

Rejoicing in God's Salvation

1 Peter 1:6-9

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P.D. Mayfield

If you have your Bible with you, please turn to 1 Peter. We are in a sermon series looking at the Book of 1 Peter, Peter's letter written to churches in a region of the Roman Empire, what is now modern-day Turkey and Asia Minor. So what does that have to do with us? It's a great question, and one that we're going to spend some time looking at. But it's a question of how do we live our life in faith with Christ that matches a reality of our daily lives. Peter is engaging with Christians from various regions, as I said, and he's reminding them who they are in Christ.

So when you hear me say "in Christ," I'm sure you might be getting all kinds of things when you hear that. From confusion, "I don't know what that means," to, "I know what that means, and that means dearly to me." But it becomes more clear what that means when there's something at stake. And what does it look like to be in a community living with one another in a culture that at best misunderstands, and at worst is hostile or even violent towards you? That's kind of the context that Peter's writing in, and one we seek the Lord's wisdom in our day. Please pray with me as I ask God's blessing on the reading of his Word as we look at what he has for us even this morning. We'll ask his blessing.

Our Father in heaven, we come to you needy, broken, sinful, rebellious, fearful, anxious, scared, angry, confused—all these things. We are swarming to come to you and pleading for your grace and your mercy. So I pray by your Spirit that you would give clarity, that your Spirit would give us understanding, that we would grow in grace, that we would grow in community that is marked and shaped by your grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Follow along as I read. We're looking at 1 Peter 1:6-9.

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 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.

At the core of this passage today, we see a paradox—a paradox that only the gospel of Jesus can make sense of. You see, the recipients of this letter that we just read a small portion of are—they're experiencing great joy. I mean, we see that in verse seven, "In this you rejoice." They're rejoicing in what came before that. Randy spoke about it a couple of weeks ago, verses three through five. They're rejoicing in their living hope that's found through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They're rejoicing in their inheritance that's imperishable. They're rejoicing in these things that the salvation that is guarded through faith, which will be revealed in the future time to come. So on one hand, they are experiencing great joy and great rejoicing in the gospel. And they are also experiencing sadness and distress and worry. They are grieving due to some of their present circumstances.

In the book *Walking with God Through Pain and Suffering*, Tim Keller quotes a sociologist by the name of Christian Smith. He's a professor of sociology and director of the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Notre Dame. Keller writes about something that Christian Smith has done in his research on spirituality in America, particularly also focusing on spirituality of adolescence and young adults in American religions, American spirituality. So Keller writes this:

From Christian Smith's research, he concluded that most young American adults are practical deists, though a few of them have never heard the term. Smith means that they see God as a being, that his job is to meet their needs. The implicit but strong cultural assumption of young adults is that God owes all but the most villainous people a comfortable life. This premise, however, inevitably leads to bitter disillusionment. Life is nasty, hard, brutish, and always feels too short. The presumption of spiritual entitlement dooms its bearers to a life of confusion when things in life inevitably go wrong.

I wonder if that resonates with you. Maybe it resonates with you because you're confused at how people can think that way. Maybe you're confused or that resonates with you because that's your experience. You know it, but you try to trick yourself into thinking that that's not true of yourself. I think it's a very common experience for people in the midst of things when it goes wrong. But what we like to do is we like to distance ourselves from reality. We like to abstract ourselves from the present moment, the present circumstance. And that's where it's easier to agree with the sentiment that the great events of the world are forged in the trials of life, or that the great people of history come through great suffering, great pains. Cognitively, intellectually, we know that to be true. And yet when that comes closer to our doorstep, we do not want anything to do with it.

So I hope you feel this tension that Peter is addressing—this tension and this gap between what we know with our head and then what we say and what we think and what we feel when we actually experience it tangibly and presently in our lives. So the paradox. How can we both simultaneously experience great joy and great sorrow, great hope and great challenges? And it's here that there is good news—the good news of the gospel in Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit—that Christians then, and by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word, now, Christians now—we can grieve our trials of the world in the context of rejoicing in God's salvation. Those things are held together. Grieving the trials of this world in the context of rejoicing in God's salvation. So we're going to just look at this in three ways over these four verses. Rejoicing in God's salvation is first rooted in faith. It's refined through trials. And it rests upon outcomes.

