

Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

An Expository Journey Through **1 Peter** **1 Peter 1:3-12**

9 Peter's Exultation of Sovereign Grace- Part 4 Loving, Believing, and Enjoying Jesus Whom You Have Not Seen

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

We must understand that winning religious arguments is *not* the same thing as winning souls. Very few people, if any, have ever been won by being vanquished in an argument. Yet most of us understand the impulse to lash out in an effort to prove that we are “right” rather than engage an unbeliever in such a way to convince him of the authenticity of Christianity.

But, if we are willing to take our instruction from the pages of the inspired New Testament writings, rather than our own instinct, we might be surprised to find the way the Apostles taught us to engage the unbelieving world around us. For example, **2 Timothy 2:24-26** says:

24 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged,

25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,

26 and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

If we really believe the Bible, then we know that lost people are spiritually dead and blind, and both unable and unwilling to accept the things of the Spirit of God. Paul says here that they must be:

“*granted* repentance”

... lost people must be mercifully and graciously and sovereignly *granted* or *given* or *gifted* with the desire and power to repent, or the dark cloud that is over their eyes that blinds them and enslaves them and that keeps them lost and heading into the abyss of God's Wrath will never lift off them. So, without being “granted repentance”, the lost will not see, they will not hear, they will not believe, and they will not be saved. And that means that Repentance, the changing of the mind that affects the heart and that causes a person to change his behavior. is *not*

merely a “human choice” or an “act of the human will”, but is, in fact, a gift from God.

And that is why the Apostle Paul teaches here that we, who are saved, must employ things like:

- ✓ Not be quarrelsome
- ✓ Kindness
- ✓ Able to Teach
- ✓ Patient when wronged
- ✓ Correcting those in opposition with gentleness

... things that don't normally lend themselves to actually “winning the argument”. Because as we witness to their hard hearts, our own heart melts with both fear and thankfulness because until that blessed Gift of Repentance came to us, we were just like them, rebellious, stiff-necked, hard hearted, and we were also unwilling and unable to turn to Jesus for the rescue of our souls.

And this creates in us a “sad rejoicing”, a “mournful happiness”, a “sorrowing joy”. We rejoice because of the Goodness of God toward us in sovereignly invading our lives and gripping our hearts with conviction, and opening our eyes, unstopping our ears, and giving us the ability to believe by taking out of us that stony heart and replacing it with a heart that could be touched by God's Finger.

But we weep over the sins of the people we care about. We mourn the fact that their blindness is *not* merely a lack of information that we can supply. We grieve over the reality that their hardness is the result of the Fall, and that unless and until God sovereignly, mercifully, and graciously lifts it, they will never see, and they will perish in a lake of fire. And that is why we pray. So, even though they may reject us and our words, we pray for them that God will be Good to soften their hearts and open their eyes and grant repentance to them.

The Apostle Peter echoes Paul by teaching this in **1 Peter 3:15-17**:

15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence;

16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame.

17 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.

... so, Peter says here that the path of “gentleness and respect” and “compelling hope” is the key to winning souls. But that brings up a question:

Will the lost world ask about the “hope that is in us” if our rhetoric is full of fear and we don’t handle suffering any better than they do?

Now, normally, you would expect the Apostles of the Church to teach that we need to study Scripture long and hard so that we can develop cogent arguments about why existentialism and dialectic humanism is counter-productive to Salvation. But here, the Apostle Peter seems to be connecting the saving of souls and convincing the unbelievers of the *validity* of Christianity with something much more simple, and something much more basic, our own suffering.

Peter seems to be teaching that the most *effective* way to actually convince people that our trust and faith in Jesus Christ is *authentic*, and not merely emotionalism, is to:

... keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered

Now why in the world would Peter say that? Why is it productive for us to “keep” or “maintain” a “**good conscience**” in the midst of being slandered? Well, he answers in the very next verse:

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.

