

Love A Little Deeper



1 Peter 1: 20–25

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I had a thought about us parents...and if you are a parent, you're really going to understand this I think. Have you noticed that when we become parents you get this supernatural ability that almost makes us superheroes? We can see things that are going to happen in the future. You just know it! You don't have to wait for it to happen; you know it before it's going to happen. We just have this ability to know before. What is neat about us superhero parents is that because we know the problem is coming we already have the solution figured out before it happens. This blows our kids minds that we actually know what they're going to do before they do it. When they do it, it doesn't shock us; we're prepared for it. When you were a young parent you wanted to be prepared for everything you knew was going to happen in the next two weeks in the life of your child, so you had that big, big bag you carried around. That was the solution bag. You had in the bag, the solution bag, everything you needed for what was going to go wrong for at least two weeks in the life of your kids. So, if you're a parent this message is not going to surprise you this morning. When we read verses 20 and 21, we're going to see that God already had the solution before we had the problem. He just has this

uncanny ability to not just see but to know what was going to happen in the lives of His children, and then already have the solution in mind.

Scripture

"He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for

"All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever."

And this word is the good news that was preached to you."

We are starting the message at the end of the previous paragraph, but our main message is not going to be verses 20 and 21 this morning, it's going to be verses 22 through 25. Now, remember what Peter is telling the elect exiles as he tries to encourage them to stand firm in a fallen world. He reminded them that they have been ransomed from all of the futile ways they inherited from their forefathers by the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish or spot. Can you imagine hearing that for the first time as the recipient of this letter, and that word ransom reminds you that a price has been paid by someone else to set you free? What Peter wants you to know your free from is not eternal separation from God—that's not the passage. You're free from all of those futile things you inherited from your forefathers, those things we kind of laugh about, we kind of joke about. It's just being a Cunningham, it's just being a Bogard...and yet, a price has been paid to set us free. Now, before Peter moves on to some practical application he wants us to remember that he, in verse 20, is modifying Christ who ransomed us through His blood. He was *foreknown* before the foundation of the world.

What is Peter doing here? Peter is wrapping up this section of thinking, reminding us, making sure we remember that our salvation, our ransom price that was paid, wasn't thought about or planned because God was shocked about what we did in the garden—and therefore after seeing that we blew it, He had to decide what to do to solve our problem to get us out of the dilemma. No. Before there was ever a you or a me, before there was ever an Adam and Eve, even before there was a universe, Christ was foreknown. This doesn't mean that God knew Jesus before the foundation of the world, that He knew, previously, God the Son. Of course He knew God the Son. The Godhead Son was God and had always been with God. So this word, foreknown, is being used in the sense that before we did what we did in the garden and would need to be ransomed, God the Father had already made a choice of Jesus to be the Redeemer to solve the problem we created. Wow! So please don't think what happened in the garden shocked God. Please don't think there was ever a time in the garden when He wished He hadn't created us. He already knew and created us anyway because He had the solution to our problem already determined, predetermined, and that's the death of His Son. Can I just say wow? Do you hear this? Your Father made a choice of Jesus because He knew the problem you and I were going to get into. When did He make this choice? Before the foundation of the world!

Now, Jesus wasn't manifested, Peter says, until these last times. So when he looked at time, Peter believed he was living in the last times, and now it had been manifested that the Christ was here. This is a reference to the birth, incarnation, life, and death of Christ. I have said this many, many times but I just want to say it again—God went public with Jesus. Publicly, He lived the life we couldn't, so that He could go to the cross and die the death we should have, so that we can now do what He did, and that's live an obedient life to God. He did this for your sake. He did this for you...God did, Jesus did.

Then, Peter is going to tell us that through Jesus we are now believers in God, which means if there was not Jesus, you and I would not believe in God. Why is our faith in God the Father? Because of Jesus the Son...because what did God do? He raised Jesus from the dead and gave

Him glory. Jesus laid His life down on a cross, His disciples buried Him, and three days later God reached down and raised Jesus back alive. When He raised Him back alive, that meant everything that was being taught about Jesus and His death on the cross is all true. Through Jesus's death on the cross as a sacrificial atonement for our sins, you and I are now made right with God! On that cross, He wasn't lying when He said, it is paid, it is finished...our sin debt is paid for! God raised Him back alive and He gave Him the glory as the risen Lord to take His seat at His right hand side, and when He sat down, it signified to us and to all the world that our sin debt is paid, our salvation is finished. There is nothing more we can do for salvation; it's finished in Christ, "...so that your faith and hope is in God." If you are a believer in God, because of Jesus your faith and your hope is in God; your faith and hope is not in yourself. Now, you need to dig really deep this morning and ask yourself, is your faith and hope in God only? Is it in what He did for you on that cross in His Son? Because, the next three verses are going to follow this amazing truth with an amazing command to act. Let's dive into it.

