

How Can I Suffer With Joy?

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[0 : 00] Two readings this morning, one from Psalm 73 and in the New Testament from 1 Peter 1, verses 6-12.

First from Psalm 73. Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet have almost slipped.

I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles. Their bodies are healthy and strong.

They are free from common human burdens. They are not plagued by human ills. Therefore pride is their necklace. They clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity.

Their evil imaginations have no limits. They scoff and speak with malice. With arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven and their tongues take possession of the earth.

[1 : 04] Therefore their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. They say, how would God know? Does the Most High know anything? This is what the wicked are like.

Always free of care. They go on amassing wealth. Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure. And I have washed my hands in innocence. All day long I have been afflicted.

And every morning brings new punishments. If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children. When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply.

Till I entered the sanctuary of God. Then I understood their final destiny. Surely you placed them on slippery ground. You cast them down to ruin.

How suddenly are they destroyed. Completely swept away by terrors. They are like a dream when one awakes. When you arise, Lord, you will despise them as fantasies.

[2 : 05] When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant. I was brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you.

You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel. And afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you?

And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail. But God is the strength of my heart. And my portion forever.

Those who are far from you will perish. You destroy all who are unfaithful to you. But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the sovereign Lord my refuge.

I will tell of all your deeds. Now moving to 1 Peter chapter 1. Starting from verse 6.

[3 : 04] In all this you greatly rejoice. Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing, when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Even angels long to look into these things. Thanks be to God for his word. So our question today as we turn to 1 Peter is this.

[4 : 37] Can I have joy in suffering? Can joy and suffering go together? Let me begin with the story of a friend who years ago was running or competing in, I guess, a triathlon in the North Highlands.

And he'd done the bike element. He'd done the swimming element. I remember talking to him about the run that was the climax of the race. He was saying it was absolutely brutal.

And for those last few miles, he said, all I was thinking of was home. All I was thinking of was being at home in the warmth, enjoying a hot shower and a hot cooked meal.

Now consider what Peter is doing here. Who is he speaking to? He's speaking to exiles, speaking to pilgrims. They are beginning to suffer as they're running the race of faith.

And Peter writes to encourage them. And in particular, he says, look, remember your true home, which isn't here.

[5 : 50] It's in heaven. He says, keep your eyes on Jesus. And the prospect of future and final salvation. But there's still this question.

When Peter puts joy and suffering side by side, we think, how can these co-exist? And maybe especially it's a challenge for us. We're told we live in the age of comfort, where one of the idols, the things that we live for and enjoy most would be comfort and security.

Where we're encouraged to find our best life now. And this message of the reality of suffering strikes our ears in a difficult way. The reality of Christianity and the realism of the Bible is that we follow Jesus, who is a suffering and dying saviour.

We are called by Jesus to carry our crosses, to deny ourselves, to live with self-sacrifice.

And indeed, Peter, who's writing this, that's his story. You read about Peter in the book of Acts and we find him being imprisoned and opposed because of the message of Jesus that he teaches.

[7 : 11] And then we think about our current situation and the suffering that we are experiencing. And perhaps today you're asking the question, can joy really be possible?

Is that even realistic in the middle of trials? Or perhaps you're a Christian and you're thinking, I wish I could face trials with trust and with hope.

I see other people do it. I wish I could do it. Well, I hope what Peter has to say will prove helpful to us. Because Peter is clear that suffering with hope, suffering with joy is possible.

And indeed, if you belong to this church, if you belong to Beclu, if you cast your mind around our congregation, you will find examples in our church.

I'm profoundly thankful for those who suffer well and have so much to teach us. For all of us, it's vital. Peter is saying that we hold on to Jesus and we hold on to his salvation.

[8 : 21] If we want to face trials well. Especially this prospect that we thought about last week of an eternal inheritance. The goal of our salvation, again, is placed before us to keep us going.

So as we think about the question, how can I suffer with joy? There are three truths to consider from our text. One, we need to consider the value of our salvation.

We need to consider the goal of our salvation. And thirdly, we need to consider the pattern of our salvation. And we'll look at each of these in turn. So first of all, let's consider the value of our salvation.

It's in verse 6 and verse 7, where we are presented with these two truths that coexist at the same time. Verse 6.

In all this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. So there's one truth.

