

**Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery
Ordeal Among You**
An Expository Journey Through 1Peter
1 Peter 1:3-12
8 Peter's Exultation of Sovereign Grace, Part 3
Rejoicing in Sufferings

November 12, 2017

1 Peter 1:3-12

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

7 so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,

9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

10 As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries,

11 seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.

12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things into which angels long to look.

To the Glory of God

Now we're *continuing* to examine the great "Exultation" of the Apostle Peter that he wrote here in the Passage that Brother Andy just read to us. In these ten verses (3-12), Peter is beginning his Epistle with a tremendous praise to God that involves several aspects of God's Sovereignty. And we've already looked at several of these in verses 3-5, and today I want to focus on what Peter is rejoicing about in verses 6-7; so let's read those verses again together:

6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,
7 so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

So here, Peter is actually rejoicing in Sufferings. Now back in our very first Sermon, we found out that Peter was moved along by God the Holy Spirit during the great persecution initiated by the Roman Emperor, Nero, at about the mid-point of the First Century, to pen down this Letter of Encouragement. At the end of verse 1 and into verse 2, Peter describes the people to whom he wrote as:

To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood...

So, these are not only people who have been sovereignly elected by God for Salvation from before the foundation of the world, but Peter calls them "**scattered aliens**", or "Aliens of the Disbursement", those who have lost their homes and possessions due to the intense persecution against the believers in the city of Rome.

And as I told you then, it was not Nero and the Roman authorities that made these people to be "scattered", but it was God, Who made them to be "aliens" or "strangers" or "pilgrims" on the earth. So, they are "scattered" by way of humanly initiated persecution, but they are

"strangers", "pilgrims", and "aliens" by virtue of the Divine Call of God that is on their lives. So, it is the miracle of the New Birth that has made them both unable and unwilling to "fit in" with the lost people of the world.

And, of course, this is the great Doctrine of "Christian Separation" that teaches that those who have been bought and paid for by the Lord Christ simply do not fit in with the lost people of the world. There is a radical and marked *difference* or *distinction* in the way we think and the way we talk and the way we live our lives and the way we raise our children, and the way we look at money and politics and nations that runs counter-intuitive to the ways of the fallen "world system" of the unregenerate. And this Doctrine is best articulated by the Apostle Paul who wrote this in **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**:

14 Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness?

15 Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?

16 Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.

17 "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you.

18 "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

And this is why "Blood-bought saints" do not marry or enter into a business partnership with the unregenerate, or those who are deceived by false religions. We have nothing *eternally* in common with anyone who has not experienced the miracle of the New Birth, and is proving that their conversion experience was genuine, by continuing to pursue Biblical Holiness on purpose.

But we must understand that the difference and the distinction between us is *not* because we are "better" than the lost, we're not. We are sinners saved by Grace, and desperately want them to be saved, too. We simply desire to reflect the Greatness and Beauty of our risen Lord

by living according to His Word precisely because He graciously and mercifully bought and paid for us, and we are now His bond-slaves. So, we seek to develop and have a "Biblical Worldview", a way of looking at all of life through what the 66 Books of the Holy Bible commands and allows, while avoiding and rejecting what the Scripture teaches that is sin.

And that effort at being "biblical" is *ongoing*. It is constant. It is not simply what we "do" for a few hours on Sunday. It is "who we are", 24 hours every day and 7 days every week. So, we seek to live all of life to God's Glory, and we understand that we *cannot* and we *do not* glorify God by engaging in or celebrating what God called "Sin".

And it is this *Holiness*, this *distinction*, this great *separation* that is, many times, the very *source*, the *cause* of our persecution and our suffering. And that was certainly true of the saints to whom Peter wrote. Their godly lives, their Christ-like demeanor, their refusal to worship the Roman Emperor, their refusal to worship the other pagan "gods" of the Roman leaders put them at odds with the average people of the Roman Empire, and made them an easy and natural target of the persecution.

Now there is a phenomenon among the lost that is fascinating when you see it. The lost world will loudly and repeatedly praise the people of the Church when it comes to them obeying the Bible about issues like helping the poor and building hospitals and forgiving guilty criminals and helping the blind. But that very same world will categorically denounce and condemn believers when they obey the Bible about things like sexual morality and abortion and other sinful human behaviors.

