

How Can I Sing The Lord's Song?

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- [0 : 0 0] Let's share in our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your great glory our supreme concern.
- through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. This is the second of three times, I think, that we're going to be looking at this passage and exploring the different parts of it.
- And Peter addresses his letter, as we saw last week, to those who are exiles. And perhaps in his mind, he was hearing the words of the psalmist in Psalm 137, who wrote in verse one, by the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion.
- And then later in verse four, how shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land? Now, of course, the exiles in our passage were not Jewish people being removed from their country and made to settle in another land, as the psalmist was referring to.
- The exiles Peter's talking to are those that are believers who are scattered from Jerusalem and areas, and Rome and other areas under Roman control because of the persecution of Christians.
- [1 : 2 2] Immediately after Jesus' ascension, we read that the apostles were in the courts of the temple each day preaching and teaching, but that time came to an end as more and more Christians were conveniently blamed for the troubles and problems that the Roman world had, and they were then forced to flee to these other provinces.
- These are the people who Peter is writing his letter to, and these are the people who might have sung along with those Babylonian exiles, how shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?
- Now, as we saw last week, believers in Jesus have much to rejoice for. The resurrection of Jesus, a living hope, God's great mercy, an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, and salvation by God's power.
- A lot to pack into just three verses that Peter did there. And this is important for us to remember because we all have a tendency to go looking for our joy in other places.
- And when we do, we can find ourselves, as one person put it, on an emotional roller coaster. When we find our joy rooted in financial security, it will rise and fall depending on the amount of money we have at the present time.
- [2 : 4 3] When our joy is rooted in a particular relationship, it will rise and fall on the basis of how that person responds to us. When our joy is rooted in social standing, it will rise and fall on the basis of whether we are accepted or rejected.
- When our joy is rooted in present circumstances, it will rise and fall on the basis of whether or not we're having a good day or a bad day. None of these things are bad in themselves, but Peter's reminding us that our joy cannot be rooted in this world, but in God himself and the salvation we have in Jesus.

That salvation is a constant mooring in the fluctuations of life. It's an unshakable foundation for our joy and perseverance. If our joy is found in knowing whose we are and where we are heading, then our joy will always be great because the grounds of our joy will never shift.

And as we turn to verse 6, Peter reminds us that, reminds them that these are things in which they should and do rejoice, but do you notice that word though?

Now sometimes you might get a piece of good news, you become very excited about it, and then it turns out not to be so good after all. Maybe you get a token from your favorite shop, B&Q, or Waterstones maybe, or Marks & Spencer, or wherever it is, even clothes shops.

[4 : 15] Maybe you open up that token to see how much you've got and you find out it's one of those £10 off if you spend £100 tokens. Suddenly, you're not quite as excited. That's a token that promised much and delivered little.

Or maybe, there's a lot of football fans in this church. Maybe your team gets a new manager and it promises great things. Dusts off the trophy cabinet, preparation for all the treasures that are going to be put inside.

But somehow, maybe not always, but often, these promises are never fulfilled and all you're left with is disappointment and maybe you're in the hunt for a shiny new manager.

But that's not what's going on here. Peter does say, though, but he's not setting them up for disappointment. He's not about to gently tell them that all the good stuff I just mentioned is not quite true and here comes the reality check.

No, it's all true, but something else is true as well. The word, though, in verse 6, introduces the subject of the next four verses in this chapter and it's those verses that we are going to be looking at this morning.

[5 : 23] So let's just remind ourselves that the verse is up there. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while. If necessary, you have been grieved by various trials. Now, taken on its own, this verse might seem strange.

It would seem to suggest that we greatly rejoice when we are grieved by various trials. Now, I'm sure we can all think of situations we've faced when the last thing we feel or know is rejoicing.

But thankfully, that's not what Peter's saying. When he says, in this you rejoice, he's talking about all those things we just talked about previously and which, as we've also seen, are things, very much things that we can rejoice in.

But having said all these things, he wants them to know that they are experiences that they will have to go through which will be difficult to rejoice in. Not impossible as we're going to see, not meaningless as we'll also see, but nonetheless difficult.

Now, in the Gospels, we see Peter sometimes as an impulsive, talk first, think second type of guy. He made many memorable statements, some of which received praise from Jesus and some of which received rebukes.

[6 : 36] Now, here in this letter, he carries on with that style. He knows that as followers of Jesus, they're going to face opposition and hostility. And in his forthright style, he lays out these things for them in this letter.

Not forthright as in uncaring, but forthright as in lovingly preparing his readers for what they might face. He wants to assure them of the hope they can have in their trials and that their hope, that hope points beyond their trials, which will now last for a little while.

But the hope in Jesus will last forever. And Paul picks this up, this theme up in Romans chapter 8, where we read in verse 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.

If we know where we're heading in the future, then we can understand that the things we face now won't compare to what is to come. Now, Peter moves on in verse 7 to lay out further explanations for our trials.

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.

[8 : 00] Now, Paul uses a good analogy here when he talks about gold being tested in fire. Now, you probably know that gold is put into a container subjected to very high temperatures and the impurities in the gold rise to the surface and can be removed.

And each time this happens, the gold becomes more and more pure until it gets as pure as it can be, which is 24 carat gold. Now, when we think of testing, we may not always think of it in the way Peter is using it here.