[9 : 27] Christians have great joy, great joy in all this. What's the all this? We go back to last week. It's that future inheritance that God has laid in store for us and is shielding us until we get there.

This is nothing less than eternity in glory with the risen Lord Jesus. That's our cause for joy. So we have great joy, but we also suffer. And Peter says we suffer in all kinds of grief, all kinds of trials.

For his audience then and for us today, we know losses of various kinds, rejection, hardships, suffering comes.

Now Peter says at the same time as you suffer, you can have great joy. How is that possible? And we need to recognise that Peter is not guilty of minimising suffering.

He's not trying to pretend that it's not a big deal. Hurts are real. The pain in our heart and the struggles we have are real. Evil done against us is awful.

[10 : 38] So Peter is not minimising that, but he is maximising our view of the value of Jesus and of eternal salvation.

So that would fill our horizon. And he does that by making a comparison in verse 7. It's the comparison between faith and gold.

Verse 7. And these have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

So there's the comparison between faith and gold. Why is the comparison? In a sense, it's to help us to weigh up in a balance. Think about those scales, those balances. It's the cost of our trials versus the eternal weight of glory that comes from knowing Jesus and being saved by him.

Two points of comparison. First comparison. Each is tested and refined. Faith and gold tested and refined. Gold is tested in a crucible and it passes through fire to burn off impurities.

[11 : 56] The crucible of our faith where faith is tested is through trials and suffering, Peter is saying. In the sense that suffering tests the genuineness of faith.

Suffering will reveal whether faith stands or faith was never really there and it falls.

And we know that because that's how Jesus teaches in his parables. One famous parable, the sower and the soil.

He talks about the farmer that goes out to sow seed and some of it falls on rocky ground and there's not deep roots. So when hardship, when suffering comes, those kind of people fall away.

No deep root of faith. Or Jesus talks about the wise and the foolish builders. The wise who hears and obeys and builds his life on the words of Jesus and that house stands firm.

[13 : 10] It's built on the rock compared to the one who doesn't listen, who doesn't obey, who doesn't put into practice the words of Jesus. And that house built on sand collapses.

So suffering tests whether faith is genuine. Suffering also has a refining process. Just as gold put through the fire refines it so that what is of value is left.

God's intention is that our valuable faith would be strengthened in trials. That it would increase our dependence on God.

It would deepen our hope in eternal reality rather than the here and now. And then the second point of comparison between faith and gold is that each has value.

So we know gold is a precious metal. The gold standard as a measure of the value of wealth.

[14 : 10] And Peter knows that. But he makes the point, yes gold is a treasure. But it's a treasure that won't last. It will in the end perish.

Of infinitely greater value, a value worth more than gold, is faith in Jesus. Because that's not temporary.

That's eternal treasure. And the true value of faith is revealed in the future when Jesus Christ returns.

And the people of God, the church of God receive praise and glory and honour. When we are welcomed into eternal glory.

So Peter's point to a suffering church is this. If we imagine our balance scale. If we put trials and suffering on one side and the joy of salvation on the other.

[15 : 15] Compared to that eternal weight of glory that far outweighs any suffering. Our trials, though real and painful, have no more weight than a feather.

Compared to the incredibly great glory of knowing Jesus as Lord. Prompts us perhaps to ask some important questions.

If Peter is saying salvation has value in his real treasure. What is it that we treasure today?

Are we placing our hope on comfort now? Or joy in and from and with Jesus for eternity? In a comfortable day.

In a secure day. We typically tend to think about the here and now. And perhaps the pandemic is helping us to think about mortality and eternity. And that's actually good for us.

[16 : 23] Here's another question. Where am I pursuing praise and glory and honour? Am I willing to risk losing praise or glory or honour from others because of my Christian faith?

Because I feel secure in knowing that in Jesus, in trusting him, I have all the praise and glory and honour that I need as I anticipate eternity.

How much does eternity shape my life, shape your life? How much does it influence our thinking today? We need to live in the good news of the gospel each day.

The good news of our salvation, which isn't just for now, but is for eternity.

That looks ahead to King Jesus coming back and us being with him in the world, being made new so that we live in the world we all want. Perhaps you are one of the many households back to the joy of P.E. with Joe.

[17 : 36] Joe Wicks, body coach, personal trainer. And if you watch him or watch other personal trainers, you get encouragement for them.