So, first, rejoicing in God's salvation is rooted in faith. We see this in verse seven and verse eight. There's a lot to unpack there and a lot that we won't get to today, some of which we will get in a few minutes. But right here, we just simply want to acknowledge that Peter is saying the recipients of this letter have faith. He's acknowledging that. But what does he mean by that word "faith"? At a very basic level, Peter compares having faith as being valuable, being precious. He makes an assumption that involves a trusting confidence. And then he even brings that down into particular confidence that rests solely upon Jesus Christ who can be confidently trusted.

So on the one hand, faith is a subjective experience of having faith. It's the experience of the one who is doing the trusting. But on the other hand, it also involves the objective reality of the trustworthiness, the credibility, the reliability of the thing or person who you are trusting in. And that thing or person that feeds into its credibility and reliability and trustworthiness—that's what it depends on. Everything falls on that. Is that thing or person—do they exhibit trustworthiness and confidence?

So a simple example—and you may have heard this. I think every generation needs to hear it, every person needs to be reminded of it. But a very simple illustration is the very chair you are sitting in. Having faith is not thinking those chairs will provide you the security of sitting down without falling on the floor. You've maybe never thought about this. I don't know. But when you think about the chair, you just sit down, right? It's intuitive. Just do it. But if you actually pause to think about it, it's quite profound. It involves a trust that's implicit in the design, in the building materials, the shape, the utility of the object. But there's also other things in play here. You perhaps noticed that it looked sound and secure and it might hold you up. Maybe you noticed that somebody was sitting beside you before you sat down, and you said, "Well they didn't fall, so I might not fall." And maybe you have a chair at home that you've sat in

before and you didn't fall on the floor. And so though this chair might look different, I think I have an experience that's like this, and so I can therefore sit down and not fall on the floor.

But all of those things are done very intuitively, automatically, subconsciously. But what actually takes place is the activity of sitting down. It's actually bending over at the waist, leaning over, bending your knees, falling down, and resting securely on the chair. That's when you're trusting in the chair—when you're sitting down. Likewise, faith in Jesus Christ is similar to that. It's knowing things about Christianity for sure, but it's so much more. It's the acting engagement of trusting him because he's trustworthy. This is how Paul can say to Timothy that he is not ashamed when speaking about his own sufferings, when speaking about his own ministry as an apostle. He is not ashamed, "For I know whom I have believed, and I'm convinced that he is able to guard until the day what he has entrusted to me." And if you notice that very small pronoun, he doesn't say, "I'm not ashamed for what I believe." He says *who*. It's a person.

D.A. Carson recently said at a conference—which I don't know which conference because I saw it on my Twitter feed—"It's not the intensity of our faith that saves us." Think about that. We like to think it's the other way. I'm being so faithful; God must bless me. Maybe we don't say those words, but we very easily slip into that thinking, just as the quote at the very beginning—how easily we function as practical deists.

The Bible speaks particularly of faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and Peter further connects this faith in verse eight with love—believing Jesus and loving Jesus. This is very much woven into this faith. And this connection is born out of Peter's own experience as a disciple of Jesus. He heard Jesus. He watched him with his eyes. He heard him with his ears. He heard him preach a message of the kingdom of God, that involves the inbreaking of God into space and time. He heard Jesus preach a message of repentance and forgiveness, a message that Peter himself believed and responded to with faith when he professed, "You are the Christ." And it's a message he vividly experienced when he repented of his betrayal and received forgiveness.

Peter and the other disciples witnessed blind men—seeing light shine on the faces of men and women for the first time. He saw deaf people hear the voices of their family members celebrating and shouting hallelujahs for the first time. Peter witnessed people who were socially, politically, and religiously marginalized because of their ethnicity, their economic and social situation, get the undivided attention and the tender touch of Jesus. Peter can say with all genuineness, "I have seen Jesus, and I betrayed him. I have seen Jesus's crucified body, and I doubted. But then, praise God, I have seen Jesus's resurrected body, and I believe. And I experience his warm embrace and his restoration." And that's how Peter and the other disciples can say, "I love Jesus, because he first loved me."

