

Freed to Love – 1 Peter 1:22-25
Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis
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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever found yourself looking for a little piece of heaven here on earth? If we're honest, this is a daily struggle for each of us. And if we look around us in the world, that's what most people are doing... looking desperately for some sort of heaven on earth and always coming up disappointed or finding that the "heaven" they finally obtained is actually a sort of prison. I came across a real estate brochure recently advertising a property for sale in Baker County, and as I looked over all the beautiful pictures of the home and the surrounding property it looked very heavenly to me...a little piece of heaven right here on earth. I'll show you a few of the pictures and see if you agree:

SHOW PICTURES OF THE PROPERTY.

Of course, this little piece of heaven is not exactly "little" is it – the house has 4 bedrooms and 5 ½ baths and a self-contained studio apartment, and it comes with 200 acres right next to the State of Oregon Elk Refuge. And as you might expect, the price tag isn't "little" either. For only \$2,350,000 it can be yours! You see heaven on earth is quite costly on many levels, and this little piece of heaven is definitely going to set your bank account back a little and include more than a bit of work to maintain it and keep it looking like heaven.

And, my friends, if this is the kind of heaven we're living for, or some other version...(We've all got different ideas and dreams about what heaven on earth looks like for us, don't we?)...but if some type of heaven on earth is what we're living for and zealously pursuing, we're not going to be free to live for the real McCoy – the real heaven that will make this beautiful home and property look like nothing, will not cost you 2.5 million, won't chain you up to endless work to try to try to make it last and keep it looking good, and will still be standing in perfect condition and just as beautiful and awe-inspiring in 1 million years as it will be at the moment receive it.

And I can tell you, God wants his children – those of us he has set free through the work of Christ on the cross – to live free for the real McCoy, not the cheap imitations found here on earth. He wants us freed to love what lasts and doesn't chain us up to empty things that lead us away from his good purposes for our lives. And Peter's going to show us how we can live freed to love what lasts in our passage today. Turn with me in your Bibles, if you would, to 1 Peter 1, verses 22 to 25. I'll also have it up here on the screen for us. Let's begin by reading the passage:

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

May the Lord bless the reading of his living and abiding Word and use it to make us more like him today!

If you still have our outline of the book of 1 Peter with you, you'll realize we're entering a new section today. We're still looking at the big picture view of the saved life (1:13-2:10) – what makes it tick and what our focus is to be – but today we'll begin looking at the second element of that big picture view. So far, in verses 13 to 21, we've seen that the foundation of the saved life is this: *setting all of our faith and hope in God and his kingdom and the grace we will receive when Christ returns*. When this happens and our faith and hope have truly shifted from the things of the world to God and his kingdom, then we'll be ready to really start living the new life of freedom Jesus purchased for us with his own precious blood.

Now the second element in the big picture view of the saved life is this: *Learning to love through knowing and obeying the Word*. This is what we're starting today and hopefully, Lord willing, will finish next week: chapter 1, verse 22 through chapter 2, verse 3. Today we'll focus on verses 22 through 25 of chapter 1, and then next week we'll tackle chapter 2, verses 1 to 3.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED, HOW AND FOR WHAT PURPOSE

So let's begin with the first phrase of verse 22, which I've labeled in your notes: *What has happened, how and for what purpose.* Look at verse 22: ***Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love.*** What has happened to you who have become followers of Christ? Your souls have been purified, have been cleansed from sin, have been washed whiter than snow. By the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the perfect, spotless Lamb, your soul has been purified, washed clean, and made perfectly acceptable to God forever. And this is past tense. Your souls have been purified. Nothing can now separate you and I from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8)! This is a living and permanent reality right now for all of us who are in Christ.

And not only have our souls been purified, we've also been given a new, pure heart...a soft heart that longs to follow God and walk with him and please him and accomplish his will. Look at the end of verse 22 and the first part of 23: ***...from a pure heart, since you have been born again...*** God has replaced our hard, stubborn, rebellious, uncircumcised heart, with a soft, willing, submissive, circumcised heart that now has capacities we never had before. And just to be clear, we're not talking about your physical heart that's pumping blood in your body right now. If you had heart problems before you came to know Jesus, you very likely still have them. What we're talking about here instead is what a former pastor of mine used to call your "inner control center."