It's like, you should be feeling this in, and they'll list muscle groups you didn't even know existed. You should be feeling this in your quads right now or your intercostals. But you'll feel pain, you'll feel the burn, but you'll feel great.

It'll be great for you mentally. You'll gain muscular stability, all those kind of things. Yes, you know pain, but you will know gain. That's what Peter says to the church.

You know and are experiencing pain now, but take heart, be encouraged. You will know eternal gain. That's the value of our salvation.

But Peter presses this still further. The second thing to think about is to consider the goal of salvation.

[18 : 45] Again, he directs suffering Christians forward to future glory, even as we have a present experience of our salvation.

So, verse 8. Notice what he draws attention to there.

Life for a Christian, in a sense, is like when we used to go to the cinema and you would see the movie trailer.

And that would prepare you for watching the main event when it came on our screens. Or to bring it into the kitchen.

It's like licking the whisk or the baking spoon, which creates a sense of anticipation for the cake, for the pudding, soon to be ready.

[20 : 01] You know what I'm talking about, I'm sure. Peter is saying to this church, look, you enjoy your salvation now.

You have a love for God because God has loved you and has sent Jesus to save you. And the Spirit of God is in your heart. So you have a love for God and you have a joy from God because you know that you belong to him.

But you also need to remember that the best is yet to come. There is so much more in store for the Christian.

If you look at verse 8, what we have is Peter, who was one of the disciples, who is an apostle, who was an eyewitness of Jesus on this earth.

And he is commending their faith. If we are Christians today, he's commending our faith. He's saying, you have love for a Jesus you've not seen.

[21 : 10] Now, how does that love develop? Well, it develops through the message of Peter and the apostles and the New Testament. The message of the Bible. That God, in his great kindness, has sent Jesus.

Jesus, who lived perfectly and then died as a sacrifice in our place, taking our sin. Who then rose in victory over the devil and sin and death.

And now he's ruling and reigning in heaven. And one day he'll come back and take his people to be with him. And he sends the Holy Spirit into our hearts.

That if we trust in Jesus, we are brought into the family of God. Our sins are forgiven. We have the hope of eternal life.

Now, they've not seen Jesus. We've not seen Jesus. But yet, we can know love. We can hear and believe. Peter also says, you have joy in a Jesus you have never met.

[22 : 15] How is that possible? Well, remember what he said in the opening verses. You can have joy because in Jesus you have a new identity. We are a new creation. But we trust in Jesus.

We are given a new spiritual birth. And we have this new inheritance. This eternal hope that no one can take from us. And so Peter says to these suffering Christians, your love and your joy are real.

They are evidence of real faith. But remember, this is just the first taste that is so much more still in store. And he makes that clear by shifting again to the future in verse 9.

When he says, For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. So there's more love and joy to come when you enjoy the full result of your faith, full and final salvation, when you are with Jesus and made like him forever.

Because then you'll be totally free from the sin that dogs us, from our shame, from the pain and death and hurt that's all around us.

[23 : 28] Then we'll have a clearer vision of the beauty and the love and the kindness and the grace of our Lord Jesus. Because we'll see him face to face.

So again, if we are to suffer well, to suffer with joy and with hope, you and I need a big picture gospel.

to recognise that the best is yet to come. To be able to see from here to eternity, through faith in Jesus, to recognise that when Jesus said, it is finished, he has accomplished a salvation that has implications for now, that we can know God now, but also that we look forward to life with him forever.

And it's important too, to recognise that Jesus is the hope that our world is desperately looking for. We need to remember, as Christians, the good news that we have.

And if you're not a Christian, let me encourage you to look deeply into the message at the heart of our Christian faith. If you are listening today and you're looking for love and you feel loss and you feel isolation, if you find yourself desperately needing joy, understand that Jesus offers both.

[25 : 00] Jesus offers both without loss, without separation, and with no end. If we will put our trust in him.

So Peter again is saying to us, you and I, we can suffer with joy when our hearts are set on Jesus. So that's the goal of our faith that he's talking about.

But now let's think about, thirdly, the pattern of our salvation. To suffer with joy, we need to consider the pattern of our salvation.

This is verse 10 to 12. Now, let's remember who Peter is writing to, who's his audience. They're former pagans, people who worshipped false gods, people who lived immoral lives, people who were far from God and far from his word.

