

Sermon 4: 1 Peter 1:6-9: Sorrowful Yet Always Rejoicing

OUTLINE

The joy of our trials
The nature of our trials
The purpose of our trials
The end of our trials
The experience of our trials

INTRODUCTION

I think one of the hardest commandments in the bible, and yet should be one of the easiest is 'rejoice always.' Joy is the focus of 1 Peter 1:6-9. Joy is one of the great things which make up the Christian experience. We are told in Nehemiah 8:10, that the joy of the Lord is our strength. Paul tells us in Galatians 5:22, that those who have the Holy Spirit should have the fruit of joy. And in Romans 14:17, he tells us that the kingdom of God is about righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. However, none of us can say that all we experience, 'all the day', is joy. And if you have ever been led to believe, that you as a Christian must be perpetually happy, you have been misled. The Christian life, does have joy in it, but it is not only joy. We know that there are necessary trials, which are given us for the testing of our faith. We know that because of our sins there must be times of 'godly sorrow'. However, even in these things joy should not be far away. For we are called to rejoice in our trials (James 1:2), that those who mourn are blessed (Matt. 5:4), "For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning." (Psalm 30:5). And so, we find the Christian life to be a mix of sorrowing, but truly also of rejoicing. The paradox, as Paul put it, 'sorrowful yet always rejoicing', is only possible in the Christian life. All believers need to learn the lesson of rejoicing in their trials, and Peter gives us an instruction how. There are various types of trials, the joy in trials that Peter is focusing on is the blessedness/happiness of the persecuted, Matt. 5:10-12, 'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.' Peter's thought in this portion matches Christ's very closely as he focuses our joy on the outcome of our faith, our salvation.

We have five aspects of our trials as our 5 points as Peter shows us how we can experience joy during our trials. The joy of our trials; the nature of our trials; the purpose of our trials; the outcome of our trials; the experience of our trials.

The joy of our trials

V6a, 'In this you rejoice.' In what do we rejoice? We do not rejoice in the pains of this life, we rejoice in God and our salvation in Him. Peter is alluding to v3-5, to the list of benefits we have in God and showing us that despite the difficulty of our external experiences, the joy that we have in our salvation is what enables us to be able to obey the command to rejoice always. Looking through the lens of God as our Father; we look back over v3-5 and see that God is our Father in Christ; He has begotten us by His powerful sovereign mercy, giving us life from death; He as a Father is keeping an incorruptible inheritance better than

anything this world can offer and that nothing in this world can touch; and as a Father He is exercising His power to guard us to ensure that we will make it to this grand end. This is what gives us true joy. Asaph in psalm 73 was not joyful, he was suffering personally and witnessing the prosperity of the wicked. He was ready to walk away from God but he personally experienced God guarding Him, by not letting go of His hand; reminding him of the final judgement against the wicked; and more importantly, the grace by which he was saved and the incredible inheritance awaiting him. Despite his trials he came to rejoice treasuring God as his good.

Only the believer can have this joy. The unbeliever can have the joy of getting married, having kids, getting a great job, but we live in a fallen world, even with having all of these things the sinful heart will be discontent. These joys are impacted by external factors because of the fall, like death, war, sickness, sinful spouses cheating, crime, etc. we have something that cannot be taken from us, something that cannot be broken, or perish. There is nothing that can separate us from God's love; and all those He has called He will glorify; no one can snatch us out of His hands. And even the biggest weak link in this coming to us, our sin, is fully paid for in Christ. We rejoice in this truth. Compared to any losses, our gains always far outweigh any losses we can sustain.

The nature of our trials

The rest of v6 describes the nature of our trials, 'though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.' Four facets of our trials are listed here, firstly, they are temporary, 'for a little while.' Peter is not making light of our pains, he is setting them against our gains in Christ. Pain always drags and feels like too long, but in the larger scheme of things, pain does not only come to an end, it gives way to perfect joy and delight in God's presence of the believer. Just as heaven teaches us not to make too much of our earthly joys, it teaches us not to make too much of our earthly sorrows. Paul, whose life was marked by a massive intensity of suffering was a joyful man who was not sunk beneath his sorrows, even when he was in prison, it was he who wrote, 2 Cor. 4:17, 'For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.' Although our burdens feel heavy by comparison to the weight of glory they are light; although our pains feel like they never end and are a torturer who won't stop, they are in light of eternity in fact momentary. The reason why joy can flourish during our trials is because as Paul says, Rom. 8:18, 'For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.'

The second thing about our trials is their necessity, 'if necessary.' Peter sneaks this little qualifier in here to remind us that God is in control, all that happens in our lives is by His will, God does not delight in the suffering of His children; He is wise and does what is best; if it is happening it must be necessary. There are no events that happen that do not fulfil some part in His good plan regarding us. Even when we can't see it, we know that He knows best.

