

Hope and Joy In Suffering

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Date: 16 January 2022

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[0 : 00] Well, congratulations. My car said it was five degrees this morning as I was driving to church. You made it. I'm glad to see you all here this morning.

Throughout the history of the Christian church, one of the hallmarks that has been true of Christianity throughout the years is that there has been joy in the midst of suffering. We see this from the very beginning. Acts chapter 5, the very beginning of the church. The apostles, having been beaten and persecuted for their proclamation of Jesus, described this way. Then they left the presence of the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name that is the name of Jesus. And every day in the temple and from house to house, they did not cease teaching and preaching that the Christ is Jesus.

Joy in suffering. It's not just in the Bible. It's not just in the first century. In the early church, we see this. We've seen it throughout history. I can think of friends who I met when I was doing ministry in China for a few years.

[1 : 26] Believers who had suffered. Suffered the rejection of their family. Alienation. Suffered by being brought in to be interrogated by the police because of their faith.

I think of friends that we have and that we support who live in Central Asia, who spend their time encouraging pastors and other Christian leaders in a culture where families are threatened, where pastors are beaten, where the police and the mobs work together at times against the life of believers.

And yet they live each day with joy. And it's not just far away and it's not just other people where I have seen this.

I have seen this here in the lives of some of you. Some of you have walked through or are walking through today deep waters of loss, of pain, of suffering, deep wounds that have been inflicted by others.

And yet I see you coming here and singing songs like the one we just sang. It is well with my soul. Why are we so surprised by this?

[2 : 55] I think it's because deep down we often think that suffering cannot really be God's plan for us. We think that somehow suffering is antithetical to the work of God in our lives and we wonder at times if we are suffering, whether God is in fact cursing us.

We have lost God's blessing. We also struggle with this because we live in a culture where we want to overcome suffering at all costs.

Our instinct as a culture is to try to control and fix whatever is wrong. Think about the last two years. We've been navigating a pandemic that has been greater than us.

And all of us in various ways have sought to control and fix this in many ways. And if we can't do that, we often give in to despair.

We rail against God and against others for their part in the suffering that we play. But Peter, in the book of 1 Peter, which we have just started a series in and what we're going to be looking at this morning, Peter is writing to a church that is suffering.

[4 : 14] He's writing to a church that in Rome and in Asia Minor would have suffered great trials during that time, persecution. And if you remember from what Pastor Nick said last week, he's writing to them, reminding them that they are elect exiles.

That is, they are strangers in the world that they now live. Because of what God has done in their lives, they will no longer fit comfortably in the world that they live in.

And with that discomfort will come suffering. Suffering for living in a fallen world, but suffering as well for the sake of following Christ. So if you want to turn with me in 1 Peter, we're going to look at this first opening section in the letter.

Chapter 1, verses 3 through 9 is what we're going to look at this morning. Peter uses a common epistolary welcome of blessing, but in so he infuses it with words of encouragement and hope to his readers as he writes to them.

So if you want to read along with me, 1 Peter 1, starting in verse 3. Let's read this together. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[5 : 40] According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you rejoice, though now, for a 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. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him, 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.

Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we thank you for this word. We pray for your help as we look at it this morning, that by your spirit, we would understand it. Lord, not only that we would know it in our heads, but that you would imprint it on our hearts.

And Lord, that the things that Peter describes here would be true of us, who know you would see as we seek to follow you. Thank you, Lord, for your help.

[7 : 14] I pray that you would help me this morning to speak your words. In Jesus' name, amen. So what does Peter have to say to us about living and suffering? He says, because of Christ, we can live with a certain hope and an indestructible joy.

And that's what we're going to look at. Certain hope and indestructible joy. How Peter fills out this description as he writes to the church in Asia Minor.

Starting in verses, it breaks down into two sections. Verses three through five, we'll look at the hope, the certainty of it. And then verses six through nine, we'll look at the joy.

And that this is what God has done in them, that he is affirming and encouraging them to continue in. So let's look at it together. Verses three through five, Peter says, there is a certain hope that we have because of God and what he has done.

Look again at verse three. He starts with this blessing. Blessed be God. Blessed be God. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

[8 : 25] Peter begins by saying, this is what God has done for you based on two things, based on the character of God, that is his mercy, his action towards you that is undeserved and based on the work of God, that is the specific historical reality of the life, death, and resurrection, particularly the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

God has done something for you, for us as believers. He has caused us to be born again. He has given us a new spiritual life within us.