Vine's Expository Dictionary describes the New Testament usage of the word, heart, as figurative for the "hidden springs of the personal life"...the core of who we are inside. Previously our heart was corrupted and hardened by sin and this worked its way into all of our actions, but now in Christ we are a new creation at the heart level. And we have new capacities that we never had before. Sin no longer has to run the show. Our souls, our hearts, have been purified and brought to new life, and in the remainder of our lives on earth we now undergo the process of bringing our minds, our thoughts, our actions, our bodies into line with the new person God has created inside, by the power of the life-changing Word of God under the guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit...the process known as sanctification...becoming more and more like Christ in our daily lives over time.

Well, how did this happen? How did our souls get purified? How did we get this new, pure heart? Look back at verse 22: ***Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth...*** The purification happened through your *obedience* to the truth. More than just knowing it and believing it intellectually, you actually took action on it. There's no other way to get there. Our souls were purified, we were saved, forgiven, and brought to new life only through *obedience* to the simple message of the gospel, the good news: *repent of your sin and believe in Jesus Christ alone for salvation*. True heart repentance – a turning away from sin and a desire to change – actually needed to take place and be expressed to God. And a prayer of belief in Jesus and surrender to his leadership in your life had to happen. That's the only way our souls are purified and we receive a new, pure heart from God. And if there's anyone here today who hasn't yet done that or wants to make sure you have, please talk to me afterwards. It's such a simple process and brings eternal life-giving results!

But in the same way that we are purified and saved by our obedience to the truth of the gospel, so also our growth in Christlikeness after the moment of salvation only happens through our *obedience* to the truth of God's Word. We first need to know the truth and then we need to obey it. Christlikeness only grows as we renew and transform our minds continually through God's Word and take action in response to what we learn. That's the HOW. We'll look more at this next week.

So we've seen the WHAT and the HOW. Now let's look at the PURPOSE for which our souls have been purified. Look again at verse 22: ***Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love***. That "for" word is significant here. Your souls have been purified by your obedience to the truth FOR a sincere brotherly love. In other words, this has happened so that you and I can now sincerely love each other. The ability to love our neighbor as we love ourselves is now possible. And it's more than just a possibility – an optional path we can take or leave. No. This capacity and call to love each other is one of the central purposes for which God has given us new life in Christ. It's what's expected to flow out of that new life he's given us.

And this love for each other is to be sincere. The King James uses the word, "unfeigned." In other words, love that is not faked or inauthentic or pasted on to get people to do what we want them to do or make us look good. With our new

hearts, our purified souls, real, sincere, heartfelt love for each other is now possible. Love that desires good for other people and takes action on those desires is now within our capacity. And more than that, it's the goal toward which God is leading us in our walk with him. What two commandments sum up the whole Law and the Prophets? Jesus told us: ***“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”*** (Matthew 22:37–40). This is what God leads us to be zealous about in our lives: *loving God and loving each other through good works and speaking the good news of God's Word to each other and to those who don't know him yet.*

THEREFORE: LOVE ONE ANOTHER EARNESTLY

And this brings us to the second main point I'd like to draw from our passage today, and really the central command and takeaway from these verses. In your sermon notes, I've labeled it: *Therefore: **love one another earnestly***. This is what Peter wants you and I to do in response to what he's sharing with us today. Since your souls have been purified through your obedience to the good news and you've been given the capacity to sincerely love, do it *earnestly* from that new, pure heart you've been given by God.

This word translated, “earnestly,” has a connection with the word, “zealous,” we looked at last week in Titus. The Greek word is *ektenos* and is drawn from the world of athletics, meaning to “to exert oneself with all of one's energy” (Holman New Testament Commentary). Similarly to how the word, “zealous,” communicated the idea of breaking into a run in pursuit of something, the word, “earnestly,” expresses and expands the same idea – the running to be done with *all of our energy*. So, considering both Titus and 1 Peter we've now seen no less than 4 strong words describing the energy and effort and focus God's people are to put into loving other people through both words and good works. This love is to be zealous, devoted, sincere and earnest! Do you think loving each other is important at all for God's purified people who've been given the capacity to actually do it?! I would say so!

