

FORGED IN THE FURNACE

Three Crucial Questions (1 Peter 1:1-9) Pastor Tim Peck Forged in the Furnace (1 Peter) pt. 1

THE BIG IDEA

As Christians, we are God's elect who live as exiles scattered in Babylon. We are on a journey toward an eternal inheritance. And to get there, we must be forged in the furnace of suffering.

OPENING

- What's your usual reaction when you encounter an obstacle in life?
- Describe a situation when you felt out of place? What was that like?

DIGGING DEEPER

- The New Testament teaching about God's "election" is a controversial doctrine. According to the *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*, God's election refers to "God's choosing of individuals or people to bring about God's good purposes. In general terms election can refer to God's choosing of persons for a type of service, while in a more particular sense election refers to God's choosing of persons to inherit salvation through Jesus Christ."¹ While all Christian traditions believe in election, Christian scholars differ over the *basis* of God's election.² Pastor Tim suggests that in the Bible, God's election is sometimes more "communal" than it is "individual." In other words, election is less about God choosing particular individuals, and more about God choosing a people for himself and then inviting anyone to enter that people through faith in Jesus. German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "We experience our election only in the church—community, which is already established in Christ, by personally appropriating it through the Holy Spirit."³ What questions does this approach answer for you about election? What other questions does it raise?

¹Stanley Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling (eds), *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 44.

²In general terms, some see God's election as "conditional" on something within people, while others see it as "unconditional," rooted instead in God's mysterious will.

³Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio* in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* 16 Volumes (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2009), Vol. 1, p. 143.

- When Peter calls us as Christians “exiles,” he is picturing our Christian lives as being like Israel’s exile in Babylon. In the later New Testament, the word Babylon is often used as a symbol for the world as it currently exists in rebellion towards God (see 1 Peter 5:17 and Revelation 14:8). An exile is someone who lives in a foreign land, apart from their homeland. As Christians, where is our homeland (see Philippians 3:20)? How should we view our society and culture around us?
- Pastor Tim suggests that exiles face two distinct temptations that ultimately lead to the same result. On the one hand, exiles are tempted to conform to Babylon, giving in to the world’s values, ideas, and practices instead of living in fidelity to God’s kingdom. This is the temptation of conforming. However, other exiles are tempted to try to conquer Babylon, to force the world to become like God’s kingdom. However, when exiles try to conquer Babylon, they become like Babylon itself. Can you think of examples of Christians conforming and conquering in our world today?
- Peter describes our inheritance in heaven as one that will never “perish, spoil, or fade” (1 Peter 1:4). This inheritance includes living with God and his people forever in God’s Kingdom, having all of our sins forgiven, the transformation of our inner life into Christ’s image, and the resurrection of our body into immortality. According to Hebrews 12:16, what did Esau do with his inheritance? How might Christians be tempted to give up their inheritance?

PUTTING IT TO WORK

- As a thought experiment, spend a day trying to look at your daily routines and interactions as if you were from another culture. What does this experience reveal to you?
- What is one area in your life where God is currently refining your faith in the furnace of affliction? Share as much about this with your group or a Christian friend as you are comfortable sharing.

PRAYER REQUESTS