And he says that this then results in or leads to, and you see the word to, we've been born again to three things. We've been born again, first of all, to a living hope.

A living hope, not a dead hope, not a vain hope, not wishful thinking. Sometimes we think of hope as, like, I hope I might get to meet the Pope someday, or I hope that I might get to Disney World. That's a vain thought. But this is not what Peter is talking about. He's talking about the real hope that God has taken hold of us by giving us new life, and that what he has promised in the future for us will come true.

[9 : 47] And it's not just a certain hope, but it's a living hope. A living hope because it means that we are caught up with Jesus Christ, who is a living Savior, who is not dead, who is not in the grave, but he is alive.

So Peter says, you have this hope grounded in the work and character of God. He says, but not only that, let me describe this hope a little more fully.

You've been born again to an inheritance that is indestructible. And it's this beautiful cascade of words that he says, it is imperishable.

It is undefiled. It is unfading. And for those who would have read the Old Testament, they would have heard the echoes of the language of inheritance that had been promised to the people of God,

the Jewish nation in the Old Testament in Israel, that would have included a land that would be full of provision and riches and province.

And yet, when we get to the first century, all the Jews know they hadn't received that, or they had squandered it, they had lost it. They knew that in the prophets, they had heard that the earth would be judged, that the land that had been defiled by the sin of God's people, and that even the grass would wither and the flowers would fade.

[11:09] But the promise, the inheritance that God gives to his people will not do any of these things. It will not perish. It will not be defiled.

And it is unfading. It is the one thing in the world that is outside of the second law of thermodynamics. It does not go from order to chaos.

It does not decay or decline, but it continues in its perfection. Imagine a treasure of inestimable worth.

Peter says we will be all, all of us, like firstborn sons. We get the whole farm. We get the company. We get all the privileges that would be given to a firstborn son in the first century.

And this is true for all of us, for all men and women, no matter what our birth order is. We all get it in Christ. What is the treasure that you long for?

[12:12] What is the inheritance that you most want in your life? Is it wealth? Is it security? Is it love? Is it belonging? It is home. Peter says we have a better inheritance in Christ, that we will be in God's kingdom forever.

And we will know the riches of all of his goodness and glory. And this treasure is not only certain and undefined, but it is kept by God, kept in heaven for you, preserved, held in, waiting for you to get there so that you can take this.

So that's the second thing. If the first thing that we're born again to is a living hope, the second thing is an indestructible inheritance. And the third thing you see in verse five, the language is a little unclear in the ESV, but it's that there is a salvation that is yet to be revealed that will be ours.

That we, as God's people, having been born again to a living hope, we are being guarded by God. And the image here is that God has put us in the keep, in the castle.

He has filled the parapets with soldiers. He has surrounded us with a garrison so that we would be kept from falling and from failing and from the enemies who would seek to assail us and destroy us, that we are being kept by God for a salvation that is yet to come.

[13:53] And it is the power of God that guards us, not our strength, not our wisdom, not our Bible knowledge, but it is the power of God that guards us.

So Peter is writing to these people, to this church saying, look at what God has done for us. We have this hope that is unbelievable.

And it is certain. And it is future looking. Peter says, this is something we are looking forward to friends. It's kind of like the last few days of school, the last, well, the last few weeks, the last few days of school nowadays is just watching movies.

But go back a couple, last few weeks, do you remember what it's like? You know that there's work ahead. You know, you've got finals to go through. You know, you've got work to do, but on the other side, what is there?

Glory, summer break, vacation. This is what we're looking for. I was actually trying to think of a better illustration than that, but I realized that every illustration of longing for something that is yet to come, humanly has this conditional aspect to it.

[15:04] It's never going to be good enough. It always might not work out as much as we want.

And part of what Peter is saying is friends, what we have before us is so unbelievably good that we have this hope now that characterizes us.

even as we walk through suffering, we have a future salvation that is being kept by God for us. And when we set our eyes on what God has done for us in Christ and what awaits us in Christ.

Well, let me quote the apostle Paul so we can think about what it means for us. Second Corinthians. So we don't lose heart.

Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day for this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

As we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen for the things that are seen or transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. For people who are living as exiles, strangers in a strange land, feeling the discomfort with the world that they live in, we fix our eyes on

this unseen inheritance and hope that awaits us.

[16:30] And it renews us day by day. And in Romans 8, this well-known passage, what then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all. How will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?

It is God who justifies. It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Jesus Christ is the one who died. More than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword? As it is written, for your sake, we are being killed all the day long.

