

Third Sunday of Easter – Epistle

Ransomed From Futility, Ransomed For Faith

1 Peter 1:17-23

Third Sunday of Easter

Analysis by Paige G. Evers

17 If you invoke as Father the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile. 18 You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. 20 He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. 21 Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God. 22 Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart. 23 You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God.

DIAGNOSIS: Futile Ways

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – Exile

Because they have converted from Greco-Roman culture to Christianity, 1 Peter's readers are dispersed, their faith is being tested, and they are suffering. Were the old ways

inherited from their ancestors (v. 18) really so futile? As the suffering continues, some are beginning to wonder. The author names their problem: being a Christian means living in exile (v. 17). In an age when nonstop “God Bless Americas” ring in our ears, it is easy to forget that Christians today are also in exile; we are surrounded by coworkers, neighbors, friends, and family who do not share our faith and hope in Jesus, and may even regard us with suspicion.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Futility

The former life, the life before exile, the life before Christ, tugs at the hearts and minds of 1 Peter’s readers. They have been taught to set all their “hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed” (1:13). But they “have not seen” Jesus Christ and “they do not see him now” (1:8). In the midst of suffering, it is tempting to return to the comfortable yet futile ways inherited from ancestors rather than trust in the One who died a seemingly futile death on a cross.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Fear

The author points to the readers’ own understanding of God the Father to help them grasp what is at stake in this tug-of-war between their “desires that you formerly had in ignorance” (2:14) and their hope in Christ. The God those in exile invoke is “the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds” (v. 17). The believers in exile and the non-believers alike will face God “when he comes to judge” (2:12). Before this judge who can stand? All would do well to “live in reverent fear” (v. 17) as they await God’s coming for judgment.

PROGNOSIS: Born Anew

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Born Anew

Thanks be to God that a reverent fear and a living hope are not mutually exclusive. The author reminds the readers that because

of their faith in Christ they have reason for hope. The “precious blood of Christ” has “ransomed” them from the futile ways of their past (v. 18). God has delivered them from exile. In this same passage, the author also reminds the readers, “you have been born anew” (v. 23). What does this mean? Our Heavenly Father “has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading” (1:3-4). Unlike the futile ways of the past, this inheritance, this legacy of the cross and the empty tomb, leads to eternal life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *For Your Sake*

The shedding of Christ’s precious blood that leads to eternal life was not God’s hastily-devised, last-minute solution. Instead, Jesus Christ “was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages” (v. 20). Even better, God made this plan for salvation and set the plan into motion “for your sake” (v. 20). A living hope, faith in Christ, “obedience to the truth” (v. 22), all of these belong to those who have been ransomed from futility. Faith and hope belong to those who have been set free for a life of trust and obedience to the God “who raised him from the dead and gave him glory” (v. 21).

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *Love One Another*

During the time of their exile, the readers of 1 Peter can withstand suffering and the stares and sneers of their non-Christian neighbors as they “love one another deeply from the heart” (v. 22). As the community of the baptized, the “born anew” (v. 23), their words and deeds to one another, to those outside the community, even to the authorities reflect their “genuine mutual love” (2:17). This love does not arise from their reservoirs of human emotion. It arises from the riches of their faith and hope which are “set on God” (v. 21) who raised

Jesus Christ from the dead and gave him glory.