

Rejoicing in Trials

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Preacher: Clarence Rolle

[0 : 00] Scripture reading taken from two passages. The first is going to be Job chapter 23 verses 1 to 12. And the second is 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 6 to 9.

! Reading from Job. Then Job answered and said, Today also my complaint is bitter. My hand is heavy on account of my groaning. Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I may come even to his seat. I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No. He would pay attention to me. There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge. Behold, I go forward, but he is not there. And backward, but I do not perceive him.

[1 : 03] On the left hand, when he is working, I do not behold him. He turns to the right hand, but I do not see him. But he knows the way that I take.

When he has tried me, I shall come out as gold. My foot has held fast his steps. I have kept his way, and I have not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of his lips.

I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food. Second reading, 1 Peter, chapter 1, verses 6 to 9.

Verse 6 to 9. Reading from verse 6.

In this you rejoice, though now for little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various 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.

[2 : 12] 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, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

And we know the Lord has blessed the reading of his word. Thank you, Jameko. This morning we are speaking about rejoicing in trials.

And over time I have spoken to various people about trials that they have gone through, and many people point to particular songs or hymns that they listen to frequently as they may be walking through a particular trial.

And I looked at some of those hymns, and it wasn't surprising to me that many of those hymns were written during or after the songwriter walked through some hardship.

And many of you would know the story of Horatio Sparford, who lost his four daughters all at once in a shipwreck.

[3 : 35] And afterward he wrote, It is well with my soul. And you might also know about Joseph Scriven. His fiancée died the day before their wedding.

And that led him to write, What a friend we have in Jesus. Or George Matheson.

He became blind, and his fiancée decided that she couldn't live with a husband who was blind. And so she abandoned him.

Later on he would write, Oh love, that will not let me go. And then we have Henry Francis Light. While he was actually dying of tuberculosis, he wrote the words to the song, Abide With Me. And there are many other examples I can point to.

[4 : 40] And not just with songwriters. There are people who have walked through very difficult circumstances. People who have faced incredible trials.

But despite the circumstances, despite us even being able to say it may be unfair what they had to go through, they still held to their faith.

They did not turn their back on God. They held fast. Despite disappointment and despite pain.

So we could ask, what keeps them in these things? And what is it that would keep us as we walk through a very difficult time in our lives?

And I would say that the answer is despite what we see around us in the moment of trial, we ought to look upward and we ought to have an eternal focus.

[6:00] So after we consider this text this morning, I believe that we would be able to see that the believer's eternal focus through fleeting trials reveals genuine faith.

The believer's eternal focus through fleeting trials reveals genuine faith. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, this morning I ask for your help and I look to you and you alone.

Lord, I pray that you would be my help that indeed what is said will be from you and only you. I pray, Lord, that we would have light shared on this challenging topic and I pray that your people will be strengthened and encouraged for every trial.

Lord, may you be glorified in this. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So I've organized what we should discuss this morning under two headings and they are trials and time and then trials and faith.

So let's first look at trials and time. Last week we were given three blessings that we all receive through our glorious salvation.

[7:41] And we heard that we've been born again to a living hope that we have an imperishable inheritance and that our eternal hope is kept by God himself in heaven.

And those were given to us from verses three to five and that's exactly where we pick up again today in verse six. Peter reminds us of those blessings.

He says because of those things the believer rejoices. Now it's easy for us to say that because even though that is true it's not actually easy to walk through it's not always easy to keep an eternal focus as we walk through difficult circumstances as we walk through hardships and trials.

We don't we have to keep a focus on the heavenly bliss that awaits us but in the meantime we have a very real world to deal with.

And Peter understands that that's why in the same sense in verse six he quickly acknowledges the difficulties of life in the here and now. He says in this you rejoice though now for a little while if necessary you've been grieved by various trials.

[9:16] So in one sentence Peter toggles his reader he toggles us between the present and between eternity. He's showing how really the reader must live in two times at the same time.

He's saying that while we endure the present we still have to look forward toward our eternal blessing. We have to keep an eternal focus.

Peter also quickly draws our attention to the duration of our trials. The duration he gives seems to be vague. All he says is that we will endure these things for a little while.

he doesn't narrow our trials down to days or weeks or months or years. He leaves that open because he points out that our trials are various.

Our tests and our hardships they can come in many different ways in many different categories and span different times. There are many people for instance who struggle with illness and relational difficulties and that hardship could span many years.