So, as long as the lost world can keep believers in the neat and tidy box of basically being a social organization that exists for no other reason than to make other people's lives better, all is well. But when Christians have the audacity to stray outside of the box and decry abortion as blatant and systematic genocide, or when we publicly and repeatedly uphold the Biblical Mandate that "Marriage" only exists between one naturally born man and one naturally born female within the confines of Holy Matrimony for one natural life, these same people will denounce us and the Bible very quickly.

Now the reality is that all Christians suffer. Either you have suffered in the past, or you are suffering right now, or you will suffer at

some point in the future. And contrary to what many in the modern Church teach, it is suffering, rather than blessings, that is the normal and natural condition of the believer. So, suffering, either by persecution or by trials or by disease or through circumstance is the "default" setting for all who have been purchased by the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, it was Jesus Himself, Who promised that those who love and serve Him would have a difficult time here on the earth. For example, Jesus said:

Matthew 5:11-12

11 "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.

12 "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Truth is that the most godly, the most humble, the most obedient people who have ever walked the face of the earth are also the ones who are intimately aware of Suffering. The writer of **Hebrews** said:

Hebrews 11:35b-38

35 ... and others were tortured, not accepting their release, so that they might obtain a better resurrection;

36 and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment.

37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated

38 (*men* of whom the world was not worthy), wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground.

... and then, lest you might buy into what the modern pied-pipers teach, that the only reason these people suffered was because of a lack of faith, the writer put this in the very next verse:

And all these, having gained approval through their faith...

So, it is common and natural for genuine believers, who are full of faith and who bear godly fruit to suffer in this life. But even though that

is true, Suffering always causes great conflict in the mind and heart of believers. And the main reason for this is that Suffering goes against the grain of the way that the human mind operates. The logic is that now that I'm saved, now that God has forgiven me of all my sins, now that I'm on my way to heaven, this life will be filled with wondrous blessings and good health and a freedom from persecution. So, when sickness or persecution or trials and other forms of suffering come to us, it seems as though God has *abandoned* us, or that He has *failed* to protect us, or that God has *forgotten* us.

And this struggle to understand Suffering from a Biblical perspective is as old as Mankind. It is the single issue that causes the greatest amount of confusion among the redeemed. Nothing else even comes close. And this confusion asks some very important questions:

- ✓ Why would my heavenly Father, Who loves me, allow me to hurt so badly?
- ✓ Where was God, when I needed Him the most?
- ✓ God is Sovereign, why didn't He stop this?

... and as the doubts and the questions persist, they get even more serious:

- ✓ Maybe God isn't Sovereign after all
- ✓ Maybe God isn't Good
- ✓ Maybe God isn't

Now the Bad News is that these questions over the issue of Suffering have driven many people from their safety in Jesus Christ, and have served to drive many of them away from the Christian Faith. They refuse to serve a "God" that would *cause* or even *allow* "Evil" to triumph. And the Good News is that the Bible was written so that those who believe it to be the infallible, inerrant Word of the living God would know the answer to these questions.

Now the overwhelming majority of the reason behind why people, who lay claim to believe the Bible to be the Word of God, either don't know or who don't believe what the Bible says about Suffering is real bad teaching. Being fed a steady diet of a "Man-centered" theology that places *us* at the forefront of all that God is doing in the Universe creates

an “entitlement mentality” that basically believes that our goals and our plans and our agenda is more important to God than His Own Goals, His Own Plans, and His Own Agenda.

So, in reality, these people have developed a false and man-made theology about God, and what God will and will not do, based on what they want it to be, and how they want it to be, and when they want it to be, as opposed to humbly believing what the 66 Books of the Holy Bible actually teach.

And there is only one cure for this; we must read and study and be exposed to and believe and trust what the sacred Scriptures say, and reject all man-made and false theology, even when the Truth doesn’t sit well with us. And that is partly why the Apostle Peter saw the need to write this first Epistle. God’s people were hurting. They were being forcefully driven from their homes and businesses by pagan and evil Roman authorities. Peter says they were “scattered”.