But now, it becomes clear in Peter's writing that they have received the wonderful gift of salvation. And to further encourage them to find joy as they suffer, he puts two remarkable patterns on display in verses 10 to 12.

[26 : 12] And the first is the pattern of Old Testament prophecy. So, look with me at verse 10. Concerning this salvation, the prophets, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing.

When he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow, it was revealed that they were not serving themselves, but you. So, there's the pattern of Old Testament prophecy.

The Old Testament prophets, they spoke and they wrote about Jesus, the Messiah, and his grace. And in so doing, they were led by God's Holy Spirit and they did it for you, Peter says.

For those of us who live this side of Jesus. The prophets, they longed to know when the Messiah would come. They wanted it to be in their day, but it was revealed to them that the pattern of God's salvation, as it had always been, would be that people would be saved by grace, ultimately through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Now, that was a mystery to them, but as they pointed forward, they were speaking for our benefit. For those of us who live after the time of Jesus.

[27 : 43] And then Peter goes on to talk about the apostles. In verse 11. These things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

The apostles too, they speak inspired by the Holy Spirit. They also speak a good news of salvation. They bring the same message of God's grace through a Messiah, only they can make it clearer because Jesus has come.

The saviour bringing God's grace has come. The pattern, the Old Testament gives promise, the New Testament brings fulfilment.

So Peter is wanting to point out the incredible privilege that belongs to every church and every Christian, this side of Jesus. That pattern of salvation is revealed in our lives through Jesus.

And then there's that incredible, almost throwaway statement in the end of verse 12, even angels long to look into these things. There's a great picture of angels peering over the wall. They're desperate to see more of salvation.

[29 : 01] So we have a privilege even over the angels. The angels, they see God's saving plan, but they don't experience it.

We experience it as sinners who are saved by grace. The pattern of our salvation shows us more of our privilege. So there's the pattern of Old Testament prophecy, but then also Peter draws attention to the pattern of Jesus' life, which is the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

The pattern of Jesus' life is that he would suffer and die first. And again, that was predicted in the Old Testament. He would be the suffering servant.

And then after going to the cross and paying the price for our sins and acting for our salvation and our redemption, there would be that victory at the resurrection.

There'd be the glory to follow. And again, the Old Testament spoke of an eternal, global, glorious king, and that's Jesus. And Jesus combines both of these realities.

[30 : 11] He is the king and he is the suffering servant for us. Now, why does Peter remind them of that? What's the significance of that pattern for Christians suffering and Christians going through trials?

Well, of course, he's saying to us, we are following in the footsteps of our Saviour. The pattern of our faith is cross-shaped.

And let me say, if you're not a Christian, you need to consider the cost of discipleship. Jesus clearly calls us to die to self and to give up our own life, our claims to be Lord and King of our own life so that he might be Lord and King.

And the only way we're going to do that is if we see the value of our salvation and the joy of what he offers. But recognise too, as Peter talks about in Jesus, someone who suffers first with glory to follow, it does not then mean when I suffer, I am unloved or I am forgotten.

Rather, this is the experience of Jesus, the son the father loves. God has laid down the pattern of salvation in the Bible and in the life of his son Jesus, that we would pattern our lives on the pattern of salvation, that we would seek to live by his grace, that we'd be willing to suffer for Jesus as we wait for future glory with him.

[32 : 05] Peter's point is that you and I can suffer with joy by fixing our eyes on Jesus. Remember my triathlon running friend?

He was kept going by the thought of home and what home represented. We are called today to suffer with joy.

Looking ahead to our future home in glory, even as we enjoy the privileges of salvation in the present.

We live knowing we have peace with God, knowing everyday love from God, receiving a joy that no circumstances can take away, having hope that is eternal.

And we have that now and we look ahead. It's like those Zoom family gatherings that no doubt we have all been, in a sense, enjoying, but in a sense, enduring.

[33 : 12] Now we have those calls, multiple screams and we get to enjoy some fun and we get to feel love from parents or siblings or children, but that's not how we want it to stay, is it?

We look forward to when we can all be gathered in the same home because we recognise that's so much better. Friends, we have so much to enjoy now as followers of Jesus to give us hope.

But Peter reminds us we have so much still to come in our true home in heaven with Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. in heaven We have so much in heaven for God in heaven and we have so much in heaven to change we love our Lord have a dream in heaven is our Son and theirison will be our Quelle