

## Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE  
EXPOSITION OF  
THE EPISTLE OF  
FIRST PETER

### When Faith Gives Way to Sight 1 Peter 1:6-9

**1 Peter 1:6** ... *In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, <sup>7</sup> that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; <sup>8</sup> and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, <sup>9</sup> obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.*

I first stepped foot on the Appalachian Trail when I was in the eighth grade. With great anticipation did I wave good-bye to my parents, sling that loaded pack on my back, and strike out on the first leg of our 5-day, 30-mile journey. Being a little guy I had not walked very far before I began to wilt under the weight of that 40-lb load. By the time I had gone a couple of miles I was almost in tears, struggling to keep up, wishing I could turn around and go back home, convinced that I had made a terrible mistake. By the third day I was doing find but I've often reflected on the struggle of those first two days.

I have observed that from time to time life can be a very burdensome journey indeed. Hardship can weigh us down like that pack I carried. This weight may be felt in times of deep loss – the loss of a spouse, the loss of a child. This weight may be felt in time of tragedy. Not many years ago the stepfather of one of the men who attended APC was in an automobile accident that left him unable to move or speak. On occasion when I would go to DTS for study I would stop by Baylor Hospital and check on him. It was a great pity to see him and equally as pitiful to see his wife and consider what lay before her in the years to come. The weight may be felt when our children pursue a course of self-will and rebellion. This weight may be felt when our serving as a caregiver begins to consume our own vitality.

In verse 6 we have the first mention by Peter of the actual temporal circumstances of the people to whom he is writing. He says they are *distressed by various trials*. The word “distressed” is from the old Greek verb *lupeo*, to cause pain or grief, to distress or grieve. So these folks were distressed, grieved, sorrowful under the heavy trials they had been called to endure.

Peter’s approach to dealing with this state of affairs is shocking. His approach serves as a rebuke to much contemporary pastoral care exercised from the pulpits of our land. Peter suggests no particular technique for relieving this distress. Peter does not put forth a ten-point strategy for dealing with suffering as if by following some formula the burden could be lifted. He doesn’t step onto the slippery slope of dealing with every specific felt need. He offers none of the things that are prescribed so often these days. Instead, he points these strugglers to the riches of the gospel.

Now you know why I invested so much time in verses 1-5. Because what Peter says in verse 6 makes sense only as you have a firm grip on what has preceded it. Let's review once again. In verses 3-5 Peter demonstrates how our redemption (**1:18a**), determined in the deep counsels of the Trinity (**1:2**) and accomplished on the cross of Christ (**1:19; 2:24**) is applied to us in time and in our human experience. Basically in verses 3-5 Peter supplies a summary of the gospel.

In **verse 3**, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* According to **Ephesians 2:1** as fallen sons of Adam we were all *dead in trespasses and sins*. God in His great mercy has answered this desperate condition brought about by sin by granting us new birth. He has freely and graciously communicated new life to our souls.

In **verse 4** Peter's focus is on the goal of God's election spoken of in verse 1. We are chosen; we are born again *to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.* In the new birth (**1:3**) God has made us His children (**John 1:12**). Consistent with our new status as children born of God is the expectation of an inheritance *from God* (**Gal. 4:7**).

In **verse 5** the focus shifts to our earthly pilgrimage in which we are kept by the power of God. *Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* In **verse 4** we are assured that our inheritance is kept for us (*reserved in heaven for you*). In **verse 5** we are assured that we are kept for our inheritance. God, by His almighty power, "will strengthen our faith and keep it from failing until we come into the promised inheritance" (Nisbet, *I Peter*, p. 18).

Here's the connection with verses 6-9. In verses 3-5 Peter has communicated enough of the riches of the gospel that he is able to say to his readers, *in this you greatly rejoice. In this you greatly rejoice. In this you greatly rejoice.* Achtemeier (*I Peter*, p. 100) says, "Christians find as the reason for their rejoicing the realities described in the preceding verses." In the fact that you have been born again to a living hope, you rejoice greatly. In the fact that an imperishable inheritance awaits you in heaven, you rejoice greatly. In the fact that you shall be preserved by the power of God Himself, you rejoice greatly. O beloved we rejoice in the riches of the gospel.