And so, Peter writes this anointed Letter to give them insight in just why they are hurting, what eternal Good their individual and collective Suffering would bring forth. And so, he says in verse 6:

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

... and he completes his thought by saying:

so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Now I fully realize that talk like this acts like sandpaper on our modern sentiments about Suffering. Because we, naturally, try to avoid Suffering at all costs. But the Bible says that God is Good to bring Suffering in our lives, not only for sake of our eternal Joy, but even our eternal Glory!

Now, first of all, we must understand that the Old Testament commands us to delight ourselves in the Lord (**Psalm 37:4**), and to serve the Lord with gladness (**Psalm 100:2**), and to rejoice before the Lord our God in all our undertakings (**Deuteronomy 12:18**). And, in the New Testament, Jesus continued that theme by commanding us in **Luke**

6:23:

Be glad in that day and leap *for joy*, for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the same way their fathers used to treat the prophets.

... and then the Lord said:

John 15:11

These things I have spoken to you so that My joy may be in you, and *that* your joy may be made full.

The Apostle Paul also commanded us:

Philippians 4:4

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!

He told us that the fruit of the Spirit is joy (**Galatians 5:22**). He says that he is a worker with us for our joy (**2 Corinthians 1:24**), and that he lives for the advancement and joy of our faith (**Philippians 1:25**), and that God loves a cheerful giver (**2 Corinthians 9:7**).

And on and on and on. And so, it is with the other writers of Scripture. The message is clear:

Christianity is a life of tremendous and abiding Joy.

Now you might be tempted to think that the only reason why Paul and Jesus could talk like that was because God had so abundantly blessed them that they were able to *avoid* the many different Sufferings that were common to believers back then. But as you read the Bible, you find that Jesus and Paul were some of the most persecuted people in the history of the world, and they both experienced physical suffering that was beyond belief. And yet they talked like their Joy was linked to their Suffering. But that couldn't be correct, could it? I mean common sense would tell you that Joy come from an absence of Suffering, not an abundance of it.

And just about the time you're trying to reconcile all that in your head, in the Passage that Brother Andy just read to us, the Apostle Peter picks up this great Truth in verse 6 and shows us two great reasons for joy, and in the process, why this Joy is a *painful* Joy.

1. The Promise of a Great Future

Let me just remind you of the first reason since that's what Peter does at the beginning of verse 6. He says:

"In this you greatly rejoice."

Now the word "**this**" refers to the first reason for great Joy. And it refers back to what we've already seen in verses 3–5.

Verse 3: God caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection from the dead.

Verse 4: God is keeping an inheritance for us in heaven that can't perish or soil or fade.

Verse 5: God is keeping us for that inheritance.

So, there's an inheritance and there's an inheritor. So, the first basis of our Joy is that God is keeping both:

1. God is keeping the inheritance perfect for us.
2. God is keeping us in faith so that we will, in fact, not make shipwreck of our faith and lose the inheritance.

Then in verse 6 Peter says:

"In THIS you greatly rejoice."

So, the first reason for our Joy is the great Future God promises us, and His unswerving Commitment to keep it for us and us for it. In other words, our Joy is based on the Happiness of our Future with God and the Certainty that we will make it there. And that means that "Christian Joy" is almost synonymous with "Christian Hope". And that's why Peter says in verse 3 that we were born again into a "living hope", then verses 4 and 5 describe the *content* of that Hope, and then verse 6 begins, "**in THIS you rejoice.**" In other words, "in this you have living, vital, life-changing hope, and in this you rejoice". So, our Hope *is* our Joy.

2. A Purpose for Our Distresses

The second reason for Joy is that God has a very Wise and Good and Kind Purpose for our distresses in this life. That is what verses 6 and 7 are about, God's Purpose for our distress.

But now don't misunderstand me. The second reason for Joy is essentially the same as the first one, namely, Hope. But the difference is this: In verses 3-5 the point is that the Inheritance is out there waiting for us, imperishable and unfading, and that we are being kept for it, so that no matter what distresses we face we can look beyond them to the sure Future that is coming and take heart. And we can tell ourselves, "It is going to be worth it all".

But in verses 6-7 the point is completely different in that the distresses *themselves* play a part in getting us ready to enjoy the Inheritance to the fullest possible measure. In other words, the distresses themselves, the bad suffering we want so badly to end, is actually a tool in God's hand to mold us and change us so that we will enjoy the Inheritance. So, we aren't made ready to inherit what God has for us *in spite of* our Suffering, but precisely *because* of it.

