdom that provides to reject the world's metrics for a purposeful and successful life. **Third**, we believers share the identity of these readers as **blood-stained, sanctified** people. We have been marked with the blood of Jesus not just to go to heaven someday. We have been

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marked to be set apart for this mission with the reminder that the power to do it comes from God through Jesus Christ.

- **We are chosen-for-a-mission, alien, Jesus' blood-marked** people. When we live out of that true identity—who we truly are as believers—it is no wonder some folks think we are strange!
- By this time in Peter's life, he is quite aware, that the world has its way of *distracting us from this identity* and from our *mission*. The world knows how to get buy-in to its ways and measures from our still unredeemed flesh. The world says, "**Look it's a squirrel,**" and we often turn immediately and say, "**Where?**"
- Peter says to his readers, "*Let me give you something else wonderful and amazing to look at—something that will keep you from being distracted by all the frivolous attention-getters of this world.*"
- Let's read where he points their attention and ours in 1 Peter 1:3-9.
- **READ 1 Peter 1:3-9**
- Look to God the Father and what he has accomplished through the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Look at God's **mercy**. Think about what you deserved but what you received from God instead that was undeserved.
- Look at the **new life** he has given you. You have been no less than born a second time. This **new birth** is as real as your first birth. You are a new person in Jesus Christ.
- Look at the **living hope** that brings of a new life as real and as powerful as the new life of the **resurrected** Jesus. If death scares you the most, you have a living example and thus a living hope. This is not just a wish. It is a future certainty that even death cannot defeat you. Look, you do not have to fear death as most of the rest of this world without Jesus fears it.

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- Look, your life to come is already connected to the life you are living now. This is one reason you wouldn't want to waste this life now as if it just doesn't matter. No! Right now you are storing up an ***inheritance reward***.
- This inheritance reward does not equal "going to heaven" for Peter. This inheritance reward is the treasure Jesus taught him to "*store up in heaven*" by how he invested his life now rather than trying to be successful by the world's standards of investment.
- I would suggest that more Christians in the USA were likely ***looking*** at their this-world 401k investment treasures this past week than looking at their eternal investments in the treasure storehouse of heaven. "*Look! There's a squirrel!*"
- Look, says Peter, "*Those heavenly investments are shielded by God's power. You'll never lose even a tiny bit of those investments.*"
- No matter what you lose here in this world, God promises to keep them safe until that *last day* when he finally and totally ***delivers*** you from this world.
- Look at the beginning of verse 6 again and really LOOK again at these realities instead of at the stuff of this world. Do this LOOKING and instead of feeling lost in this world, Peter says that you and I can ***"Greatly rejoice!" Right now!***
- Of course, we'll need to believe that these truths are true for this *looking—this focus--* to matter! We'll need to believe that if God's Word says these are the realities they are real, in order to be moved to rejoicing.
- Why do I make this point? Well, look at the second half of verse 6. ***"(T)hough now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials."***

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- Living for Jesus in this world so that we do not waste our lives by God's measure will produce pain, suffering, trials—grief! This is one reason so many of us are tempted to look at life through the worldly lens so that we might avoid some of these trials.
- True, we probably can avoid some of the pain if we will just do things the world's way. So, why not work hard with the purpose of buying some comfort and sense of safety and control the way the world can provide it?
- Or, why not avoid some relational pain? Relationally what's a little lie here and there? Why not just sweep this or that under the rug rather than do the truly loving thing that will likely bring some pain?
- We probably ought to get a grip on this truth about suffering as believers since Jesus, James, Paul and now Peter here all tell us living for God's glory in this broken world will not be possible without suffering.
- In fact, if we understand them all correctly, our suffering is no accident. Neither is it a punishment. Understood correctly, our suffering is a good thing. Our suffering is the means God uses in this world to separate the wheat and the chaff of our faith.
- Most English versions struggle with translating this idea. They make a purifying process sound as if it is a testing process to see if our faith, as a whole, is genuine—good enough faith.
- This is not Peter, Paul or James' point. The suffering gives us a way to put what we call our "faith" into action. Then, that which is false in our faith is burned off and our faith actually in the Lord Jesus is left purified. The dross is removed and what remains is the pure gold of trust in Him. That trust is worth more than the pure gold of this world, according to Peter. Abraham experienced this when called upon to sacrifice Isaac. His faith in God was purified like pure gold!