Now I would suggest that most people, who lay claim to being saved this morning, would categorically disagree with Peter here. You would be hard pressed to find *anyone* in the modern Church who would say that “**suffering for doing what is right**” would ever be the “**will of God**”, or that for God’s people to suffer could ever in any way be classified as being “**better**”. And yet, that is exactly what the sacred Scriptures teach.

I would suggest that the overwhelming majority of Sermons today throughout America would have something to do with how we can all live better lives down here, and how we can all become richer and accumulate more of this world's goods, and how we can become more influential with the "culture" so we can "rescue it", and how we can all learn to walk in "Divine Health", and how we can operate in the "Prophetic Anointing". Some Sermons today will center on the "5 tips on having a happy Marriage" and the "7 secrets of raising godly children" and the "13 steps to loving your wife", while others will deal with which businesses we can boycott and which political issues Christians should fight against.

But very few will deal with what Peter teaches here, that as we "suffer as Christians", we are proving to the unbelieving world that our Faith is genuine and that Christianity is authentic, and that our trust in a Savior, Whom we have never seen, is valid. Here is what God the Holy Spirit moved the Apostle Peter to write down in the Passage that Brother Andy just read to us:

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.

Now, first of all, I agree with most observers that we are actually witnessing the systematic *dismantling* of Western Civilization before our eyes. The great distinctions that made our culture and even our nation unique and special, and the envy of the world, is melting before us. We are living in a time when the gap between genuine believers and the majority of the population is growing wider every day. And the result is that laws and customs that went along with the "Religious Majority", that one time dominated the United States, are coming under more and more scrutiny, and some are actually being overthrown and cast off. And that trend will continue as genuine, Bible-believing Christians assume a "minority role" in the nation.

Our voice will be less and less effective, our ideals less and less attractive, and our agenda less and less implemented as unbelievers of every kind begin to dominate and govern. And the result will be that the 230 year “reprieve” that God gave His Church here in America, where we have been relatively free from physical, civil, and criminal persecution and oppression will end, and Christians in the United States will live underneath the very same dangerous and hostile conditions that believers have been living under in other nations. So, as far as that goes, I’m in accord with many of these observers.

But unlike many of these people, I don’t think that what we are witnessing is entirely a bad thing. And so, I depart from many of them as they dream nostalgically about the 1950s and “join the fight” to reclaim the “golden era” of America that seemed so much more conducive to Christianity. I am much less worried about the “broadening gap between church and society” than I am with the seeming unwillingness of many, who lay claim to be saved, to engage the lost world with humility and kindness in the face of persecution.

I believe the Bible to be the Word of God, and therefore, I don’t want to simply say that and put that slogan on my bumper or on my ball cap, but I want to actually *prove* that my faith and my trust and my hope in an invisible Redeemer is valid by learning what the Bible teaches about *how* I am supposed to walk this world in white rather than engage with society on its own terms and in its own tenor.

And that means that what is first of all required of me is that I take my cues on conduct and civility and tongue, what I say, what I think, where I’m going, what my values are, how to live in the Light of eternity, living under the shadow of the Cross, that I am to take all of that from the pages of Scripture, from the Gospel, and *not* from a Man, Whom I have never seen, Jesus Christ, and *not* from the lost world. And then I am to labor *unendingly* to resist the lusts of my flesh to live in such a way that proves that my allegiance to the Kingdom of God is authentic, and encourages lost people to ask me about the hope that is in me. And, according to what the Apostle Peter taught, nowhere does all this shine through more clearly than in three areas:

1. How I understand Suffering
2. How I discuss Suffering
3. How I engage in Suffering

When I was growing up, there was a price to pay if you didn't attend Church and say you were a Christian. You literally couldn't run for political office and win if you were an avowed atheist or didn't belong to the local Church. People wouldn't do business with pagans, and so, the result was that everybody said they were saved. Everybody was a member of some Church and the pews were filled on Sunday morning with people who were no more converted than the pew they were sitting on.