But if you're still in doubt as to whether you should concern yourself with this priority, consider a few other passages:

1 Peter 4:7–8

7 The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. 8 Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

1 Thessalonians 4:9–12

9 Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, 10 for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more,

Romans 12:9–10

9 Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

Hebrews 13:1

1 Let brotherly love continue.

I'd say love for each other is a very important priority, wouldn't you? Is zealous, earnest, sincere, devoted, genuine, affectionate, enduring love for your brothers and sisters in Christ a top priority for you in your life right now? Thankfully, I've seen that it is a priority for many of you here in this body, but let's pursue it more and more and remember that it's *above all*. We must never sacrifice our love for each other on the altar of what we may want personally, what someone may have said that hurt our feelings, what our personal ambitions may be, or any number of other things that Satan tries to use to divide the body of Christ. Because when we're divided and not living in love for each other, it's like we're putting a veil over the glory of God, and we hinder those who don't know him yet from seeing his glory displayed in the body of Christ. May we always keep a real, genuine love for our brothers and sisters in Christ as a top priority in everything we do in life and together as the body of Christ.

This is God's goal for us as the body of Christ and it's what's intended to issue and grow out of the pure hearts he's given us. As Paul says to Timothy: ***The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*** And in fact, it's only when we learn to love each other this way that the world will know we're true followers of Christ. Jesus told us so in John 13, verses 34 and 35: ***"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."*** They won't know we're true disciples of Christ unless we're loving each other sincerely and earnestly, showing evidence of the new life and the new heart God has given us through Christ. But when we do love each other as we are loved by God, they get to see glimpses of God and evidence of his transforming power. The veil comes off and God's glory is revealed!

But, my friends, this process of learning to love each other sincerely and earnestly only happens as we diligently and continually engage in the renewing of our minds through God's Word...the reshaping of how we think and act as we know and believe God's Word and act on it. The new heart we've been given is placed within a body and a mind that have been guided for all our lives by a sinful, self-centered heart. As such, both our bodies and our minds need to be re-worked and re-trained to think and act like God and choose the ways of our new heart instead of the selfish, sinful ways that guided us before. And only a continual intake of God's Word can train us to recognize and choose the ways of our new heart.

FINDING YOUR FREEDOM TO LOVE

But as our minds are renewed and reworked through the power of God's Word under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, there's something else Peter wants to share with us that will truly free us to love each other as God intends. In your sermon notes, I've called this final section: *Finding your freedom to love*. How do we get there? How do we actually become people who are zealous about loving other people in both words and actions? One thing is certain about loving other people, there's always an earthly cost to us, whether it be our time, our money, our energy, or even our own goals or dreams. So how do we become freed to live in love for others when we know it could cost us dearly in an earthly sense? Well,

let's read the passage again, focusing on verses 23 to 25, to see what Peter has to say about this:

22 Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, 23 since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; 24 for "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever." And this word is the good news that was preached to you.

Notice first that verse 23 points again to that new, pure heart we've been given, reminding us that we were born again spiritually to eternal life...the imperishable life...the life that never ends. A seed was planted and sprouted within us and it will never ever die. You and I have been brought into life eternal...life that sees and endures and hopes way beyond the brief years we live on this earth. Life that sees beyond the temporary, passing things of this earth to the lasting glory that awaits in the endless ages to come. And this eternal life came to us through something eternal: the living, life-giving, enduring Word of God. And that eternal Word teaches us the eternal principles of how to live the eternal kind of life. You see, we've been re-born into a whole new way of living that no longer builds hope on perishable things that quickly wear out and fade away, but rather on what is imperishable and undefiled and unfading and lasts in undiminishing glory for all of eternity.

