

December 4, 2016
Sunday Evening Service
Communion
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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REJOICE BECAUSE THE OUTCOME IS SURE 1 Peter 1:3-9

I heard the old Andy Williams song playing again the other day that reminded me that this is the season for rejoicing. The second verse of the song goes like this:

It's the hap-happiest season of all;
With those holiday greetings and gay happy meetings;
When friends come to call.
It's the hap-happiest season of all.

But, I think I keep seeing people who are not happy at all. And what about Christians? Sometimes I sense when I'm around certain professing believers that there is almost a foreboding attitude.

Well, there shouldn't be. We have new leadership coming to Washington. America is going to be great again. Already the president-elect has talked a major employer into staying in the country. We should feel like the lyrics of the old song say:

Happy days are here again
The skies above are clear again
So let's sing a song of cheer again
Happy days are here again.

Yes, that song was published just days before the New York Stock Market crashed in 1929 and the Great Depression ensued. It was played over and over as F.D.R. launched socialism in America from which we have never recovered.

Christians should realize that if we are trying to rejoice because circumstances are favorable, we are going to be sadly disappointed. For Christians, the reason for our joy is the word and work of Jesus Christ in our lives. Because that is true, we should not only be able to

truly rejoice in times of testing, but should learn that the testing of our faith actually increases our joy? How can that be?

Rejoice Even Though You Suffer (vv.6-7).

If we have the right object we are able to rejoice. What is that? Peter wrote, "In this you rejoice" (v.6a). Okay, in what? (v.6a). Looking back to verses three through five, we learn that we rejoice in God's mercy and power. In other words, we are more likely to rejoice if we are thinking about our Father and Savior. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!* (v.3a). The word behind the English "blessed" means that we remember that God is well spoken of. Satan and sinners speak carelessly or sacrilegiously of God and Christ. Conversely, the angels in heaven praise Him. Wise men and women praise Him. People redeemed by His grace and mercy are wise people.

If we are exalting God, praising our Father and Lord Jesus Christ in our minds, it will have an impact on our attitude and actions. Are you discouraged? What do you think about the Heavenly Father and your Lord Jesus Christ? Do you think about Him? Are you struggling with sin? What do you think about the Heavenly Father and your Lord Jesus Christ? Do you think about Him?

Second, we are more likely to rejoice when we are thinking about our Savior's work of mercy. *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* (vv.3b-4a). God our Creator did a work in us according to the measure, the abundance, of His mercy. He is able to do that all the time because God has an inexhaustible reservoir of mercy. God's mercy focuses on the sinner's miserable, hopeless condition. It is an expression of His compassion toward us. His mercy is also His willingness to withhold from us the punishment we deserve. We all deserve to be punished in the lake of fire for eternity. But instead, our Creator and Judge who is perfectly just, reached into His vault of mercy and withholds that deserved punishment from us.

It is because of that mercy that He caused us to be born again. Notice that word, "cause." It implies an activity. Being born again is

not an idea, a theory, or even a creed or just a doctrine. To be born again is an activity of the Holy Spirit. Something tangible happens when God creates a person anew changing us from a child deserving eternal wrath, to a child of Himself to live in the light of His righteousness. Because something tangible happens, results of a changed life are obvious.

God the Holy Spirit performs this miracle through the power of the resurrection of Christ. If Christ did not burst forth from the grave, there is no new birth, no mercy, no hope. Faith, full dependance on the actual, bodily resurrection of Christ is essential for the new birth.

Finally, the end to which we are born again is our reason for rejoicing. We are born again to a living hope. Our living hope is an imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance. Our inheritance is like a legal covenant that must be fulfilled. Our inheritance is to live in perfection in the presence of our Heavenly Father and Lord Jesus Christ forever! — and nothing can change it. We can see how that ought to be a reason for rejoicing, right?

A third focus for our thinking if we would rejoice is to think about our Savior's power. Your inheritance is *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 (vv.4b-5)*. How good to know that our inheritance is kept in heaven by God's power. How good to know that we ourselves are being guarded by God's power. Our continuing faith in God and His powerful work is evidence that He is indeed guarding us. This faith in God will continue to the time when full salvation with all its eternal blessings is revealed.

So rejoice. In light of these promises, how could we not rejoice? Then if you are rejoicing, why are you not smiling? Why are you not happy all the time? Why are you not giddy all the time like children opening useless gifts on Christmas morning? Maybe we do not fully understand rejoicing. What does rejoicing look like? It can be a positive attitude, a sense of confidence. The most common Greek word translated "rejoice" (*cairo*) can mean to be happy. But the word also means to thrive, do well, or even to greet someone.

That is the word Paul used repeatedly in his letter to the Philippian Christians. He wrote from a Roman prison about rejoicing and having joy. His confident, upbeat spirit was rooted in his confidence in God's faithfulness to His promises and in His work.

The Greek word Peter used here is even more expressive or exalting than the common word for rejoice. This word (*aggaliao*) is found 11 times in the NT and is almost always a response to God's work. The word means to exalt and be exceedingly glad. There is emotion involved in this rejoicing. For example, Mary confessed that her spirit was exceeding glad to hear the news that she would bear Messiah (Luke 1:47). Jesus taught that when we are persecuted, we should have positive confidence (*cairo*) and be exceeding glad that we have great reward in heaven (Matthew 5:12). Jesus Himself was exultant that God the Father revealed truth to people who have child-like faith (Luke 10:21). The Philippian jailer was emotionally joyful to be able to believe in God unto salvation (Acts 16:34).