So, people lied about believing in God. And they lied about trusting in Jesus and hoping in Eternal Life. But because they weren't saved, their natures had not experienced the miracle of the New Birth, and therefore, they didn't love God or the things of God. But they had to put up a public front, because no self-respecting American would ever admit he was lost.

The result was hypocrisy of the highest order. People, who said they were saved out of public pressure, but who weren't, lived secret lives of sin and wickedness, because that's what lost people do. Fish swim, birds fly, and lost people love darkness rather than light. And so, what it meant to actually be a Christian was diminished and brought low and tarnished due to the fact that lost people were impersonating the redeemed.

So, what we actually had was not a "Christian Nation" as many claim, but a form of "cultural Christianity", a sort of revival of the "Christendom" that dominated Europe for many centuries, where everyone laid claim to being saved, even though they weren't. It was a make-believe world where the overwhelming majority of people were believers. Only it wasn't true.

And now that we've had a half century to examine this period of time, we are finding out that America was "religious", but decidedly not born again. They were "spiritual", but not trusting in Christ. They were "good", but not saved. And even though they felt obligated to check the box that showed their Church affiliation, the majority really didn't believe the Bible to be the Word of God, or worth the time to live up to its standards.

So, what we are seeing in our day is really not a decline of truly born-again souls in our nation, but a strange honesty in checking the box that says "None" or "Unaffiliated" when it comes to religious

preference. What we're witnessing is a strange boldness to stand publicly, as well as privately, against God and His Word.

And I'm telling you this morning that this isn't as bad as you might think. First of all, one good thing coming out of this strange honesty is that the lost world is self-identifying themselves. They are now free and comfortable to say, "*I'm an unbeliever*". And so, our mission field is being clearly shown to us. We know who to speak with and who to pray for and we know what to say.

But we also know who is watching us, who it is that is watching and waiting to see real believers, not the Sunday morning types, the genuine followers of Jesus, not the cultural types, the authentic Christians, who can say along with Peter:

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.

... and can say:

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.

The rising antipathy against the Church doesn't mean there is less Christianity in America, it means that there's less and less "Christian *nominalism*", less and less "*cultural* Christianity". And if what is reducing is the *nominalism*, going by the "name" of a believer when in fact you're not, so that *proportionally* there's actually more *authentic* Christianity that's biblical, this is actually God the Holy Spirit purifying His Church.

We must understand that *some* of the ingrained "Christian ethos" in this country inherited from our so-called "Judeo-Christian roots" was fake, it was hypocritical, and it wasn't real. But that shadow is now giving way to sincere authenticity and honesty. And so, rather than fighting to recapture the façade that we once had, we need to live fully

and deeply and radically in Jesus, by His Spirit, and according to His Word, and the unmistakable contrast between their darkness and our light will be obvious and clear. And nowhere will that contrast be more clear than when those in darkness begin to persecute those in Light.

*Now keep in mind that the last chapter says that we win. And so, *whatever* the culture is doing right now;, *whatever* form of "lostness" they are currently manifesting, *whatever* brand of "darkness" they are promoting, it doesn't work, and it won't work. But, it will serve to bring the elect, who are not yet saved, to a place where they see the godly fruit of authentic Christians suffering to the glory of God. And, in their lost condition, they will turn aside to see this great sight-, an authentic believer burning with the fires of suffering, and yet he is not consumed.

As this nation moves further and further away from Christian roots, what you're finding nowadays, for example, on many University campuses, is that there is actually *less* rebellion against Christianity than there was fifteen years ago- because they don't really know enough about it to hate it. They haven't really seen much authentic Christianity and so there's at least a sort of open curiosity about it.

In our relative comfort this morning, it might be hard to realize that 2,000 years ago, when Peter wrote this Epistle- the Church was scattered. The believers of Peter's day were horribly persecuted. Christianity was an illegal and despised religion. And the persecution was so intense- that many feared for the future of Christianity. Would it be extinguished? Would God allow His Church to be stamped out? What possible Good come ever come out of such intense suffering by the followers of Jesus?