So, we don't just look beyond the distresses to the sure Hope, we look at God's Purpose *in* the distresses, and we see how God is working the distresses together for our Good. And that *is* our Hope!

And that means that Biblical Christianity is a life of tremendous Joy, first, because we have a great and fail-safe Future to look forward to beyond all our distresses, AND second, because God has a Purpose to *increase* our Joy in that Future through the "means" of all our distresses.

Now where do I get the idea that our distresses are designed by God on purpose for our "Good"? From the phrase that Peter uses in verses 6:

"If Necessary"

I get it from the phrase "**if necessary**" in verse 6 and the word "**that**" (or "so that") at the beginning of verse 7. Verse 6 says:

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

So, what kind of *necessity* is this? Who or what is making the distress of these trials "necessary"? Well, the answer is God. Peter makes it plain that "Christian distress" only happens if God "wills" it. For example, in **1 Peter 3:17** the Apostle says:

For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

In other words, you *might* suffer for doing what is right, but you might not. And the ultimate Determiner of whether you suffer or you don't suffer is God, and not Man. So, "if God should 'will' it so," we will or we won't suffer. And then again, in **1 Peter 4:19**, he says:

Therefore, those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

In other words, Peter is teaching that it is the sovereign Will of God that governs all the distresses that happen to us and, therefore the Purpose of them is *not* ultimately, caused by evil men or even satan- but only because it was the Will of God! So, when Peter says in verse 6,

if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

... he means:

"If God wills it to be necessary."

But why in the world would God do that? This leads us to the word "**that**", or "**so that**", at the beginning of verse 7. This gives the ultimate Reason *why* God would deem it necessary that we be distressed by various trials:

So that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Now what this verse does is spell out the Divine Purpose of our distresses. The Purpose is that our distresses would *refine* the *genuineness* of our faith the way fire refines gold, so that when Christ comes back, the *quality* of our faith would win praise and glory and honor. So, there is a very Wise and Good and Kind purposeful Design in all our distresses as a Christian. God *wills* them, and He does so for your "Good".

Now I realize that this raises a very painful and troubling question. We are not playing games here. So, does that mean that God "wills" the break-up of your marriage? Does God "will" your cancer, or your homosexual orientation, or the rebellion of your child, or the loss of your job, or the threatening chaos around the world?

And the answer is "No", God does *not* "will" it. And Yes, God *does* "will" it. "No", in the sense that God does *not* delight in pain for its own sake. God never commands sin or approves of sinning. But "Yes", God does "will" that these things be, in the sense that He could *prevent* them, but, sometimes, He *allows* them and *guides* them, and *governs* them. Why? So that an infinitely greater "Good" will come forth that would *not* come forth had God not allowed them to be.

So, for example, when Christians suffer for doing "right", sin is happening to them. But **1 Peter 3:17** says that sometimes God "wills" that this happen. Now God does not *endorse* or *approve* of sinning, but He can and He does "will" that sinful acts exist, but only for His Own holy Purposes.

For example, when Christ was murdered on the Cross, that was the highest and worst of all sin. Yet God "willed" that it happen:

Isaiah 53:10a

But the Lord was pleased to crush Him...

... and that is the only reason we are saved. So, by God *allowing* sin- an infinitely greater Good was brought forth.

Now if there is a Divine Purpose in our Sufferings, we should ask what that is. Because knowing this is a means of tremendous Joy in and through our distresses. And Peter mentions at least five elements of God's Purpose in our distresses.

1. Various Trials

In God's Purpose, our distresses are made up of various trials.
Verse 6b:

... if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

The NIV says "all kinds of trials."

.. and the point is that the variety of ways that we experience Suffering is vast. So, in God's Design it is "necessary," he says, to use a wide range of trials. So, there is not merely one kind of trial in view here. God paints with different colors, some very dark and some very bright. And, in the end, the canvas of your life will be glorious if you entrust your soul to a faithful Creator (**1 Peter 4:19**).

2. Brief Distresses

In God's Purpose, my distresses are brief. Verse 6 again:

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

Now the concept of "for a little while" is very relative, isn't it? If you say, "He can hold his breath for a little while", you mean two or three minutes. And that's a long time for breath-holding. But if you say, "He's been a Pastor of the Church 'for a little while'", you may mean a few years. And that's the way it is with the phrase "a little while" in this verse. Compared to others and compared to a lifetime on earth, your distresses may last a long time and not a little. But compared to eternity, compared to the Inheritance that is imperishable, and undefiled, and unfading, that is kept in heaven for you, all of your Sufferings are only for "a little time".