In these verses, you may have noticed that Peter included a quote from the Old Testament book of Isaiah, chapter 40, verses 6 and 8: ***"All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, 25 but the word of the Lord remains forever."*** In quoting this Old Testament passage, Peter reveals the key truth we need in order to free us to love as God intends, and it centers around how we view "all flesh" and "all its glory." All flesh is of course speaking of all created human beings, with bodies formed from dust and returning to dust when we die. And as we all know well, the bodies of human beings are frail and fragile and each of us only have at most 80 to 100 years to be alive. In light of eternity, we're like a blade of grass that's green only for a short while and then dries out and turns brown quickly in the hot sun. And not only that, all of our glory, our physical beauty and strength, our accomplishments, our

possessions, our fame, all that we chase after earth and so often rely on to prove our value and worth, is like the flower of grass, even shorter lived than the grass itself. A flash of beauty and then it's gone.

I think the most fitting illustration for this idea is the peony flower. **SHOW PICTURES.** So beautiful. So colorful. So packed with petals. A wonderful smell. And yet within just a few days, the petals are all over the ground, or all over your counter if you put them in a vase in your house. So if you could apply these pictures of a peony flower to your life and the passing glory you may be able to achieve or possess by chasing after what this world has to offer during the brief years of your life on earth, you'd be well on your way to becoming freed to love. Because the only way we'll ever be able to walk into the earnest and sincere love for each other that God intends to characterize the new, imperishable life of a true follower of Christ, is when we're willing to abandon the pursuit of earthly glory to fully pursue eternal glory. That's what will finally free us to love each other as God intends.

A life pursuing eternal glory is a life lived by the word of God that's alive and remains relevant and true and life-changing FOREVER. And his Word will always teach us to love God and love others with all of our energy and focus. It will teach us how to love like God loves and how to live his purposes in all we do, preparing ourselves for eternity reigning with him and inviting others to do the same...proclaiming the same good news that was proclaimed to us and brought us to the eternal life. And the only way we can be fully freed to live this way is when we loosen our grasp on earthly glory and set our hearts and our hope on eternal glory. That's when we'll be fully freed to love.

CONCLUSION

So what are you chasing in your life with all your energy right now? What is your heart set on? Do you have anything on earth you want so badly that you may even be willing to set a side of few of God's principles in order to get it? That you might even sacrifice love for your brothers and sisters in Christ in order to obtain it or achieve it? Don't chase the glory of a peony flower, putting all your energies into something that will only last a few days. Don't live for a little piece of heaven here on earth. Instead, chase the unfading flower of eternal glory found in zealously, earnestly, sincerely loving God and others as yourself, as you seek, trust

and follow the principles of God's Word. You'll be building up perfect, lasting treasures in heaven and helping many others do the same.

This does not mean that earthly possessions are bad, or that we need to be financially poor, or that we shouldn't have goals at our job, or that we can't enjoy the good things of life that God so often blesses us with. Like Paul, we can thrive as a follower of Christ whether we're in plenty or in want. The problem comes when earthly things become the source of our hope and security and when they're draining most of our energy and time and keeping us from seeking above all the kingdom of God and loving others earnestly in words and action. Too often the American Dream – health, wealth and the pursuit of a little bit of heaven on earth – has been mixed in with the American gospel and has kept us from living the new life God has for us. We start thinking life is about pursuing the American Dream and bringing Jesus along for the ride to help us achieve it. But, my friends, we will not be freed to love as long as we live for the American Dream. Let that dream go and reach fully for what lasts forever, reveals the glory of God to others, and prepares you for eternal life to come. Live free to love as God has loved you. Let your new heart do what it was created to do.

You've heard the expression, "Follow your heart." That's really bad advice for someone who doesn't know Christ and still has a heart that's desperately wicked. But it's really good advice for those who have a new, pure heart from God that longs for his purposes and that's ready to live the new life and ready to start breaking through the self-centered, self-glorifying ways of our old self. Love one another earnestly, love that issues from a pure heart! Next week, we'll look at the continuing story of what the life freed to love looks like.