The third thing he notes, is that we are grieved by our trials, 'you have been grieved.' This word means pained or vexed. Some Christians wrongly think that in order to be able to rejoice in our trials we have to pretend they don't hurt; that we deny that something bad has happened; some even call the bad things that caused the sin and pain good things. This is wrong. Peter is being realistic. He is acknowledging the very real pain and cost of the difficulty this church is facing.

Having joy in trials does not result from self-deception where we lie about how much pain we have experienced. No, that would be wrong. Imagine pretending that the death of a spouse or family member does not hurt, how does that honor them? Imagine pretending that the end of a marriage is not enough to get upset about, we are not to turn a blind eye to sin. Imagine making light of sexual abuse; or persecution of the church; or getting cancer; or being unjustly fired because of your faith in an attempt to fabricate joy by making light of our troubles. Peter is not doing this. He is acknowledging the pain. The joy we are able to experience in our trials is not by making our troubles smaller than they are but setting them against the infinite riches that we have in Christ. We have permission to feel the pain, to look down to the very bottom of how much trouble sin has caused and then from that perspective look back up to the solution we have in Christ. I believe God gets more glory from us recognizing how painful it is and then finding consolation in Him instead of pretending that the pain is nothing.

Fourthly, we experience not just one but 'various trials'. The human experience is usually one thing on top of another. You can experience health difficulties, while the economy is taking a turn, while the government is taking a left turn, while you are trying to support a hurting family member. Like Job you can experience a loss of material goods, the death of all your children, the loss of your health and then on top of that your wife can turn on you and your faith, and your friends can become your accusers. Peter is recognizing the compounded nature of our trials, and he is still insisting that the joy we can have is in the face of a multifaceted situation.

The purpose of our trials

V7, 'so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' Our faith is more valuable than gold, for it is by faith that we grasp the forgiveness freely offered to us in Christ, and it is by faith that we continue to cling to Christ throughout our pilgrimage here on earth. For this reason our faith is important, and it needs to be strong. God has undertaken to strengthen it by the use of trials.

Peter puts forward two reasons for necessity of tests, to refine faith, and to test whether it is genuine.

Gold will ultimately be destroyed on the last day when God recreates the Heavens and the Earth. However, our faith will not be destroyed like gold, but it does need to be purified. So, refining is an appropriate picture of what God does to our faith during trials. Just as fire melts gold and brings out its impurities to the surface to be scooped off and thrown away, so our faith is put to the test during difficulties and the impurities surface to be put away.

Have you ever had the experience that when you went through difficulties, they really brought out the worst in you. You thought you were quite a nice person until you were put in that situation that brought out your worst. Those are the impurities coming to the surface. Through your trials your temper, your impatience, your fear of man, your hypocrisy, your pride, your laziness, etc, are exposed. They surface so that they can be dealt with. So just as a jeweler will sift off the scum from the melted metal, we confess and repent of the impurities and weaknesses revealed by our trials.

Trials not only function as a fire to expose and remove impurities, they are also a training ground or a gym for building strength. A marathon runner will wake up early every morning and go for long painful runs, they are painful, inconvenient, he is always faced with the choice to listen to his screaming muscles, and give in to the pain. Or, he can endure it, push through it, and at the end of it have developed stronger muscles, and a stronger will which has better control over his complaining body. This is the teaching of James and Paul: Romans 5:3-4 "More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope," ;James 1:2-4 "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."

Peter also tells us that trials prove the genuineness of our faith, this means that if we have a true faith we will endure trials staying faithful to God. But, if we are not true Christians, trials will reveal what we are by the fact that we will leave the Lord, and abandon the faith. I have read several biographies of the persecuted Church in Russia during the Communist era. One of the remarkable things is that there were very few lukewarm Christians. In the west we have the problem of many people who are only outwardly religious warming the pews and bringing down the name of Christ with their half-heartedness. But in Russia, where it could mean death, torture, imprisonment, labor camps and many other things, there were few who were not truly Christians who associated themselves with the Church. The trial of persecution sifted and purified the Church. So , although the Russian Churches suffered persecution they were better off in some ways, not having the problems that we encounter in our Churches. There was no indifference, or a low level of involvement, or Christians dividing over insignificant issues. They felt the benefit of being tried.

There is another way in which the trial of persecution proves the genuineness of your faith. People wouldn't persecute you if you were like them, they only persecute you because you are like Christ. This works out to be an affirmation of the fact that grace has touched your life. So much so that others can see it, and so you are being persecuted for it. If you are being persecuted for being a Christian, you must be doing something right, there must be something 'genuine' about your faith.

The end of our trials

Peter next goes on to talk about the outcome of our trials, he does this twice, v7b, 'may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.' V9, 'obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.' Our faith which is tested for its genuineness and strengthened ends in the revelation of Jesus Christ, that is the 2nd coming. Some have noted that the word 'revelation' which means 'revealing' is appropriate because He is already with us, but the full manifestation of His reign which the church presently tastes in salvation will be fully manifest for judgement and the making new of all things.