In actuality, God the Holy Spirit was displaying the Beauty and the Majesty and the Invincibility of His Grace to the world through His broken and hurting followers. As the entire world watched the slaves of Jesus hunted down and imprisoned and martyred- they marveled. They marveled at the Kindness and the Gentleness that these scattered aliens showed. They marveled at the Love and Tenderness they demonstrated. They marveled that these suffering saints *rejoiced* as they burned.

The "Great Dispersion" as historians now call it- was actually God's Hand of Providence displaying authentic Christianity to the world. And the result of this intense time of persecution was not only **NOT** the extinguishing of Christ's Church- but one of the greatest

seasons of Evangelism the Church has ever known. More people came to Jesus for Salvation during this period than in almost any other in the history of Christianity. And the key to it all was in how these believers, who remain unknown to us, handled the suffering that God allowed to come their way.

Now, our focus this morning is on verses 7 through 9. And the question I want to start with is this:

Why does Peter tell the Christians what they are experiencing? He says:

... 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; 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, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Peter tells these "scattered aliens" what they are experiencing:

"You are loving Christ; you are believing in Christ in the midst of horrific agony; you are rejoicing in Christ with inexpressible and glorified Joy in great suffering; all of that even though you do not now see Him."

Now, why is Peter saying this? Why tell these persecuted believers what their own experience is? Because he wants to describe for them what true, "authentic Christianity" looks like. And to do that in such a way that, if they ever drift away from it- they will have a fixed Standard for them to refer to- so they can wake up and return to what they've lost.

You see, true, authentic Christianity is like swimming upstream in a river of godlessness- and for us, it is secular American godlessness. We swim with the stroke of Love to Christ, and the stroke of Faith in Christ, and the stroke of Joy in Christ. And while we swim- we strive very hard not to get swept away with the godless toward the terrible rapids of Judgment that is down the river.

Now, we need to begin with the un-impeachable Reality that God keeps saved people saved. Verse 5 tells us that. But the "way" or the

"means" by which God protects us- is *not* by Himself- but "through faith". So, the Bible doesn't teach that God protects us when we stop swimming against the tide. The Bible doesn't teach that God protects us when we willingly swim toward the rapids. No, God keeps us saved by sovereignly *enabling* and *empowering* us to "keep on" swimming *against* the stream with the strokes of Faith, Love, and Joy. So, the "eternality" of our Salvation lies in us "keeping on". We *keep on* repenting; we *keep on* praying; we *keep on* trusting; we *keep on* believing; we *keep on* growing; we *keep on* learning; we *keep on* changing; we *keep on* struggling against the lusts of our flesh to *keep on* being faithful. And we *keep on* "by the protecting Power of God". And we keep on "to God's Glory" and for the "Honor of Jesus Christ." And the result of this "keeping on" is that we don't get carried away in the current of Christlessness and drown.

So, yes, verse 5 says that we are eternally protected "by the Power of God". But that's not all it says. It also says that we are "**protected by the Power of God- THROUGH FAITH**". So, both parts are necessary in order to be protected and remain saved.

And God raised up the Apostles to not only personally model the authentic Christian life for us- but to articulate in writing through their various inspired "Letters" *how* and *why* we are to live contrary to the ways of the lost unregenerate world and magnify the great Worth of Jesus Christ by the way we live our lives.

So, **1Peter** acts like Divine Instruction and Divine Guidance on *how* and *why* to "keep on"- even when we are being severely persecuted. This Epistle lays down, not only the Command to be faithful in every conceivable circumstance- even horrific persecution, but it also illustrates what authentic Christianity looks like. And that's what the Apostle Peter is doing in this Passage.

Verses 7-9 establishes a fixed point of reference to call us to what real Christianity is. And Peter was moved along by God the Holy Spirit to do that for the suffering saints back in the First Century- and I want to try to do that very same thing with his inerrant Words for this Church today. I want to plant a flag on the side of the river of American godlessness and call you to look at it to see where you are in your Christian swimming.