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things, we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

[17:32] For I am sure that neither death nor life, neither angels, nor rulers, neither present, or things to come, nor powers, nor heights, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Friends, this is what certain hope looks like. This is what has characterized the church through many days. Peter goes on, however, he doesn't just stop with hope, but he continues to say that not only hope, but joy also marks Christians facing suffering.

So this is what he says in verses 6 through 9. You see it right in the beginning. He says, in this now you rejoice. In this, meaning all the things that I've just said, this incredible work that God has done for us, this work of hope, this is what we rejoice.

And yet Peter then dives not into, in this we rejoice, and resound with greater blessings, and sing songs, praises, and hymns, but he turns and he says, he goes straight to the place that we wish he wouldn't.

He talks about suffering. He says, in this we rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials. Peter says, indestructible joy is not in the absence, but in the presence of suffering.

[19:05] The translation here in verse 6, I think is a little tricky, because it makes it sound as if the trials are possible, or potential, but not real. I don't think that's what Peter means here.

I think what he really means is this. In this you rejoice, since for a short time, it is necessary that you will be grieved by various trials. This reflects some of the ideas here.

What Peter is saying is a few things about suffering that help us shape what this joy looks like. As we understand suffering as a part of God's plan, we see that it is necessary.

The verb there is a divine imperative that is used in various places in the scripture, where, for instance, when Jesus says, it is necessary for the son of man to be delivered up and crucified on the cross.

It's the same word. It's the same idea here, that the hand of God is behind this divine necessity. And Peter is saying, it is a part of God's plan.

[20:13] He also says that these sufferings will be various. It will include both the persecution and suffering for being a Christian and the suffering for being in a fallen world.

Friends, we don't need to compare our sufferings and say, well, this is more serious than that, or this is a different kind of suffering. We're all going to suffer. It is necessary that we would suffer. And we must walk through it. We don't need to compare them, but we are called to endure them. He also reminds us, though, that these sufferings were only going to be for a little while. They will not last forever. This is so hard to remember in the moment, isn't it? When things are really hard, all you can see is how hard they are.

When you are feeling the pain of loss, it's at times overwhelming, is it not? When you're feeling hurt and betrayed, when you're feeling afraid, Peter says, none of these will last forever.

[21:23] He's already pointed to an eternal perspective of a future hope. He says, these things will not last forever. And then he says, and these things have a purpose in the hands of God.

This is this funny phrase where he's talking about gold. Verse seven, 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.

What is he saying? He's saying that what suffering does for us is it refines and strengthens our faith. That when God puts us through sufferings, it is like taking gold and throwing it into a hot fire so

it will purify, burn out the impurities, and show the glory of the gold. And what Peter is saying is, gold eventually is going to disappear. Gold isn't going to last forever. But your faith will. Your faith has a greater lifespan than gold does. And this is what God is doing, refining us with a purpose. Edmund Clowney says this, trials should not surprise us or cause us to doubt God's faithfulness.

[22 : 42] Rather, we should actually be glad for them. God sends trials to strengthen our trust in him so that our faith will not fail. Our trials keep us trusting.

They burn away our self-confidence and drive us to our savior. Friends, this is what God is doing. He is proving the faith that he has given us.

He is testing it. And as he is testing it, he is building it and making it stronger and making it deeper. I was reading this week, some of the writings of Johnny Erickson Tata and Nancy Guthrie, both authors who have written extensively about suffering and about how to live with joy and hope in the midst of them.

And it was striking to me that one of the things they said is, God doesn't give us more than we can handle, although it doesn't often feel like that. It often feels like it's more than we can handle. But God doesn't give us more than we can handle.

But what he does do is give us increasingly more at times over life. And there are times when we think, God, I can't take any more. And he says, actually, you can.

[23 : 52] And he gives us more, more suffering. But through that, we also get deeper faith. And that faith results in joy.

And this is what Paul says, or Peter says in verse eight, it results in praise and glory on the last day. Because when we make it through the fire and when we are found standing at the end, Jesus holds us up and says, these are my trophies.

These are the ones that I have rescued and kept and preserved through all of these things. And I'm now putting them on display so that all will see the glory of the faith with which they have walked through this life.

And for us who have walked through it, Peter reminds us that there is a joy there as well. This brings us to verses eight and nine, where Jesus becomes the focus of our joy.

Though you have not seen him, he's just talked about the end of verse seven, that we're gonna experience this praise and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ. When Jesus comes back, now he says, now I know you haven't seen him yet, right?