And Peter shares James' perspective on this life:

James 4:14

Yet you do not know what your life will be like tomorrow. You are *just* a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away.

So, compared to the length and greatness of the unending Future God has planned for you, all the Sufferings of this life are very little, indeed (cf. 5:10).

3. Grievous Trials

In God's Purpose, our trials are "grievous". They are "distresses". They really hurt. The word in verse 6 ("you have been distressed by various trials") means: *grieved or sorrowed*. So, it's not double-talk when Peter says:

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

You are rejoicing, even though you are grieved. And we know this is not a typo, because Paul said he experienced this very thing. In **2 Corinthians 6:10**, the Apostle says he lives:

"as sorrowful yet always rejoicing."

So, in God's grand Purpose for our trials there is a place for real, authentic grieving and distress. But this experience is fundamentally altered from the way the world experiences these things. We see a grand and glorious Purpose in it all. And so, our root stays planted even though the branches thrash about in the wind. And the leaves remain green and the fruit keeps growing because our roots go down by the stream of God's sovereign Grace, and we trust Him for a good Purpose.

4. Like Refining Fire

In God's Purpose, our distresses are like the fire that refines gold from its impurities. Look at Verse 7:

So that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

Now gold is a metal that is dug out of the ground. And even though gold is valuable, at first it is surrounded by dirt and other metals that *lessen* the value of it. So, gold must be “refined” so that all of the impurities will be removed. And the only way to refine gold is by fire. So, the fire is turned up so hot that it literally eviscerates all of the other degrading ingredients, and all you have left is pure gold. So, when gold is melted in the fire, all the impurities float to the top and can be removed. And when the refining fire is over, the gold is even *more* valuable.

So, it is with our faith in God. We have faith now. And that faith is precious. We trust God’s Promises and seek to do His Will. But there are earthly impurities in our trust. There are elements of murmuring and complaining, and a certain level of delight in sin that remains. So, our faith must be *refined*. And the only way our faith may be refined is through the fires of Suffering.

Even though we are saved, there remain tendencies to trust in money and power and position and popularity, alongside of God. So, there is dirt and baser metals alongside with the gold of our faith. And these impurities in our faith hinder our fullest experience of the Goodness and Greatness of God. So, God purposes to refine our faith with the fires of trial and distress. And His Goal is that our faith would be *more pure* and *more genuine*. That is, that it be more utterly dependent on Him and not on things and other persons for our joy.

And one of the best illustrations of how this works comes from the experience the Apostle Paul. In **2 Corinthians 1:8-9**, Paul described this very refining design of God in his distress.

8 For we do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction which came *to us* in Asia, that we were burdened excessively, beyond our strength, so that we despaired even of life;

9 indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves so that we would not trust in ourselves, but in God who raises the dead;

God took away from Paul an ordinary prop of safety and let him feel an almost overwhelming sense of human abandonment. This was the fire of **1 Peter 1:7**. And God did this, not because God didn't love Paul. He allowed this evil to come to Paul because God saw Paul's faith as gold, that was worthy of refining.

5. Our Faith Receiving Praise, Glory, and Honor

Finally, in God's Purpose, the result of this refining is that our faith will receive praise and honor and glory. Verse 7:

So that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

When Jesus appears in Glory, two things are going to happen:

1. His Glory will be magnificently reflected in the mirror of our faith.
2. He will be the "trusted One" and the "hoped-for One" and the "rejoiced-in One".

So, His Glory will shine through our faith and hope and joy. And that means that the more pure and refined the gold of our faith is, the more clearly Christ's Beauty and Worth will be reflected.

But since God exalts all that exalts Him, He will give praise and honor and glory to our faith. He will say:

"Well done, good and faithful servant."

He will give us what Peter says in **1 Peter 5:4**:

The unfading crown of glory

... and we will see finally that the Purpose of God in all our distresses has been the extraordinary Joy of sharing in the very Glory and Praise and Honor of God Himself!

Amen. Let's pray.

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