Now Peter says five things (in verses 8–9) about his Christian readers:

1. They love Jesus
2. They believe in Jesus
3. They rejoice in Jesus
4. Through all their loving; believing; and rejoicing in Jesus- they are receiving the Salvation of their souls
5. They are experiencing this even though, like us, they have never actually seen Jesus

And this is true, authentic Christianity: God is saving our souls by working in our hearts a love and a confidence and a joy that is against the stream of secularism and godlessness and worldliness in our society. True Christianity is *loving* Jesus Christ and *trusting* Jesus Christ and *enjoying* Jesus Christ. In other words, Christianity is first and foremost a matter of the heart (Love, Trust, and Joy), and *not* a matter of external performances (even though those external performances matter). And Peter adds in verse 9: in this you are now (progressively/ongoingly) receiving the Goal of it all- the Salvation of your soul. The final, full Salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (v. 5) we are now receiving for our souls (in part) as we love Jesus Christ, and learn to trust Jesus Christ, and rejoice in Jesus Christ- right now- even in our suffering.

Now, let's see if we can get inside these three experiences of believing, loving and rejoicing Jesus and see how they relate and whether we are in fact experiencing them or not. What do we really mean when we speak of loving Jesus Christ and trusting Him and enjoying Him. Well, we need to start with three definitions:

1. Loving Jesus

Loving Jesus means for unworthy sinners to experience Jesus as being infinitely Precious because of His Character and Virtue.

2. Trusting Jesus

Trusting Jesus means for unworthy sinners to experience Jesus as being infinitely Reliable and Trustworthy in all His Promises and in all His Counsel.

In other words:

Love is attracted to the Beloved for Who He is- not simply what He has done or is doing.

... and ...

Faith is confident in the Trusted One for what He *is* doing in the present and *will do* in the future- based on what He said.

3. Enjoying Jesus

But what about Joy? Peter says:

1 Peter 1:8b

... you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,

Now historically, most believers have looked at Joy and rejoicing in Jesus as a separate issue from loving Him and trusting Him. But look at what the Bible actually says about this:

Philippians 1:25&26

25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith,

26 so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again.

Romans 15:13

Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 1:24

Not that we lord it over your faith, but are workers with you for your joy; for in your faith you are standing firm.

These verses and many, many others seem to paint an entirely different picture than what many of us have been taught. These verses seem to teach that we should *not* consider Joy in Jesus as being *separate* from loving Him and trusting in Him.

Rejoicing in Jesus Christ- *especially* in suffering- is the deep, good, and real feelings that are the product of loving Him and believing in

Him. Rejoicing in Jesus is merely the echo of genuinely experiencing Jesus as Who He is- the Treasure of the Universe- Who is infinitely Valuable and infinitely Reliable- using our emotions and our hearts. It is the deep, good, and real feelings of being attracted to Jesus for Who He is and the deep, good, and real feelings of being confident in Him for what He is doing now and what He will do in the future- based on what He said in His Word.

So rather than being *distinct* from Love and Faith- Joy and Rejoicing in Jesus is simply the normal and natural Goal of genuine Love and strong and vibrant Faith. I suggest to you that it would be horribly contradictory for any of us to say, "*I am deeply attracted to the Value of Who Jesus is (by virtue of the miracle of the New Birth)- but I have no deep, good, or real feelings in that attraction.*"

Likewise, it is the same with Faith: it would be a terrible contradiction for any of us to say, "*I am confidently trusting in what Jesus will do for me, but I have no deep, good, or real feelings in that confidence.*" What is confidence without deep, good, and real feelings of Hope and Assurance in the One you trust? There may be an expectation of pain and suffering along the way- but if there were no deep, good, and real feeling that Satan is not in charge and the Romans are not in charge; my Father, Who loves me is in charge. And that means that this "bad thing" that God has *allowed* to come my way is "working together" with all the other "things" that God has either caused or allowed to come into my life- and the Promise of Scripture is that it is working together- not only for the greater "Good" of the Glory of God- but also they are working together for the fulfillment of my everlasting Joy as well! So, without the Joy- it could not be called, "Trust" or Confidence or Faith at all.