We know that we shall rejoice in the future. But Peter suggests that we can know a measure of this joy now. Indeed, **the great joy of the end overflows into the present and fuels our endurance.** Our joy is not unlike the joy of our Savior *who for the joy set before Him endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2).* Our joy is in spiritual realities that we can see only by faith now but will know by sight in the future. In short, our joy is in the mercies of God lavished upon us in the gospel. This joy is nourished as we ponder, as we consider the glories of the grace of God in Christ. Beloved, our stability, yes, our joy, in hard times is rooted in the gospel. This is why we continue to hammer the gospel from this pulpit rather than trying to impress you with slick techniques for dealing with specific trials.

**Note:** I'm more or less convinced that the believer's response to specific trials is best worked out through fellowship, counsel, study, and prayer with pastors and other members of the body of Christ.

Peter's declaration that we can rejoice in the gospel is stunning given the adversative *even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.* Joy is the overarching spirit of the Christian life.

Joy that is rooted in the gospel knows no circumstantial limitations. Gospel joy is not present or absent depending upon whether life is hard or easy at any given time. Such joy is a function of the reality of the eternal constant of the saving grace of God. This is why we ought to continually remind one another of the gospel. Distress cannot destroy our delight in the gospel. Indeed, as we shall see in verse 7, distress is designed to increase our joy in and anticipation of the glories of the gospel.

The rest of verse 6 teaches us about distress. These folks have been brought to grief *by various trials* (see also **James 1:2**). Various means many-colored. Most of us at one time or another have visited Sherwin Williams, Kelly Moore, or some other store to select paint. Each store has a display of paint chips - the little pieces of paper showing the gazillion colors that are available. Trials are like that. They come to us in an variety of ways. They are different in kind and vary in degree or intensity from person to person

These trials are ours *for a little while*. A *little while* is to be understood, not in absolute terms of days or years, but in relative terms. It refers to our time in the flesh in contrast to eternity. This seems to be the general position of the Bible. **James 4:14**, *you are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away*. **I Peter 1:17**, *conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth*. **I Peter 4:2** speaks of *the rest of the time in the flesh*. I do not think Peter is suggesting that every moment of the Christian life is a grueling, torturous affair. I think we may fairly say that from time to time throughout our lives we shall know the heaviness of trials. Even if we are burdened with hardship for years it is still a little while in comparison to the eternal joy that awaits us. This is exactly

Paul's point in **II Corinthians 4:17**, *for momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison.*

These trials shall be ours *if necessary*. This is better translated *since it is necessary*. Sufferings are the means God has ordained to accomplish His good and perfect will in our lives. In this respect our lives mirror that of our Lord. The sufferings of Jesus Himself were viewed as a divine necessity. **Mark 8:31**, *He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things.* In **Luke 24:26** Jesus asked, *"Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"* It is with this perspective in mind that Peter can say in **I Peter 4:12**, *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you.* God has more to do with our lives than just effective management of unexpected situations. Our trials come by design. There is purpose behind them. *In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.* The title of this sermon is "When Faith Gives Way to Sight." Verses 7, 8, and 9 speak of things we cannot see now but will know when Christ is revealed. The rest of the sermon is built around these three things.

**Verse 7.** *That the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.* We cannot fully see the gracious purposes for which hardship is designed (**I Peter 1:7**). The focus in I Peter is on the genuineness of faith. How does one come to assurance that his faith is not mere head knowledge, not mere temporal faith, not some tradition handed down from his parents? How is one assured that his faith is of the saving kind – trusting in Christ alone as He is offered in the gospel; heartily relying upon the

promises of God in Christ? One's faith is proven or shown to be the real thing through divinely designed trials.

Peter uses the process of refining gold to illustrate this. Raw gold is put through fire. Oddly enough, fire does not destroy the gold as one might expect. Rather, the fire purifies the gold by melting it causing the impurities to rise to the top to be skimmed off. Fire, then, makes the gold even more valuable. Trials, like the fire can be perceived as something that would destroy our lives. But the fire of trials on our lives serves the same purpose as the fire in the furnace or kiln. It does not destroy but purifies. God is precious, for sure, but only relatively so. Although having survived the fire of the furnace, the gold will at last be incinerated. Faith, on the other hand, purified by trial, will endure and, indeed, result in eternal salvation.