[10:48] And the truth is that will be the lot of many believers. Some of us will have to walk through hardships that last an extraordinary length of time.

time. So a little while as Peter puts it it's not necessarily meant to convey a specific period of time but it's to give us a perspective of time.

And this is this perspective. as believers we have to think of trials as brief and temporary and transitory.

We have to think of them as temporary. That can only be done in light of the eternity that follows this dispensation of time.

So a little while really is contained within all our time and all our life. At any moment as long as we live we can enter into and we can walk through a period of trial.

[12:04] And because we have one trial it doesn't mean that that's it. It's not a one and done type of thing. There's nothing that precludes us from facing several different trials in our lifetime.

Really we can face any number of trials as long as we live. And it's interesting to me that the ESV says though now for a little while if necessary if necessary you've been grieved by various trials. trials. So including the word if necessary that phrase forces us to think about who decides if a trial is necessary.

And when we consider that we're forced to come to the realization that it's not up to us. Trials are determined by a sovereign God.

we don't decide anything about it. We don't decide when we get to walk through a trial.

[13:21] We don't decide how long we last. And we don't decide how many trials we get in our lifetime. And if we think about it trials have to be sovereignly appointed by God.

if we were able to choose our own trials believe none of us would ever walk through a trial. Very few of us would volunteer to face hardships especially hardships of the more challenging sort.

So we don't get to the side the trial we don't get to the side how many times but for all our life we must be open to trials. We must be prepared to endure trials at any point.

Trials that are appointed by a sovereign God. And so I said this bit already but I'll say it again. It's easy for me to say that.

It's easy for me to stand in front of you and say we have to be prepared at any moment to experience trials. it's easy for me to say we have to think of them as brief, as temporary but the truth is when we walk through a trial we never feel like it's brief.

[14:56] We never feel like it's temporary. temporary. We want it to end. See in our minds we know it's true that we should be prepared and that we will walk through trials but in reality it's never easy and for sure the word I use fleeting it seems even that I would throw that in someone's face someone who has known a trial and then to refer to it as fleeting.

Well let's look at Peter's original audience. The original recipients of this letter were experiencing mainly social persecution and persecution is a type of trial.

It is being mistreated specifically because of our faith. Specifically because we are followers of Christ. They were living in a culture that did not embrace their Christian beliefs.

They were looked down on in this polytheistic society where they were looking to the one God who exists in three persons.

And of course they would not worship an emperor as a deity. So social persecution we could say okay that's bad but in the grand scheme of things that's pretty mild.

[16:45] in fact many of us may have experienced social persecution in our workplace or in our neighborhood and we could see ourselves in that time walking through this type of trial facing a hostile community.

however shortly after this God found it necessary that some of these same readers would walk through a far more difficult trial.

They would be among the Christians who would experience probably the most infamous time of persecution in church history.

It was when the emperor at the time Nero used the power of the Roman state to dish out unprecedented levels of cruelty on Christians.

He imprisoned them, he tortured them, he forced them to make false confessions. They implicated others who were then arrested and tortured and many of them were killed.

[18:12] And here's what the historian Tacitus says about that period of trial. He writes, Mockeries were added to their deaths so that wrapped in the skins of wild animals they might die torn to pieces by dogs or nailed to crosses they were burned to death to furnish light at night when they had ended.

Nero made his own gardens available for this spectacle and put on circus games mingling with the people while dressed in a charioteer's uniform or standing in his chariot.

As a result, there arose compassion toward those who were guilty and who deserved the most extraordinary punishments on the grounds that they were being destroyed not for the public good but for the savagery of one man.

So we read this, we read this horrible time, these atrocities and we have to ask how does the believer endure this?

How does the believer walk through this and think of it as brief? We have to think could we endure this even if we think of it as for a little while?

[19:48] Now I don't think any of us have been called yet to this type of trial, this type of persecution. But the reality is at some point one or more than one of us could be.

What would be our reaction to it? Well for you to think not so dramatically how we react to another trial but a difficult trial.

Something more severe than being shunned by co-workers or having verbal abuse from someone in a community that's hostile to Christians.

What happens to our faith when one of our children who we taught to be raised in the way of our faith denies Christ?

what happens when we face the death of loved ones or when we are given a diagnosis and we have to face prolonged!

[21 : 07] illness what happens to our faith? Are we supposed to rejoice in these trials?