Serving and struggling and seeking to obey Jesus without rejoicing in Jesus- is *not* being spiritual- it isn't being noble. It is being ridiculous. It isn't being Biblical either- it is being a Gnostic or a Stoic- but it isn't being Biblical. What is attraction without deep, good, and real feelings for something?

Now I am deeply concerned about all this- for one reason: These believers were going through horrific persecution. The Government was officially and formally hostile toward their Faith. The Romans had confiscated their homes and possessions; they were being driven into hostile, Gentile areas- which were terribly dangerous; and some were

being imprisoned and killed. So, what did these “scattered aliens” have that kept them going? What could they rely on; what could they trust; what could they hold on to- that would motivate them to remain faithful to a Savior Whom they had never seen- and endure this suffering with Joy?

1. Their deep, good, and real Love in an invisible Savior, Who was more valuable than anything they could possess on this earth

Combined with

2. Unshakable Trust that what Jesus promised- He was able and willing to do

Brought about an...

Inexpressible Joy that was full of Glory

So, those two things- Love and Faith- working together produced a rejoicing that enabled these pilgrims and strangers to obtain the final result of all that God wanted for them:

The Salvation of their souls

So, I conclude that attraction to the ultimate Value and Worth of Jesus (which we call, “Love”), and confidence in the ultimate Reliability and Trustworthiness of Jesus (which we call, “Faith”) are not *less* than a deep, good, and real feeling, called Joy. Now they are more; there are other elements in Love and Faith besides the deep, good, and real feeling of Joy, but they are not *less* than Joy.

So, this holy Joy that Peter refers to in verse 8 is a constituent part of both Love and Faith, and put together- they represent what true and authentic Christianity really is. And this goes a long way to explaining why Peter calls this Joy

“inexpressible and full of glory [or glorified].”

So, what gives Joy its quality? And I don't mean merely its intensity- but what gives Joy its "moral character"? What makes Joy either ugly or beautiful? Depraved or noble? Dirty or clean? The answer is that the thing enjoyed- is what gives Joy its character. For example, if you "enjoy" dirty jokes and bathroom language and lewd pictures- then your joy reflects that your heart is dirty and that makes your joy to be dirty as well. If you "enjoy" cruelty and arrogance and revenge- then your joy reflects that heart and your joy have that wicked character. Or the more you get your joy simply from material things, or the more your heart and your joy shrivel up like a mere material thing. You become what you crave and what you enjoy.

But the Apostle Peter says in verse 8 that Christian Joy is two things:

1. Inexpressible
2. Glorified

So how does Joy take on those qualities? Our Joy becomes those two things because it is craving the infinite Worth of Jesus and relishing in the infinite Reliability of Jesus. So, you *become* what you crave and what you enjoy. And Christians crave and enjoy Jesus Christ. And that means that they become like Jesus Christ. Jesus' Preciousness and His Reliability are inexpressibly great, and so our Joy is inexpressible in Him. And Jesus has in Himself all the Glory of the created Universe and of God Himself. And that makes our Joy in Jesus to be a *glorified* Joy—that is, a Joy that is being changed from one degree of Glory to another by His Glory. So, as we are attracted by His Value and Worth- and as we are confident in His Reliability- we enjoy Jesus- even though we have never seen Him.

Peter is teaching here that we become what we crave and what we enjoy. And what Christians crave and enjoy above all else is the Glory of Jesus Christ. So, our joy is "inexpressible and glorified" because it is Joy in loving Christ and trusting Christ- Who is inexpressibly glorious!

But just how do we come to crave the infinite Value and Worth of Jesus if He is invisible? Just how do we come to trust the Reliability of Jesus Christ if we can't see Him? How do we love Him and believe in Him and enjoy Him- if we can't see Him?