[25 : 13] Though you have not seen him, you love him, right? And Peter's writing this saying, I actually did see him. I saw the resurrected Christ, but you haven't seen him. And now you don't see him now.

And I don't see him now. None of us see him now, right? But you believe in him. And in that faith, being refined, tested by these sufferings, in that faith, because we believe in him, because we see Jesus, that we don't actually see him.

That we do not see him now, we believe in him and rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible, filled with glory.

Friends, have you ever been rendered speechless by something beautiful? This often happens to me when I go to the mountains. And not just, sorry, not the East Coast mountains, the real mountains.

You go to the Rockies, go to the Alps. I've never been to the Himalayas, but I really wanna go. I mean the mountains that are majestic, that soar and tower over you.

[26 : 22] The mountains that seem like they will never fall, that have a grandeur and a glory. And I'm caught with, I don't have words to describe the beauty and the splendor and the grandeur of it.

This, I think, is what Peter is trying to suggest when he says, and it's such, we rejoice with joy. We rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible.

Have you felt those moments of worship? Have you felt those times when you're singing, it is well with my soul, and you stop singing because you're overcome?

God, I'm not. This is what Peter is referring to. Filled with glory. He's saying that as Christians walk through suffering with this hope before us, we walk through it with a joy.

A joy that is present as well as future. A joy that starts now and continues along the way through the path to what is coming for us.

[27 : 43] And this is how Peter wants to begin his letter to these elect exiles by encouraging them to remember this hope and to persevere in this joy.

Now look, we need to be clear on something. We're not to rejoice in evil. We're not to find joy in bad things that have happened to us.

Nor are we to entertain the thought that God authors sins. But in the midst of the trials and sufferings that God allows in our lives, in the midst of the sufferings that will be a part of God's purpose for our lives, what do we fix our eyes on?

If we simply look at the suffering, we will despair. Or we will become obsessed with trying to fix and escape it. Or we will doubt God.

But if we fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and the perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame so that we might be saved.

[28 : 57] This is where we find hope and joy. And this is where Peter ends. Verse nine, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

This is where he began. You've been born again to living hope. He brings it back here to the end. He says we have this obtaining a salvation. As we continue in faith, as we continue in hope and joy in the midst of suffering, we obtain the thing that we most need and most want.

And that is our salvation. What Jesus has come to do for us, making us alive when we were dead in our sins and trespasses, raising us up with him to a new life and a living hope with a future that is certain in God and an inheritance that is waiting for us.

Because we have seen our Savior, Jesus, we can live this way. This is indestructible joy and certain hope no matter what the trials that we face.

Think about the audience that Peter would have been writing to and the things that he himself would have suffered. For Peter was the bishop in Rome.

[30 : 14] It's most likely that he wrote this letter during the reign of Nero. If you know anything about Nero, Nero was renowned for his cruelty and his persecution of Christians.

The Christians were dying for their faith in Rome. And he writes to the Christians in Asia Minor who were likely also facing similar kinds of persecution and trials.

He's saying, hang in there. You have begun this race with hope and joy. Hang in there.

I was reflecting on the value and the worth of this today or this week because this weekend is the seventh anniversary of the death of my first wife to cancer.

And I was thinking about what Peter writes here and the value that it has been because what he writes here is as I look back and as I look at my life today, what I've experienced in the bleakness of the situation in the days after her death when everything felt tasteless, the world seemed to be more black and white than color.

[31 : 40] And I struggled to see what God's plan was and how it could be good when I didn't feel like rejoicing and hope seemed only in the future and I didn't understand why God had chosen this path for me.

God reminded me of the things that Peter reminds us of in this passage this morning. Look at what God has done in the past. Jesus is risen from the dead.

Jesus has called you to believe in him. God has taken hold of you and he promises not only then having done that work in the past, but he promises in the future that he will finish what he started.

He will take us home. He will take me home. He will keep me for the salvation that he has for me. And because of that, I can not only walk this life with hope, but I can do it with joy.

And God has shown me joy in the last seven years in many good things. He has shown me joy most of all in him. There are still things that are hard.

[32 : 56] The loss is not gone, but it's become a part of my life. And I pray for you as I pray for me this morning that God is able to give us certain hope and indestructible joy as we walk through the sufferings that have been, that are, and that will be a part of our lives as well.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for this passage. We thank you for the apostle Peter and for his words to us. Lord, we ask that by your spirit, Lord, you would help us to walk by faith.

And in that faith, Lord, that we would know hope that is certain and a joy that is indestructible because of what you have done for us. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen.