

# Joy and Hope Amidst Suffering

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[ 0 : 00 ] Amen. Who are you? What are you doing? Where are you headed?

These are the questions all about the meaning of life, and these are the questions of any age, the questions which have received a whole host of answers. And one related question is, how do you deal with suffering? I wonder how you would go about answering that question, and that too has received a whole host of responses.

The often quoted remark from Richard Dawkins where he commented on the sufferings of the world that are beyond all decent contemplation, he concluded that the universe that we observe has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at bottom no design, no purpose, no good, no evil, nothing but pitiless indifference. Cheerful stuff, isn't it?

Perhaps for Peter, the question about how we deal with suffering is to be answered about knowing when we are. We live after the time where Jesus died on the cross and achieved our salvation. We live during a time of temporary suffering, and we live in anticipation of the future glories that await us. And in this passage, we find that our salvation has been secured by the work of Christ, and that even in the midst of temporary sufferings, we may find joy and hope in this. And as we await our future glorification when Christ appears in His second coming. And we shall consider this under three headings. Firstly, in verses 3 to 5, we see our salvation, or we see a joy in salvation secured.

[ 2 : 06 ] In verses 6 to 9, we find a joy in temporary sufferings. And in verses 10 to 12, we see a joy in glory anticipated. So firstly, in verses 3 to 5, we see a joy in salvation secured.

And the first thing that we find in this section is that we can have a joy in the new birth. Verse 3, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In His great mercy, He has given us new birth. What does it mean to have new birth in Christ? Well, many of us who know our Bibles well may be able to point to John chapter 3, verse 3, where we see it is necessary to be born again to enjoy eternal life. We may also think of Ephesians, where previously you were dead in your transgressions, and now you have been made alive in Christ. And this is the reality for the Christian believer, that you were dead in the sins and trespasses in which you formerly walked. Ephesians chapter 2, verse 1 says, you were dead in your transgressions and sins in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the Spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. Without Christ, all of humankind is lost in this misery, in sin's futility and in hell's damnation. But now you have been made alive in Christ Jesus.

Read again verse 3, because of His great mercy, He has given us new birth. It is because of God's great mercy that you have been made alive again. And throughout Scripture, we read of God's covenantal love for His people that saved His people from the hands of slavery of the Egyptians and constantly saved His people from the hands of their enemies.

And it is the same infinite and eternal love of God which has caused you to be born again, from death into salvation. And this is not on our own efforts as if we could add or contribute anything to our salvation. It is on the basis of His love alone that we can know the joy of His blessings.

So, we have been born again and we subsequently see that we have been made alive to a living hope. Verse 3 again, He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. I wonder what hopes you have this morning. Maybe those are hopes about the weather or maybe about your future. We like to hope in many things. Maybe we hope that Scotland will one day win the Euros. Well, in that case, that's not even false hope. That's just no hope at all.

[ 5 : 32 ] But this is not like the new hope that the birth gives us, especially not that last one. For this hope, the hope in the new birth is certain. Not only is it placed in the God in whom we can have full expectation, but we also find that this hope is a living hope. And this is striking in our world as it was

in Peter's world. We live in a world which often does not know how to respond to the reality of death.

As some of you know, I proposed to Emily, my wife, in a graveyard. And something which we like to do from time to time is walk through graveyards. And I find it very interesting to look at what all the different gravestones have written on them. And some of them are very profound. They have a Bible verse on them or something. But others bring home the reality that all rationality goes out of the window in the face of death. I remember one that read something along the lines of, God only sends the best of us to heaven. And it's just not true, is it? Well, perhaps it is, but I don't think quite in the way that they meant it. And I say this to stress that our culture does not know how to respond to the dark and uncertain reality of death. Peter calls this a living hope in contrast to all of this. And in a world which is so uncertain, what comfort we can derive and take from the fact that our hope is based upon the historical resurrection of our Lord and Savior. Read again these verses. Verse 4, we have been born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It is not based upon some... our hope is not based upon some scientific advancement. It is not based upon some political policy. It is based solely and alone on the fact that Christ is risen, and it is because of this fact that we can be sure on the last day we will be raised with Him.

So, we have been made alive to a living hope. We have also been made alive to an indestructible inheritance. Verse 4, into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you. And it is important to understand that when the Bible mentions inheritance, it means something very significant and specific. In the Old Testament, we have to understand that the Israelites, they had their inheritance, which was the promised land. And in their inheritance... and in their inherited promised land, that is where they enjoyed the blessings of the presence of God. This inheritance was a source of joy to the people living in the times of the Old Testament. However, this inheritance was lost, as Peter's audience would have been well aware of. It was destroyed by the Babylonians, defiled by

[ 9 : 02 ] Israel's sin and unfaithfulness, and it was left in decay. But the inheritance we have been born again into is not like this one, but it is much greater. Read again these verses. This one can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is far greater than any earthly treasure for this inheritance is kept in heaven for you. It is a heavenly reward which can never be taken away.

It is imperishable. It can never be destroyed. It is not like our earthly treasures where moths and vermin destroy and thieves break in and steal.

No, no, it is kept in heaven and no disaster can befall it. It cannot spoil. It is incorruptible.

It is because of the sin of the Israelites that the people of God lost their inheritance the first time. But now, for those of us who have been made alive, our inheritance cannot be spoiled and ruined by our sin.

For those of you in Christ know this, that no matter how badly you have sinned, no matter how badly you may sin, nothing can spoil the inheritance that awaits you in glory. Nothing can take away your heavenly reward.

[ 10 : 43 ] There is nothing you can do to make you unworthy of the grace that you have in Christ. And if you do sin, you have an advocate with the Father, who has died for you and has given you this new life.

It cannot perish. It cannot spoil. It cannot fail. And finally, it will never fade. Our inheritance will never age. The passage of time will never cause it to decay or rust away.

Instead, it is held, it remains firmly held until you take possession of it in full. And because your inheritance ultimately lies in the infinite, eternal, and unchanging God, you can be assured that it is secure.

And it is not just your inheritance which is guaranteed. In verse 5, you too will be kept secure until that day. In verse 5, who through faith are being shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Formerly, you were kept in the custody of law and sin, but now you are being held and kept by your Father, by your Savior.

[ 12 : 16 ] And know that our Savior is preparing a place for us in the new creation, and he will, and this will be ready at the time when he comes back.

Our salvation is secured, and in this we can find much joy. We can join with Peter in praising our God for the salvation that is secure for us in heaven.

So that is our salvation, our joy in salvation secured. Secondly, in verses 6 to 9, we see a joy in temporary sufferings.

In verses 6 to 7, we find a necessary but temporary time of trials for Christians.

Verse 6, In all this you rejoice, though now for a little while, though now for a little, you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

[13:19] These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though it is refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Now many speculate as to the sufferings that Peter is talking about here. They try to look to the historical background to try and find the exact circumstance which Peter was addressing.

Those conclusions are not so certain, but what is interesting is that the language Peter uses here is very similar to what we read elsewhere, to what we read earlier in Zechariah chapter 13.

Turn with me to Zechariah chapter 13 for a second again. Important verses for this passage.

Zechariah chapter 13. It says, Awake sword against my shepherd, against the man who is close to me, declares the Lord Almighty.

Strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn my hand against the little ones.

In the whole lands, declares the Lord, two-thirds will be struck down and perish, yet one-third will be left in it. And then verse 9.

[14:38] This third I will put into fire. I will refine them like silver and test them like gold.

Notice the similarities in the language. And throughout 1 Peter, we read of the references of the great shepherd who was slain. Zechariah envisages the striking of God's king, the shepherd king, which we know as Jesus, and the subsequent scattering and refining of his people in order to prepare them for the final glory of God's kingdom. In other words, the work of Christ begins a series of necessary trials for the people of God, and which will prepare the way for the completion of his kingdom.

And this is important to understand, important background for this passage for two reasons. Firstly, in this passage, it is confirmed that suffering is a necessary experience of the Christian life.

There are many today who believe that the Christian faith is a way to avoid suffering. They see it as this crutch, which allows us to avoid the hard and difficult reality of pain and death.

But this could not be further from the truth. In verse 6, the audience have had to endure suffering and grief. In fact, if you're reading from the ESV, the ESV puts this as necessary grief.

[16:13] It is important to be clear that conversion does not mean that all of our problems will magic away. John Calvin puts it like this, the faithful are not logs of wood, nor have they so divested themselves of human feelings as to be unaffected by sorrow, unafraid of danger, unhurt by poverty, and untouched by hard and unbearable persecution.

You are not logs of wood. You cannot avoid sufferings and pain because you know Jesus. And we face much, many trials in this world. There are many sufferings which plague us.

In a world which is so connected by social media, there seems to be so much loneliness in this world.

In 1 Peter, we find the audience then were facing pressure from the outside world. In chapter 4, verses 1-5, the believers face persecution for not joining in the evil ways of the Gentiles, and Peter exhorts them to suffer not as the unbelievers do.

And this could not be more timely to today, could it? Where believers are pressurized to conform to the ways of this world. Biblical views regarding marriage, family, wealth, and the general way of life are not only regarded as irrelevant and outdated, but so much of our culture actively despises these things. Standing by these things may mean that we are the odd one out amongst our colleagues, friends, or possibly even our families. We not only learn of the necessity of these trials, but we also learn that they are temporary. We suffer only for, verse 6, a little while. And this is what we find in the prophecy of Zechariah. After the striking of the shepherd in verse 13, in the scattering of the flock, we read Zechariah 40, where God brings in His kingdom in glory. He ushers in a new age.

[18:50] And this is what the refining of us through suffering is geared towards. It is all geared towards this final day. And this can give us hope that in the midst of all the trials that you go through, the tested genuineness of your faith will result in the praise and glory of God at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Not only can we rejoice in the fact that our salvation has been secured, but we must also emphasize at this point that we can find joy in the glorification that will be secured in the last day when Christ comes in His glory.

Very often we know in life it is necessary to and important to endure temporary suffering to gain reward. The Bible very often uses the image of an athlete. The athlete has to go on strict diets. He needs to go through intense training and that might involve pain. But ultimately it is all geared towards great reward. I don't know if you've seen those videos. There are many examples of this sort of thing. I don't know if you've seen those videos where they sit a kid in a room with a marshmallow and they're told if you don't eat this marshmallow, we're going to give you two marshmallows.

Now usually the kid ends up eating the marshmallow and he has to learn the lesson of degrade gratification the hard way. But we know the importance of often enduring a temporary trial in order to gain something more.

But how much greater here? Not only because of the certainty of the outcome, but also because of how much grander our heavenly inheritance is. Verse 8, though you have not seen Him, you love Him.

[ 20 : 54 ] And even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and a glorious joy. For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Friends, we gain great joy in the salvation that we have. We gain great joy in knowing Christ whom we do not see.

Imagine how much greater it will be when we see Him face to face. All of the trials will be in the past and you will receive the purpose of your salvation, which is eternal fellowship with Him.

As the hymn we sang earlier puts it, that purer and higher and greater will be our joy and our wonder when Jesus we see.

And this is the answer to our temporary trials and suffering. It is to gaze upon the reward which awaits you in heaven.

[ 22 : 13 ] If you are in Christ, suffering is not the end, but you are heading towards a heavenly inheritance where you will be transformed in an instant when He comes.

And it is important at this point to also note that we will not always know the answer to every trial we go through. The Bible does not explain the reason for why we go through every single hardship. Sometimes we will never know why we go through certain situations, as the life of Job helpfully highlights. But what we do know is this, that Christ is shaping us and is preparing us for a future day when He comes in glory and fills us with this joy that is inexpressible.

As another famous hymn says, I cannot tell how He will win the nations, how He will claim His earthly heritage, how satisfied needs and aspirations of East and West, of sinner and of sage. But this I know, all flesh shall see His glory, and He shall reap the harvest He has sown. And some glad day His sun shall shine in splendor when He, the Savior, Savior of the world, is known.

[ 23 : 44 ] Our salvation is secure. So let us stand firm in the midst of these trials. Let us not suffer as the unbelievers do.

Let us not grieve as those who have no hope. A theme in 1 Peter, a common theme in 1 Peter, is that Christians ought to act distinctly.

And this is often a struggle for many believers. But the clear message here is not only to look to the cross, which we of course should look to, but also to look to the second coming of Christ.

Look to the glory of the glorification that awaits us, and let us endure the temporary, necessary sufferings with which we endure, as we gaze upon the glory of His return.

So that is our joy in temporary sufferings. Thirdly and finally, verses 10 to 12, we see joy in glory anticipated.

[ 24 : 48 ] Verses 10 and 11. Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when He predicted the suffering of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

Concerning this salvation, that is, the salvation that we found in verses 3 to 5 that is secure, and the glories yet to come that we see in verses 6 to 9, this is the salvation that the prophets sought to understand.

And this passage highlights for us that the Old and New Testaments proclaim the one same plan of God. They're not different stories.

They're not different ways of salvation, but one eternal plan from the beginning. Therefore, how important is it that we read our Old Testaments and see to understand this history, because by it and its prophecies do we understand the salvation that is proclaimed by the New Testament. However, they did not see things as clearly as we do. And it is important to note that this does not mean that they were not saved in the same way. They still enjoyed the same salvation that we enjoy today, though maybe they had less clarity as to how this would all work out.

[ 26 : 30 ] It does suggest they did not enjoy the same New Testament perspective that we enjoyed today. Verse 10, they searched intently and with greatest care, trying to understand the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

That is, the salvation and temporary sufferings and glories that Christ will bring in the Second Coming. I wonder if you have ever lost your keys or if you've lost your phone.

I wonder how intently you search for these things. There was one time I was working on an essay for seminary, and I was working on my Word document the day. The due date was here.

I was making my last-minute edits. And all of a sudden, Microsoft Word decided to revert my save to what it was at the beginning of my work. I had almost lost all of it. And I cannot tell you how intently I searched my iPad files to try and recover that work.

Now, in the end, thankfully, I did recover it, but I searched very, with greatest care for that document. Now, maybe this is slightly different, but they searched intently to understand the salvation that Christ brings.

[ 27 : 54 ] They searched intently to understand how all the prophecy that was given to them would play out. Daniel chapter 8 verse 15 gives us but one example where Daniel seeks to understand the contents of his prophecy, of his vision.

And we can only imagine just the longing that some of these prophets would have to understand these things. Many of them lived in exile. Many of them awaited the future glory, the restoration of the glory of the heights of the kingdom of David, which was lost after the exile.

The prophets anticipated the joys and the glories which they foresaw in a limited capacity, but in 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 12, Peter draws a contrast between the Old Testament prophets and New Testament Christians.

Verse 12, it was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but to you when they spoke of the things that have now been told to 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. What the prophets so eagerly anticipated, we have experienced more fully as Christians living in light of the cross.

[ 29 : 25 ] What they experienced in shadows and in types, we experience in full reality. And when we consider this, we come to discover how blessed we truly are.

We do not experience the fullness of the glory that is yet to come. That's still in the future. And that, we join in the prophets in our longing and anticipation to know how that will all be brought to pass.

Even the angels long to look into and understand how God's plan of eternal redemption will be finished. And I wonder, do you wait with eager anticipation for the return of our Lord?

Do you long for that final and glorious day? As we await the return of our Lord, we live during a time of suffering and trials.

And very often, we rightly focus on the cross of Christ. We rightly focus on what, we are focused on what Jesus has bought for us. But doesn't this passage not remind us of the importance and the comfort that we can find looking towards the second coming of Christ?

[ 30 : 49 ] Not just the first advent, but the second as well. And another thing which this passage reminds us of is the importance of preaching these things.

Given that we enjoy such a privileged place, living after the cross, and in a time, and that time where we live in sufferings, in a time where we need God's grace so much to sustain us in all that we endure, we need His grace, it is so important to allow the salvation and glories of God's kingdom to be preached to us.

In this age, in our age, our prayer should be that of the great hymn, Thine be the glory. No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of life.

Life is not without thee. Aid us in our strife. Make us more than conquerors. Through thy deathless love, bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.

It is through God's means of grace, that is, through the word and sacrament, through the preaching and reading of His word, and through baptism and the Lord's Supper, that we are being shaped and prepared for the glory of Christ's second coming.

[ 32 : 21 ] It is through these means that we are being carried safe through Jordan to His home above. And how we should not neglect to gather together to receive these means of grace as we live in this time of suffering.

And word and sacrament to sustain us as we anticipate the revelation of Jesus Christ. in receiving the reading and preaching of God's word, we are sustained and are reminded of the glory that awaits us in the midst of many trials.

And doesn't this not bring us a joy and a peace which surpasses all understanding? Doesn't this not encourage us that we are sustained?

And doesn't this not inspire us to live in godliness and fear? How wonderful a truth it is that despite your sufferings now, you are headed to glory when Christ returns.

And when you see Him in an instant, you will be changed. and all the trials of this life will cease. You will dwell with Him forever and you will be glorified.

[ 33 : 49 ] Amen. Let us let us pray.