Most of us, when we hear test, think of something that we have to pass, hopefully, or that we might fail. Now, this is a good time of year to be thinking about tests because so many of our young people are sitting exams at the moment.

And for them, this is a high-stress time where they feel lots of pressure and where concern about not passing is very much on their minds. And I do hope that we'll all remember, I'm sure you are, to continue to pray for them and support them in any way that we can.

Also, in a couple of weeks, I'm going to be taking a minibus driving test which will allow me to drive minibuses for SU Scotland. And that is definitely a pass-fail kind of test.

[9 : 17] I almost failed the theory, had to take it twice. It's very stressful. But if the assessor, the driving assessor, decides I'm not good enough driving the minibus, then that will be the end of it.

And that's really how we like it with driving tests, isn't it? We really prefer it if all the bad drivers didn't get licenses and only the people who have practiced and are good drivers do get their licenses.

But when Peter uses the word test and the image of gold being tested by fire, he's not talking about a pass-fail sort of test. This type of test is more like a proving or a tempering to make something stronger, like the old blacksmiths who made swords by heating them and then cooling the metal till it was as strong as it could be.

God doesn't allow us to be tested only because he's willing to see us fail. That's the opposite of our relationship with God. The test God allows in our lives are to strengthen our faith and draw us closer to him and make us rely more on him than on ourselves or our own wisdom.

At the beginning of verse 7, Peter says, the tested genuineness of your faith. And what does he mean by that? He's telling them that through their trials they will come to see that the faith we have in God is real because it will have been through a test or a proving and come out stronger.

[10 : 46] There's a story about a group of Russian Christians who were meeting illegally in a church to share and worship and fellowship together and this was before the fall of the Iron Curtain.

And suddenly the doors burst open and two Russian soldiers entered. And they told everyone that they had orders to kill all the Christians and if anyone in that room was not really a Christian this is the time that they should leave.

Now of course the state always planted people in these gatherings to inform on them so they weren't really followers of Jesus. And of course several of the people left the church at once and those who stayed faced execution or imprisonment and torture.

but they couldn't deny their faith so they stayed behind and trusted God for whatever happened. But what did happen was that the soldiers put down their guns and embraced the believers because they were Christians as well but didn't want to trust their identity to anyone who was not completely committed to their faith.

Now we can only imagine the range of emotions that people must have gone through in those moments. fear disbelief confusion recognition and joy.

[11 : 59] They must have known how it might have gone because thousands of Christians were killed by the Soviet authorities in those years. But even in knowing they trusted. But what they will have known was that through that experience their faith was strengthened because at the time of this terrifying test they put their trust in God.

Perhaps the trial we face will not be of that nature but it will be no less real to us whatever it is. And the results will be the same. The tested genuineness of our faith will be shown to us as we endure trials and come to the other side of them.

And this for Peter is more precious than even the purest gold which is held by the world as a treasured thing and which as he points out will eventually perish so is worth so much less than the strengthening of our relationship with God.

Genuine faith is more valuable to God than gold because he is a God who delights in being trusted. And since God's evaluation of something is the ultimate standard of meaning in the universe Peter's readers have a secure basis for a sense of ultimate meaning and importance in their own lives.

And Peter builds on that encouragement in verses 8 to 9. Now Peter, as we know, spent three years with Jesus.

[13 : 34] He was witness to the wonderful acts of power, the teaching to the crowds, and the teaching just to the group of disciples. He was privileged to be one of the few who saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain and he made that great statement on behalf of all the disciples that you are the Messiah, the one sent from God.

He sat and listened to the Sermon on the Mount and was involved in passing around that seemingly unending supply of bread and fish as Jesus fed the multitude. But Peter's saying that none of the people who he's writing to have had that experience.

They have been asked to believe in someone they have never seen. Yet it's clear that Peter knows that these believers rejoice in their love for the Savior that they have not seen. And he goes so far as to say that they rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible.

Not only do we have faith in Jesus and love for Jesus now, we also know already that joy that we will experience when we see him. Such is the faith and hope for those of us who know Jesus.

We wait for the salvation that Jesus will bring with him at his appearance, but we're already experiencing that salvation. We live in a future that's already present, not just in imagination or expectation, but in realization, which is Jesus' life in us through the Spirit.

[14 : 53] No wonder Peter uses the words inexpressible joy. Now we started off by thinking about the exiles from the Old Testament who had been taken in captivity to Babylon and asked in their lament, how can we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

But our joy, our ability to sing the Lord's song is not about where we are, but by who is with us. We grow in our faith through the trials we have talked about and through the indwelling Spirit through whom we are sealed to God as his.

On the day I finished preparing for today, the YouVersion Bible app had this verse as its verse for the day. I don't know if I've got it. No. Philippians chapter 4, verse 7.

Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. As we've talked about the strength in our faith that comes through trials and the joy we experience as children of God, we could possibly see it as God sending us out to be tested saying, see you later, I hope you get on okay.

But in fact, God is with us in every part of our lives and his promises like this one I just read from Philippians are true for all of us all the time. As part of our growth through trials, as part of our growth through trials is how we experience the reality of God and his peace as we turn to him.

[16 : 19] Life in the present is empowered by the God who dwells among us and in us. The spirit is present with us and for us. Let's pray together. Loving God, we thank you that we can know you through your spirit and that you are with us in all circumstances.

Help us to know that assurance as we face trials and may our joy and faith in you grow. Bless us as we bring these prayers to you in Jesus' name. Amen.