A future, climactic, pivotal event is in view here in verse 7 – *the revelation of Jesus Christ*. In that day eternal destinies are declared. It will be the day of salvation for some (1:5). It will be a terrible day of judgment for others (1:7, 4:17). In that day all that will matter will be your faith. Whether or not you die in faith will be the issue. Whether or not you die trusting Jesus Christ alone for your salvation as He is offered to you in the gospel. That faith in which and through which you are preserved must be tried, proven to be genuine. In this life we can see only the edges of the ways of God in proving our faith but one day we shall surely know the end of His designs. **The great joy of that end overflows into the present and fuels our endurance.**

**Verse 8.** *And though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.*

We cannot see the Person in whom our faith rests (**I Peter 1:8**). Consideration of this verse moved me to make this observation: as a Christian you have staked everything on a man you've never seen. You have not *seen Him* (**1:8a**) in the physical sense in which Peter was privileged to see Him. And yet, you *love Him* (**1:8b**). How can one love someone whose face he has never seen? Whose voice he has never heard? Whose touch he has never felt? I asked myself, how shall my affection for Christ be accounted for? The example of His life draws out my affection. The change He has wrought in my life draws out my affection. What others have said about Him attracts me to Him. The bottom line is that my affection for Him must be explained in terms of the miraculous. God has granted me a new birth in which my affections were turned to Him and to the One He has sent. The Scriptures tell me about this One, this Savior, this Redeemer. The Holy Spirit has convinced me that what the Scriptures tell me about Jesus is true. And I say, Lord, Thou didst strike my heart with Thy Word and I loved Thee. I *do not see Him now* (**1:8c**). Even though He is veiled to my sight I *believe in Him* (**1:8d**). I believe that He was raised to life from the dead. I believe that He is sitting at the right hand of the Father. I believe that He ever lives to make intercession for the saints. One day He shall be revealed to my sight and I shall rejoice greatly. **The great joy of the end overflows into the present and fuels our endurance.**

**Verse 9.** *Obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.* We cannot see the prize that awaits genuine faith (**I Peter 1:9**). We can by no means

estimate the joys that will attend the consummation of our salvation. The mind has not, indeed, cannot conceive the blessing (3:9) God has in store for us (I Cor. 1:9). Peter echoes that sentiment in **verse 7**. The prize will be *praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ*. Peter echoes that sentiment again in **verse 8**. The prize is *joy inexpressible and full of glory*. The prize will be *the salvation of our souls* (1:9). One day we shall see the glorious scope of this thing we call salvation and we shall rejoice. **The great joy of the end overflows into the present and fuels our endurance.**

I want to conclude this sermon and transition into the Lord's Supper this morning with these words from Howard Marshall: "The picture of the Christian life presented by Peter in these opening verses is characterized by hope in what God will do *in the future*. Christians, he says, look forward to salvation in the world to come. Our lives ought to have a forward-looking and other-worldly dimension that is often lacking among contemporary Christians. As we go through I Peter, we will, of course, need to keep in mind Peter's attitude toward the existing world. But we already note that Peter's strong stress on *the future* does force questions upon us. Have we lost the *future* dimension from the life of the individual Christian and of the church? Have we grown used to a situation in which the coming of Christ and the revelation of salvation do not fall within our expectations? True, we believe in the *future* hope in principle, but has it lost its importance as a factor in our daily living? And, as a result, do we lay too much stress on salvation now, both in our own lives and in the life of the world, and too little on what Christ has yet to bring" (*I Peter*, p. 43).

There are some things I know to exist and look forward to experiencing even though I cannot see them right now. I relish the cool, crisp mountain air of

Colorado even though I cannot feel it now. I relish the evening sights on the boat dock at the house where we stay at the Lake of the Ozarks – the star-filled sky, the reflections of Christmas lights on the still water - even though I cannot see them now. I relish the sound of the Little Pigeon River in the Smokey Mountains even though I cannot hear it now. Not only do I believe these physical things but I anticipate the next time I can experience them in person.

The same may be said for things spiritual. There are certain promises vouchsafed to us in the gospel. Secured by the blood of Christ. We believe those promises and anticipate entering in to them. But now we can neither see nor experience them. Like the saints of old we are people of faith welcoming the promises *from a distance* (**Heb. 11:13**). They are obscured by the limitations of the flesh. They are obscured by the boundaries of time. They are obscured by the sorrows of suffering and hardship. One day the clouds will dissipate. One day the veil will be removed. One day the fog will lift. One day faith will give way to sight. **The great joy of that blessed end overflows into the present and fuels our endurance.**

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He offers none of the things that are prescribed so often these days. Instead, he points these strugglers to the riches of the \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **Review I Peter 1:3-5**

**The great joy of the end \_\_\_\_\_ into the present  
and fuels our endurance.**

In short, our joy is in the \_\_\_\_\_ of God lavished upon us in the \_\_\_\_\_.

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**We cannot see the \_\_\_\_\_ that awaits genuine faith (I Peter 1:9).**