I can't tell you how thankful I am for the privilege you give me to study God's Word and then feed you on Sunday mornings. It's been a delight this week. But I want to be totally honest with you; this passage is going to go in a direction I didn't know it was going to go. When I came to this passage, I tried to do what I'm supposed to do, and that is not read anything into the passage but just let the passage say what it is saying. But I noticed something—when we start reading verse 22, I want you to notice all the commas, I want you to notice the semicolon, but I want you to notice where the period is. Now we see this with Paul a lot, but Peter is just a fisherman, we don't expect him to do this—he just goes on and on and on, so this is a long sentence. For those of us who are English speakers, we like short, simple sentences. We like a lot of six or seven words sentences with a period. That's not going to happen with Peter here, "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart" Now I expect a period right there, but there's no period there's a comma. That means I can't stop here I have just got to draw a breath and continue on because he's continuing the thought, "since you have been born again, (No period,

another comma) not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;" There is not even a period here, now a semicolon! And he launches into the Old Testament Isaiah chapter 40 and he quotes three verses, verses 6, 7, and 8, and finally we have a period, praise the Lord! Then he's got one more short simple sentence, "And this word is the good news that was preached to you."

Now, I want to tell you what I believe Peter is doing here. A little while ago we studied the Gospel of Mark. I love the Gospel of Mark; it's action-packed and fast paced. Do you remember that literary device Mark used from time to time, where he would start a story, interrupt the story with another story, and then he would finish the first story? In the literary world, it's what we call a Markan Sandwich. It was a teaching technique. Most scholars believe that Mark was influenced by Peter, and so the Gospel of Mark could be called the Gospel of Peter. Here, I think we see a sandwich, not a Markan Sandwich, but a Peteran Sandwich, a sandwich of truth. I want to show you what Peter does...Peter doesn't take two stories here and interrupt one story with another story, but he takes two truths about identity, and in the middle of those two truths, he puts in a verb, a command of action. That command is based on what he says about identity before and what he says about identity after, and that's why he uses commas. When Peter says, "Having purified your souls" just imagine a sandwich and this is the top piece of bread. Then he's going to give a command based on that, which is "love one another earnestly." That's the meat of this paragraph. So, if you're going to go home with something this morning, go home with the meat. And the meat is we are supposed to love one another earnestly and that love is supposed to come from a pure heart. But why are we loving one another earnestly? It's because we have purified our souls by obedience to the truth for brotherly love. Does that makes sense? Now, if you're going to have a sandwich, you got to have the bottom bread. The bottom piece of bread is the next statement "since you have been born again." Now here's what I thought...as I studied this week, I thought okay I'm supposed to love other people because I have purified my soul, and then Peter tells me, since you have been born again. See, I wanted to believe there's something else I'm supposed to do because I have been born again, but he doesn't tell us anything else to do

after because we've been born again; he has already told us what we're supposed to do. Because we've been born again, what we're supposed to do is love one another...wow. We could literally let "love one another earnestly from a pure heart" end the first statement, and then start the second statement with the same sentence, "love one another earnestly from a pure heart since you have been born again."

I have to ask you a question. Have you been born again? Have you purified your soul? If you have been born again, you have purified your soul and if you have purified your soul, you have been born again. If you have not purified your soul, you have not been born again, and if you have not been born again, you have not purified yourself. I'll tell you what Peter is doing here—Peter is bringing in both sides of salvation. You know me because I have been your pastor a long time—I get a little aggravated at those people in churches who swing to one side or the other side of salvation. They make it all about the human side, or they make it all about the divine side. In this sandwich of truth, Peter combines the human side and the divine side because there are two sides of salvation—the human side and the divine side. But the truth is if you have purified your soul, if you have been born again, the evidence of that is not going to church, it's not reading your Bible, it's not given money, it's not teaching a class; it's loving one another deeply from a pure heart.

You know I love sandwiches...I have said this many, many times, if I can't have a filet mignon I just rather have a good old hamburger. This is going to be a sandwich, but I pray it's a filet mignon to you, "having purified your souls by obedience to the truth." Do you remember when you heard the gospel and you obeyed? Now, this is not a works based salvation. Here's how you obey the gospel—you simply believe what God says is true. What did God say is true? God says it's true that He put Jesus on a cross in your place, and on that cross Jesus faced your eternal separation of God, paid your sin debt, frees you from the penalty of sin, and makes you in a right relationship with God. Do you know what God demands of you? He demands you to repent of being a sinner and cling to that truth. The moment your repent of sin and put your complete faith and trust in Christ, you just purified yourself. Wow! You just freed yourself from all of that

junk you inherited from mama and daddy! Isn't that cool? Jesus paid to ransom me so that I don't have to be like granddaddy. I don't have to be like great-great granddaddy. All of that junk that was in our family, it stops with me because I'm a believer in Jesus! Can you imagine somebody ransoming you and then you staying in the junk? We love those ransom movies where the person's help bondage, but when the ransom is paid they're free, they don't stay in captivity. Why are you still in captivity? You're free. The price has been paid for you.