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- Still, I suggest again, that more Christians these past weeks have probably been looking at and focused upon the amazingly high price of this world's gold as our worldly economy crashes than on the pure gold of faith in Jesus. "*Look! There's a squirrel!*"
- The gold of this world is worth making TV commercials to sell it. In bad financial times it can *perhaps* help to protect me and give me more control over my worldly success and comfort.
- However, the pure gold of purified faith—purified in trials and suffering—is worth glory and honor when we stand before the Jesus—the eternal Lord of the universe. "*Look! There's a squirrel!*"
- Peter knows many or all of his readers (so of course us too) have never seen the Lord Jesus Christ—the Sovereign of all Creation—with their physical eyes. This is just as they have never seen the pure gold of their purified faith. The gold of this world seems so much more real to our flesh for sure! ***But, Jesus is real!*** They believe this enough to be able to love the Lord they have never seen.
- When they believe in Jesus—when they look, by faith, at all the realities that knowing even an unseen Jesus brings—they are then filled with ***inexpressible and glorious joy.***
- Jesus' coming glory and reward for purified faith is just as real! And, it is a wonderful reality even if the process in this world to purify faith absolutely must involve the painful fires of suffering.
- In the end, for Peter's point in the letter, do you see what this process going on means for us? What is happening when we choose to LOOK at—that is to focus on the realities of ***God's mercy, our new birth, our living hope,*** and an ***imperishable inheritance reward*** even as we are in the faith-purifying process of suffering?
- What is happening? ***We are NOT wasting our life!*** Our life is being saved by God! Our life is being redeemed for his created purpose!

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- This is the principle taught by Jesus that "**to save our life we must lose our life.**"
- When understood in this light this is what Jesus means when he asks "**what it will profit a man if he gains the whole world but forfeits his soul.**" This is not a question focused on going to hell (although a person who loses his own soul could well be bound for that destiny). It is a question of wasting life—of not really living even while alive because of chasing the wrong things and having the wrong purpose. Even a person bound for heaven can **gain the whole world and lose their own soul in this manner**—or see their soul saved as Peter wants here.
- This is the principle of purified faith in Jesus Christ. This means trusting Him and relinquishing my own control of my life. The world ultimately rejects this as being a good purpose in life even when it might seem sometimes they *sort of* try to practice it by doing "good stuff" without even involving Jesus.
- Why do I say they seem to sort of try to practice this? In my opinion, we live in a very strange world today—at least a very different one than I have been used to.
- Today when the world says, "**Look! It's a squirrel!**" they may as likely be pointing at some distraction from Peter's heavenly focus that appears to be loving, good, moral and sacrificial as they might be pointing at gold and silver or prestige and power.
- They say, **Look! It's love!** As they point to accepting an unbiblical sexuality or gender fluidity.
- Even a Catholic bishop finally said, I'm not falling for that distraction when a politician claiming to be following God kept saying, **Look! It's love!** to allow an expecting mother the freedom to control her own life by aborting a lump of nothing that is actually a human being.

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- Or, **Look! It's love!** When we apply a definition of "equity" that makes people forever identify as victims and victimizers rather than deal with forgiveness and truth.
- **Look! It's love!** To save the earth like we want it even if we have to stretch the truth and make others suffer in ways from which we exempt ourselves.
- **Look! It's love!** To lie and spread disinformation if we do it to achieve our much better desired ends and elect the people we want to elect.
- Why do I use these examples? Because these are the **squirrels** that the world is using today to get the attention our kids and our grandkids. These are some of the new attention-getters that sound good like love (and "God is love after all!") the world points to that take their eyes, and some of ours, off the heavenly focus—off the things Peter said to look at.
- Satan never runs out of new ways to use tried and true old principles of distraction. *Look at that fruit! How pretty to the eye! How good it must taste to the tongue!*
- Look at how we love people! See! They like us because we make them feel good by giving them what they want. That must be God's way, right. Look over here! **Look! It's a squirrel!**
- Every day we wake up alive, we can know that God has left us believers in Jesus in this broken world for a very important reason as part of his plan.
- Part of that plan of being left here as called-to-the mission, alien-to-this-world, Jesus'-blood-spattered people is that we will have the opportunity to see our faith in Jesus Christ—faith which is more precious than gold—faith which is more precious than gaining this whole—purified so it will someday bring great glory to God and great reward to us.

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- As difficult as it is to keep the focus on this truth, each day, every circumstance, presents this opportunity.
- If we want to save our lives from "being wasted," instead of turning to the distractions of the world, we can look to all the amazing realities of Life in Jesus Christ as they are carefully and clearly revealed in God's Word.
- So then, contrary to that old saying, it turns out that "*we must be **"heavenly minded to actually be of any earthly good at all!"***"
- To not be heavenly minded is to end up wasting earthly life.
- If our focus is on chasing the distracting *squirrels* this world points out instead of the realities of our identity and our life in Jesus Christ, especially when we suffer, we will be of no earthly good.
- *How great are these realities of life in Jesus even in a broken world that includes us suffering? We shall see, Lord willing, next week.*
- I'll will leave you with a simple quotation to think about from a professor of mine summing up the reason you and I are still here, still alive today, as believers still living in this still broken world...
- *"The true goal of Christian faith is more than to escape from eternal damnation. It is to achieve a fullness of life now and a resplendent glory in the age to come. For this, sufferings are as necessary to us as they were to our Lord. For Him, the path to glory led to the cross. So also for his followers." (Hodges; 1 Peter p.23*