It is important to realize that 10 of the 11 uses of this word occur in the middle voice, which shows the individual being responsible for this joy, not outward circumstances. God expects you and me to be very joyful for the work He has done, continues to do, and will do in our lives. And that has little to do with living the good life according to modern American opinion. If we rejoice only when times are good, we are not doing what Peter taught in this text. The context of rejoicing according to Peter's letter was not good times.

We do well to understand the connection between rejoicing and suffering because suffering is not unusual for Christians. Peter instructed fellow believers to be exceedingly glad even though they were grieved by trials. *In this you rejoice though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials (v.6)*.

The original recipients of the letter were facing difficult circumstances. Probably Peter wrote this letter around 63 while living in Rome. We believe that the name "Babylon" (5:13) is actually a code name for Rome. Nero had ascended to Emperor nine years earlier. By now it was obvious that he was a crazed man. Within a year of Peter writing this letter, Nero's foolish decisions would result in the destruction of a large part of Rome by fire. Nero pinned the blame for the destruction on Christians who were already suspected of being cultists and already subject to a certain amount of persecution. After the fire, harsh persecution was leveled against Christians especially in Rome, but also reaching out to other regions of the empire. That is why Peter addressed the letter to "exiles" scattered across the empire (1:1).

The *various trials* included imprisonment, beatings, being run out of homes and towns, false accusation, and sometimes being encased in wax, impaled on poles and lit afire to provide light for Nero's garden parties. The *little while* lasted until Nero died in 68-69 and Vespasian took the throne. It is true that Vespasian grew weary of Jewish revolt and destroyed Jerusalem and scattered the Jews in order to fulfill their request to Pilate that the responsibility for Jesus' blood be on them and their children. But at the same time, he was tolerant of Christians.

This reality begs a question: "If God is really in control, why does He allow His people to suffer?" Peter gave us that short answer with these words, *so that the tested genuineness of your faith— (v. 7a)*. Oh, faith needs testing. It is fairly easy to claim to believe Jesus. People in Jesus' day claimed they believed He was the Messiah. But when He put them to the test or when they faced trials from the Jewish leaders, the people walked away. Many people claim to believe "in" Jesus, but what do they believe? Faith does not just believe in facts or evidence. Genuine faith rests in the person of Christ and depends on Christ.

Why is it necessary in God's plan for our faith to be tested? Tested faith is *more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire— (v. 7b)*. Trails and difficulties are the process that prove that dependance on Christ is real. Our tests are like the fires that melted the gold and brought the impurities to the top where they could be skimmed away. Likewise, for us, owning deep confidence about our dependance on Christ, learned through trials, is precious. This is why and how we are able to rejoice in trials. The trials peel away our self-reliance and independence until we really understand "faith in Christ alone."

Another reason why tested faith is good is because we *may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ (v. 7c)*. Genuine faith endures trials and testing. Genuine faith will most definitely result in salvation. Genuine faith then gains for us praise, glory and honor because we are secure in Christ Jesus. How amazing that in the end He honors us with the same thing by which we honor Him in life. Is this not reason to rejoice? Yes, but it seems so distant, so difficult to grasp, so unreal. Ultimate salvation is not a theory but a fact!

Rejoice Even Though You Don't See Christ (vv.8-9).

Would we really rejoice more if Christ was alive and walking with us today? Peter taught that though we cannot see Christ, we love Him and trust Him. Is this true of us? Do we love the unseen Christ? *Though you have not seen him, you love him (v. 8a)*. Peter saw Christ and still his love was put to the test. Having vowed greater loyalty than the other disciples could muster, Peter failed. As Jesus restored fellowship with Peter, He asked three times about Peter's love. Peter could speak from experience about the part love for Christ plays in fellowship with Him.

We, unlike Peter, have not visibly seen our Savior. We see pictures and cameos of Him throughout the Bible. We know Him through His self-revelation. But do we love Him? This is not to ask if we have warm feelings for Him. This is not to attempt to muster up compassion for Christ. The question is: "Do we have such a desire for Christ that we are willing to endure trials and willing to sacrifice for His sake and testimony." A fitting challenge for us is: "Don't tell us you love Jesus. Show us."

Second, we are trusting the unseen Christ. *Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory (v. 8b)*. Thomas saw Jesus but had difficulty trusting Him. All of the twelve chosen disciples claimed they believed that Jesus was Messiah. Judas proved he had a misguided understanding of Messiah. But for a short season Thomas was not much better. He trusted the concept of a Messiah who would act like an earthly king. A dead and risen Christ was more than he could trust. That is until Christ graciously revealed Himself in bodily form to Thomas who then gave his life as a martyr because he fully depended on the Christ he had seen.

We do not see a bodily form of Christ, but we depend on Him. We know Him because we read His promises every day. We study the work of salvation He is accomplishing in us. We truly depend on the fact that all of God's promises are guaranteed in Him (2 Cor. 1:20). We do not see a physical Christ, but we trust Him completely because of what He has written for us.

Therefore, we are confident that the unseen Christ will complete His work of salvation in us (v.9). The outcome of faith is salvation.

You who truly trust Christ are *obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls (v.9)*. Our faith in Christ is not an end in itself. There is no reason to feel a sense of accomplishment because we trust Christ. That is not the reason or goal of faith. We trust Christ, depend on Him alone, to the end that we will become just like Him that He might be glorified. See that picture in the Revelation of John as he describes those last days as God is wrapping up all judgment on earth: *After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, crying out, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God" (Revelation 19:1)*. Salvation is the demonstration of all God's power and glory. It is His. And He plans to share it with us at our salvation!

Rejoice. That should not strike us as an impossible command. What does it require? Be exceedingly glad and exalt in Christ. We must guard against trying to find happiness with stuff and changing circumstances—which is the normal and expected thing. Genuine faith keeps our eyes on Christ as we rejoice in the work He has done, is doing, will do.