Now, there was a purpose in Him ransoming you. It is for "brotherly love." It's where we get that word Philadelphia from, the city of brotherly love. God ransomed you so that you could be part of a family, a new family...not a physical family, but a spiritual family. Do you know what you have within you if you purified your soul through faith in Jesus? You have a love for brothers and sisters in Christ. Now, there is not a person in here and there's not a person in the whole universe who could ever say I have ever said anything negative about my sister Regina. She is an amazing lady. Do you know why I think she's an amazing lady? Because she's my sister. From the time we were little, she has loved me, and from the time I accepted her into the family as my sister, I have loved her. There's just no doubt. Do you know why we love each other? It's because we had the same parents, Bobby and June Cunningham. We both have a combination of their DNA. But here is what there's no doubt about—we love each other. Well, the family of God is a big family and we have God's DNA. We're family. We're brothers and sisters in Christ. Do you know what is amazing about me and my sister? We got saved on the same day, March 24th, 1974. We both stepped out to accept Christ at the same time, but somehow she figured out quicker than I did and she got saved before me. So even though I'm almost two years older than her, physically, she's a few minutes older than me spiritually. Man, I'm looking at a big family here this morning. Some of you are younger than me, some of you are older me, and some of you are close to my age. Do you know why we got redeemed from the yuck and the junk? It's so that we could sit down together and be family.

Now, I want to be totally honest with you—because of the family I was raised in, I struggled with those people who have physical families who don't love each other. I just don't get it. Sorry, but I don't get it. What I also don't get is how you treat your brother in Christ like you treat your brother in Christ. And you sisters? God help some of us. Physically, my sister and I don't talk about each other. How dare we talk about each other in the family of God the way we do! Now, the only reason we would be doing that stuff is because we're still in that yuck of the sin of the forefather. I thought you got redeemed from that! I thought you understood when you put your faith in trust in Jesus Christ we were being redeemed, not just from the penalty of sin we were being redeemed from the power of sin, so we are going to operate on a level as a family, the family of God, the family of Christ.

Now, notice what Peter does. I love this...he didn't start with the divine side of salvation he started with the human side of salvation. This is a choice you made, to be a part of the family of God. Now, I do believe that some of us got misled. We were misled to believe the only reason we got saved is so that we could die and go to Heaven and not go to Hell. No. I mean yes—if you're a believer you're not going to Hell, you're going to Heaven when you die—but God is concerned about the life we're living right now. So Peter reminds us we made a choice to be a part of something bigger than us, and that's a family. Family is built around a love that you give but also a love that you receive, so it's a reciprocal relationship. It's not a one-sided relationship. Are you experiencing that in the body of Christ? Now because of this, here's the command, “love one another earnestly from a pure heart.” But look what Peter does...you see it in the English, because that first love says brotherly love, which is describing the Greek word, *Phileo*. The second word is a different word for love, which is *Agapao*. Peter is saying if you are part of the family of God by a choice you have made to purify your soul, here's my command to you—I want you to *Agapao* one another in the family. I want your love to go from just a brother and sister type love to a God kind of love, and I want you do it earnestly. See, the word, *Agapao*, is a spontaneous love that arises within family members because we see a family member with the need. And once you see that need you just can't help it you just jump

into action, you just love. Then you evaluate the need. See, this love is arising in you because of the need in another. Once you have realized there's a need, you evaluate that need, and you elevate that need to place a priority. Then you look within yourself and see what you can do to meet that need. That's what God did; that's what we're supposed to do. It was Jesus who said, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another." I don't know if you know this or not, but there are a lot of people in your world who do not really believe you're a disciple of Christ. Sorry. It's just a fact. They aren't going by church attendance. They're not going by your Bible. Do you know what they're going by? They're going by the way you treat each other, the way you love. I don't know where they get this, but they have this thought that people who follow Christ ought to be like Him! Imagine that! They know He was manifested and then there's a group of us who are following Him.

So, Peter tells the church (evidently they were struggling like we are struggling), love one another and stretch it out. Yeah, that's what this word, earnestly, means. It means to stretch it out. I have two grandboys and they play on the middle school ball team at the school they go to. I have seen the beginning of their practices and I don't stay for the whole thing, but occasionally I have just gone in at the end of their practices. I don't know why on ball teams they always start by running and they always in by running. Have you noticed that? So the other day I was going in at the end of the practice and they were running, and I heard the coach yell to the kids who had been practicing about an hour and a half, "STRETCH IT OUT!" Immediately, there was a change in those boys! Those boys had been running but they had been kind of running in a sort of lazy jog, but now whoa, they were really stretching it out! Now, I shouldn't tell this but there's been a few times when I have been to practice and I have heard the coach pick out an individual player and say, "DIG DEEPER! We're playing basketball, how do you dig deeper? We all know what that means. It means that kid thought he was giving everything he could give, but the coach knew he wasn't. So the coach is telling him to find another gear, find

another level—you have a little more ability and you ought to do more than you're doing.