On that final day because of our faith there will be praise and glory and honor, but for who? Friends Peter is talking about us, we will receive praise and glory and honor. And secondarily this will accrue to Christ as well. It may sound

strange to you that you will one day receive glory, praise and honor, but this is Biblical teaching. You see, because you have true faith you will persevere to the end and at the end, is an amazing inheritance and reward. The Bible tells us that we will receive new and glorious resurrection bodies, after the nature of Christ's own resurrection body. That is receiving glory. We will also receive a commendation from God when he says to us, 'good and faithful servant'. That is praise. And we will be 'promoted' to our new position as royalty and reign with Christ. That is honor. Now lest we think we are stealing God's glory let us be clear, we will be taking any crowns we receive knowing that it was by His power that we were saved and sustained and we will be casting them at His feet. And I hope you see it is not the same as we will receive. He will not simply receive glory, but will be manifest in the full glory of his divinity, with every knee bowing and every tongue confessing that he is Lord. He will be worshipped, not merely commended, he will be exalted to the highest and not merely honored as we will be. And every soul who stays faithful to heaven will be another worshipping voice filling heaven with the glory, honor, and praise which Christ so rightly deserves. He will clothe us in His glory and we will be honored above what we are worth; and we will respond to glorify Him giving less than He deserves.

The experience of our trials

V8, 'Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.' In this verse Peter points out the three things that define our experience during our life that is filled with trials. Love; faith and joy.

Because of God's grace, He opened our eyes. We have been called by His power and shown the depth of our sin and the depth of His mercy in Christ. We have been moved to pure despair as we saw how sinful, judged and lost we were, but then saw His love in the giving of His Son. we see Him, leave His divine glory to become a man; we watch Him live a life of service all the while being hated and rejected by those He was sent to save. We see His love; His compassion; His gentleness with the sinner. We see Him praying Gethsemane given insight into all that He has to choose to save us; not walking away but embracing the worst possible punishment a human being could face. We watch Him be betrayed; falsely accused; abused brutally; and then be crucified. We hear Him with His dying breathes pray for mercy; extend forgiveness; bear the curse of our sin; and announce that all that is needed to save us is accomplished. Knowing all that we deserve; knowing that He has saved us; and now knowing as Peter has reminded us that we are God's children; being guarded and headed to a glorious destiny that we have not earned; that nothing can take away from us. Of course we love Him. We could not love anyone more because no one could do more for us. No one could be more worthy of love. This love is real, though it is still challenged by our ongoing love for sin and temptation; but like Peter who denied Jesus three times and yet still confessed his love, so do we.

Our present life is also characterized by faith. We cannot help but think of John 20:29 when Jesus spoke to doubting Thomas after He resurrected, 'Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."' We live by faith not by sight; and we have the blessing of believing that Jesus promised.

And because of His love for us; because of our salvation; because of the certainty of all that God is for us and what lies ahead of us; even though our pain is deep,

we have joy that is inexpressible and full of glory. Peter is not talking about future joy but present joy. Inexpressible/unutterable/not able to fully express in words, this is our experience. If you are a Christian you will know that at times you feel this immense joy, and that this is exactly what it feels like. As the dimensions of eternity roll into your mind, as you fathom how much sinfulness has been forgiven, as you realize what great love God has had for and has for you, as you consider Christ's humility, the gifts you presently have, the intimacy with God that is yours at any moment, and on and on we could go. You feel this 'inexpressible' joy. The realities we have been brought into are bigger than our ability to measure, and so our emotional peaks are at their highest, and yet still not high enough to do justice to our salvation, when we are feeling as we ought.

And so Peter uses a second word which is so true of the joy we experience, 'glorious'. We experience a joy that is full of glory. This does not mean simply that we have a magnificent or extra special joy. No, this means that we are actually tasting a little bit of heaven in our joy. This is because of the Holy Spirit who is called the Spirit of glory in 1 Pet. 4:14. The Spirit who drives all of history to God's glorious goal of the new creation gives us glimpses and tastes of the glory to come. We get to feel a little bit of what heaven is like. We must not think that this is all that heaven is going to feel like, for we still have a sin nature and are not yet seeing the full manifestation of his glory. But, be that as it may, we are still tasting the same joy we will experience in heaven. So, your very best now, is the beginning of what joy will feel like in heaven, and then in heaven we will enter into unfelt territory, our emotions will feel things for the first time. In heaven we cannot have heart attacks, and this is good for if God were to reveal himself as he is, we would all die of a heart attack. But for now we experience this thunder from afar, we experience an inexpressible and glorious joy.

But of course there are kill joys, things that steal our joy. Sin steals our joy; self pity steals our joy; refusing to exercise our faith and thinking of our inheritance; believing in God's goodness in our difficulties; these can steal our joy. Harboring resentment and unforgiveness as you stew in your pain counting your losses but not your blessings in Christ. Too often we allow things to steal our joy. But Peter has written to remind these hurting Christians that even though life is hard and they go through trials they can know joy because of God's love and saving work in Christ.