But I think if we face with that question we all know this that we don't rejoice in those things themselves we don't rejoice in the trial itself none of us looks forward to celebrating a bad health diagnosis none of us would rejoice on hearing of the death of a loved one and Peter doesn't tell us to do that although we are walking through horrible circumstances we are told to rejoice in the results of our trials throughout those circumstances we are to keep our eyes on the eternal hope that we heard about last week the eternal hope that

Peter has laid out in front of us although we will face heart wrenching scenes in this theater of life we are told to keep our eyes on the finale and in the last act we know that Christ himself is revealed that Christ appears on the last day and we see him face to face Peter points to the return of Christ where we realize that what we've been striving for in our little while is before us in a little while we battle through disappointments in a little while we face headaches and heartaches we grapple with loss but then after our little while we meet face to face with our

Lord and our Savior and we receive our imperishable reward so that's time and trials let's look now at trials and our faith I said earlier that our trials are sovereignly appointed by God and when we think about it again we have to admit yes trials are sovereignly appointed by God because there's a purpose to them they're not random trials aren't just bad things that happen to us and for no reason trials are difficulties and hardships that are sovereignly appointed for God's own purposes and as verse 7 points out

God has designed for us to walk through periods of hardships and periods of testing for the express purpose of revealing that our faith is genuine faith many many times we think of trials as things that strengthen our faith but here in this passage that's not what Peter says Peter sees trials as the means by which God actually proves our faith I can recall as a student when we did math problems our math teacher would often say don't just show your answer but show proof of your answer and so by that they meant that there was always a way to test that what you got in that problem was correct so as a quick example if 12 divided by 4 gave you 3 there was a way to test your division with multiplication so as a test 4 multiplied by 3 must give you what you start out with you must come back to 12 and that's sort of what Peter is saying here he's not saying that our faith really is being tested but he's pointing to the testing of the genuineness of our faith that's what's being proved by our trials just as fire can be a test for gold and distill it down to its true form our faith is authenticated by our trials it distills it down and what remains if it's tested to be true faith then we know that our belief our holding to

[26 : 54] Christ was always genuine and Peter says that this genuine faith finding that you have this genuine faith is more precious than gold gold I don't have to tell you how precious gold is but I will just give you this point about gold as of yesterday the cost of gold was \$4,981 per ounce a premium is placed on it and I won't ask for a show of hands but I'm almost willing to guarantee that I ask especially the women who loves gold at least 80-90% of us probably would confess that we love gold and probably would pay a pretty penny for the right gold piece we always place a premium and especially the world the world really puts a premium on gold as we see with the price such a premium that people have done really unspeakable things for gold if you were to read about the

California gold rush for example in the United States in the 1840s and 1850s people travel there from all around the United States and they had to face incredible difficulties to get there wild animals hostile people they do like they could lose their life but some would go all the way from the east coast of the United States all the way to the west coast of California no matter what dangers they faced for the hope of finding gold and sad to say once they got there many Native Americans were displaced from their land and many were killed so they could possess the land where they found gold and we don't have to go all the way to the United States the same thing happened much closer to us in the Caribbean we know about the Spanish and other Europeans who came to Caribbean islands in search of gold they were willing to put the natives there into forced labor to

extract it and many of them died but they found it so precious that they were willing to sacrifice the lives of countless people to obtain gold and I believe from what we're reading here that gold was just as valuable it was thought of as just as precious in Peter's time

Peter speaks about the value of gold and he says as precious as it is as desperate as we may become to obtain it general faith genuine faith is more precious than gold how precious it is for us to have an assurance that our holding to Christ that our belief in Christ is not misplaced that it's real how precious it is for us to realize that our true general faith will lead us to our eternal reward and that's what trials do for us through our trials

God confirms that our faith is true belief when we face severe sickness as we heard that many among us are doing now and Lyndon prayed for many of them and many of us we know have recently been bereaved so when our loved ones are taken away in any way they're taken away especially if they're taken away suddenly when we deal with upheavals in our relationships or a loss of wealth or some business deal goes bad but still we hold to our faith still we do not turn our back on God in these things we find a level of assurance that we truly believe that we have a level of assurance that our belief is what we said it was so it's in these trials and these difficulties as they say when the rubber meets the road that's when we know that we didn't follow a fad that we didn't get caught up in emotion and say that we gave our life to Christ we have assurance of our belief in those tests when we continue to believe we know with assurance we belong to Christ and that genuine assurance is the most valuable thing we could possess and we read a passage from Job earlier Job understood this genuine assurance he understood how precious it was let's have a look at Job 23 that passage where he says but he knows the way that I take speaking of God when he has tried me I shall come out as gold my foot has held fast to his steps I have kept my way I have not turned aside I have not departed from the commandment of his lips I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food Job held fast to God and his faith was shown to be genuine so what will be our response to trials will we be like