That's what Peter is saying here. Love one another deeper; you're getting lazy! And some of you are lazy and you know it. You're just wanting to walk. You're just wanting to jog. But when it comes to life, we got to love a little deeper. We got to stretch it out. I know what you're going to say...you're going to say, "You just don't know what they did..." I don't know what 'they' are doing, but I know what I did to Jesus. Can I tell you what I did to Him? I put Him on a tree. In case you've forgotten, you put Him on the same tree I did. He had legions of angels He could call for but He didn't. Do you know what He did? He loved me. Because of the need I had that I could not meet, He put Himself on that cross. When He was dying, He wasn't just dying from nails and a spear; He was dying from the payment of my sin, and He bore it. That's what Peter says. We have to love each other deeply. It's got to be coming from a pure heart.

Peter wants our brotherly love to be sincere. See, that word, sincere, means without hypocrisy. Now, let's set the stage here. In the biblical world, if you were hypocrite, that means you were an actor. That meant you played another part, but in that day, you just put a mask in front of you and you played the part of the mask. Then when your part was over, you ran off stage grabbed another mask and came out and played a completely different part. It would be like today in Hollywood the same person playing different parts. When it comes to the family, take the mask off. Take the mask off. When we step it up to a God kind of love, we can't have a divided heart. You can't have a heart that's loyal to you and loyal to God; you have to have a heart that's loyal to God, and you love like He loves.

That's enough said, amen, but Peter doesn't stop there. He then says, "...since you have been born again." So, we love one another deeply from a pure heart because we have purified our souls by faith, and now we love one another deeply from a pure heart because we've been born again. But when we're born again, the seed wasn't perishable, its imperishable. And the seed is "the living and abiding Word of God." And then, he quotes this Old Testament scripture about how flesh was kind of like grass. Grass

withers and dies. Grass puts on a flower if you let it get tall enough (that's happened in my house a few times), and then eventually that flower fades. The Word of God never fades. Why? It's eternal. So catch this—some of us know this to be true—when you were born of your mom and dad, the life they brought to you is going to be over one day. You're going to die. Can I just say this? In the midst of dying, the glory goes; it starts to fade. So here's what's happening...because of Bobby and June Cunningham, I'm going to die and I'm decaying in the process of dying, and you are too. You realize that, right? You young people don't get this, but one day everything old people tell you is happening to them is going to happen to you too. I heard that growing up. I thought no, that was not going to happen to me. Well, let me just say it's happening to me...every bit of it. And it's accelerating a whole lot faster the last few months and years.

Now, let me tell you about my spiritual life, let me tell you about my Dad. No death. No decay. With Dad, He gave me eternal life. Now, eternal life doesn't just mean I'm never going to die, never going to Hell, and I'm going to live forever. Eternal life doesn't talk about when I die and go to Heaven; eternal life happens the moment I believe in Jesus. Peter is trying to remind us, and let me remind us of this—when we were born again, we received a God kind of life, and because you received a God kind of life, we can love like God loves. Yes, I can be in that situation and instead of thinking about me, I can think about you! Instead of meeting my need at that moment, I can meet your need. I can love you in a redeeming way, not in an enabling way or an avoiding way if you're part of the family of God

Then Peter says, "This word (the Word of God) is the good news that was preached to you." Here's how this works. Here's how the divine side and human side perfectly balance each other. Paul says in Romans that if we will confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved. For with the heart, one believes to righteousness and with the mouth, confession is made to salvation. And whoever calls upon the name Lord shall be saved. But then, Paul asked the questions, how can they call if they have not believed? How can they believe in whom they have not heard? And how can they hear

unless there be a preacher? And how can there be a preacher unless he's sent? Then in Romans 10, Paul reminds us that God's voice has gone out but they've not all obeyed the gospel. They've not all believed. Then he comes back to this point: so faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of God.

It's the Word of God that converges on you and brings you to a place of faith in His Son Jesus Christ. In that moment of faith, you become born again as a child of God. As a child of God, you are part of a family bigger than you. As a family member who is fellowshiping with your Father, you have the ability to love like He loved. So this week, you're going to get to life this out. I want you to listen the voice of the Holy Spirit within you and see if He says to any of us, stretch it out...stretch it out! Or, about the time you get ready to say something you shouldn't say or repeat something you shouldn't repeat, He's going to say to you, dig a little deeper! If you have purified your soul and you have been born again, you ought to be able to dig a little deeper. By this, the world will know we are His disciples.