Even though we don't see Jesus Face to face with our physical eyes- we do see Him in another way that is even more important than what we see with our natural eyes. For example, in **Romans 15:20&21**- the Apostle Paul said,

**20 And thus I aspired to preach the gospel, not where Christ was *already* named, so that I would not build on another man's foundation;
21 but as it is written, "*THEY WHO HAD NO NEWS OF HIM SHALL SEE, AND THEY WHO HAVE NOT HEARD SHALL UNDERSTAND.*"**

Paul described his mission to unreached peoples (who could never see Christ physically) like this. And that means that in, by, and through the preaching of the Biblical Gospel- Jesus Christ can be "seen" in a way that is vastly more important than seeing Him physically.

We must understand that literally tens of thousands of people in Jesus' lifetime saw Him physically- and yet only 120 were in the Upper Room. So, even though their natural eyes looked at Jesus- they never really saw Him. Jesus said,

"Seeing they did not see"

So that means there is a "seeing" that is infinitely more important than what we look at with our physical eyes. Over in **2Corinthians 4:6**- the Apostle Paul described this other kind of "seeing" like this:

For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

So, there is a "spiritual seeing" with a heart that has been sovereignly "unveiled" by God the Holy Spirit, that allows unworthy sinners to behold the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ. And without that kind of "seeing" no one is saved. Michael Card expressed the paradox of not seeing yet seeing- in one of his songs like this:

To hear with my heart
to see with my soul
to be guided by a hand I cannot hold

to trust in a way that I cannot see
that's what faith must be.¹

So, how does that happen? How does that kind of “seeing” happen? It happens through the preaching and teaching and hearing the Word of God. When the Gospel of Jesus Christ is preached- chosen vessels are gifted with the miracle of “seeing” Jesus more clearly for Who He really is. And this seeing brings the reality and the clarity of Jesus to the forefront better than anyone who physically saw Jesus in His earthly Ministry.

If you read the Gospels, **Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John**, with a heart that has been dealt with by God the Holy Spirit- you will “see” the true Glory of Jesus far better than most of the people who actually knew Him on earth could see Him- Nicodemus, the Centurion, the widow of Nain, Zacchaeus, the thief on the Cross, the thronging crowds. They saw a brief glimpse here and a snatch there. But in the Gospels- you get four complementary Portraits of Jesus inspired by God and covering the whole range of His Life and Person and Teaching and Ministry.

And that means that hearing and reading and understanding the Gospels are much better than actually being there. You are taken into the inner circle of the “Apostolic band” where you never could have gone. You go with Jesus through Gethsemane and the Trial and the Crucifixion and the Resurrection and the meetings after the resurrection. You hear whole sermons and long discourses- not in isolated snatches on hillsides but in rich God-inspired contexts that take you deeper than you ever could have gone as a perplexed peasant in Galilee.

In the four Gospels, you “see” the whole range of Jesus’ Character and Power which nobody on earth saw as fully as you can now “see” in the written Word. You see His absolute Freedom from anxiety with no place to lay His Head; His unflinching Courage in the face of deadly opposition; His unanswerable Wisdom; His honoring of women; His Tenderness with children; His Compassion toward lepers; His Meekness in suffering; His Patience with Peter; His Tears over Jerusalem; His Blessing those who cursed Him; His Heart for the

¹ "That's What Faith Must Be"; Music and words by Michael Card

nations; His Love for the Glory of God; His Simplicity and Devotion; His Power to still storms and heal the sick and multiply bread and cast out demons.

So, even though you do not now see Him, yet in another sense you “see” Jesus far better than the tens of thousands who saw Him Face to face. You “see” the very Glory of the invincible God shining in this Man's Face at every turn in the Gospels. And because you see Jesus with the eyes of your heart- you love Him; and you trust Him; and you rejoice in Him- with joy inexpressible and full of glory.

That is the great Banner waving on the side of the river of godlessness. And I pray that if you are looking at it this morning from downstream floating comfortably toward destruction- that God will wake you up and open the eyes of your heart and set you to stroking— not with legal works to earn anything from God, but with the stroke of Love and Faith and Joy- because that is true and authentic Christianity.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.