[34 : 14] Job and keep to the way of God and not turn our back on Christ and when we do that and we hold to our faith it's not only assurance to us but it's assurance to those around us we have some degree of knowing that what we said we believe we do believe it's even assurance to our spiritual enemies consider Satan himself in this situation with Job remember that Satan was counting on Job to curse God Satan said to God that Job would only serve him because of the blessings he had he claimed that if those were taken away Job would no longer glorify God but how much did

Job glorify God in holding fast to him and Job's genuine display of faith not only glorified God but as much it puts Satan to shame and again that's what our holding to our faith does assurance for us and assurance to others so will we be like Job this is what Job says in Job 19 will we by faith say like him for I know that my redeemer lives at the last he will stand upon the earth and after my skin has been thus destroyed yet in my flesh I shall see God whom I shall see for myself and my eyes shall behold and not another

Job's faith was genuine faith because even in his deep affliction he held to the belief that his savior would vindicate him and Job believed that even if in this life he never understood his affliction that his savior would appear at the last day and he would be embraced by him and this is what Peter holds out to his readers and by extension that's what he holds out to us our genuine faith will result in us seeing Christ on the last day and then we will rejoice and Christ will glorify us with himself in verse 8 Peter continues to emphasize that we must continue in faith he says 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 so the emphasis here is that these people these people of God they loved

Christ and they believed in him and that belief is by faith not because they had seen him and Peter was not like them Peter had actually seen Christ Peter was living with Christ Peter was taught by him for three years of his ministry but these Christians had only heard and they believed they were among those who the resurrected Christ when speaking to Thomas said have you believed because you have seen blessed are those who have not seen and yet believed so like that particular set of

Christians we have not seen Christ but yet we have a relationship with him and our trials we actually experience him we can experience the presence of Christ as we walk through trials we somehow experience his presence in our sufferings and he becomes even more real to us though

we have not seen him and though we do not see him we believe in him and after a little while we'll experience the culmination or the finale of our salvation and we do see him with our own eyes and notice what Peter says here about joy he speaks about our seeing

[40 : 01] Christ at the last day but it's clear that the joy that we experience is not just future joy what he says is that we have a joy now even while we walk through our trials we can experience joy even though we have no pleasure in the trial itself we still have an eternal joy and that is what it means to rejoice in our trials Galatians 5 tells us that joy is actually a fruit of the spirit and here again we see this dynamic of us living in two times at the same time we may be experiencing trials in the moment and we may not be happy about it we may feel any number of ways as we experience this trial but the Holy Spirit which is in us as a deposit as a guarantee of our imperishable inheritance points us toward eternity he points us toward the culmination of our joy and so even in these temporary trials even when we're not happy about it we can have joy in that moment looking towards our eternal reward and finally

I thought about what I could say that would encourage us as we prepare to face trials at some point or as we walk through a period of hardship now and what I thought would be most helpful to share is that we know sufferings but we don't have a savior who does not know sufferings he is reliquated with suffering our savior who was creator entered his own creation he became flesh it's not some extraordinary flesh it's flesh that felt pain sorrow that new laughter flesh that could bleed he himself has been tried he doesn't!

He doesn't naively expect us to experience sorrow hardship and trials and he can't relate to it our God knows trials he knows suffering and he was an example to us he actually modeled to us how we are to endure temporary trials with an eternal focus the author of Hebrews puts it this way therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us and here's the thing looking to Jesus the founder and perfecter of our faith who for the joy that was set before him enjoyed the cross despising the shame and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God while on the cross

Christ was enduring unbelievable suffering but he was able to look forward to the joy that was set before him the joy of completing obedience to the father and the joy of eternity with his beloved so let's be encouraged by Christ let's be encouraged by him in our trials whatever they may be whenever they may come for however long they may last let's look at the big picture of things and the big picture of things our trials no matter how long in this lifetime really can be thought of as difficult as they are as little while but as we enjoy them let's look forward to our final hope of salvation and seeing our savior with our very own eyes let's pray father we thank you what a blessing it is lord to know that we can have assurance of your great salvation and father we pray for the trials father we know that many are walking through them would you give grace would you give endurance cause them to hold fast because in a little while they will know your eternal embrace to do that for us we pray in Christ's name amen