So the question is: is this your story? Is this story of faith your story? Who do you say Jesus is? Is faith merely the cognitive and intellectual ascent of things and tenets and doctrines and snippets and pithy statements and slogans that are about Christianity—or can you rejoice in Jesus's words from John 20:29, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed"? Rejoicing in God's salvation is rooted in faith—faith in a person, and his name is Jesus.

Secondly, rejoicing in God's salvation is refined through trials. This is verse six. So where he says they are grieving by various trials. So just a little bit of context. I'm looking at verses six through nine. Last week, Randy was looking at verses three through five. Next week, Randy's going to be preaching on verses ten through twelve. This whole section, verses three through twelve, is one introductory statement. And it's all blended together. And so he's going to be unpacking these trials more down the road. He gets into some specificity in chapters three and four. But in general, here, we can discern a few things. There are a couple layers to consider.

One layer is that trials that Peter's referring to is just broadly as experiences of sadness and distress associated with being tested. That word of trial is an act of being tested. We see that even

connecting with the imagery of the gold being refined by fire, of metal being heated up to the point that the impurities of the metal are separated out, and you can scoop the dross off the top, and you're left with the more pure sense of the metal. He's comparing it both in value but also in refinement with gold. That idea of being tested, being brought in pressure and heat, that which is going to separate the dross from what is pure.

But we can also discern some particularities that are for what these believers are dealing with. Some scholars attempt to define them. Some do a better job of it than others. But some people like to try to picture what's going on with this widespread official Roman imperial policy of widespread persecution of the church. Although that did happen in places, which it generally happened kind of sporadic and more local, it did happen from the Romans—but here, that lacks convincing evidence. What is more likely is that Christians in these regions that Peter's writing to are experiencing more localized, unofficial discrimination and hostility from neighbors simply because they identify as people who believe and follow Jesus Christ. So although I want to honor and value the beautiful good news of this passage of how we endure trials of all kinds, whether that's illness and affliction or other sufferings about just circumstances of life because life is hard—that is true in a secondary application. But here, we are talking about a group of people who are suffering because they are Christians.

Now, the way they experience this hostility and discrimination plays out in different ways. I mean, there are possibilities where they just looked strange to the local populations because they did not participate in various immoral practices that were very common in that culture. Perhaps it was because they were refusing to participate in the civic duties of the day that were kind of conflated with veneration of the emperor. That could be part of it. And it could have just involved the confusion over their status in relationship to the empire of who is this group of people and why do they gather on Sunday mornings and why do they participate in a communion meal? This is not—we don't really have a category for this. And actually, we do have a category, and it's actually not legal. So that's all in play too. It's a mixture of all of the above, most likely. Because the dynamics of being people is complex—religion, culture, politics, are incredible complex. So though we cannot know with any specificity, we can have confidence that they were experiencing suffering because of the name of Jesus.

Our entire staff right now is reading a book by Russell Moore called *Onward: Engaging the Culture Without Losing the Gospel*. Early on, he writes this paragraph:

As American culture secularizes, the most basic Christian tenets seem ever more detached from mainstream American culture. There is, for those who came and will come of age in recent years, no social utility in embracing them. Those who identify with Christianity, and who gather with the people of God, have already decided to walk out of step with the culture. These Christians have already embraced strangeness by spending Sunday morning at church rather than at brunch.

So what does this look like for you? What does it look like for us at CPC? What does that look like for the broader American church? Those are very deep questions that aren't settled in a sermon—one sermon. These things are lived out in conversations. This is lived out in life. What does it look like for us to suffer in the name of Jesus?

Writing a chapter in a book, a collection of essays on suffering and the goodness of God, Dan McCartney writes this:

1 Peter goes further than the Book of James by seeing suffering not just as something to be endured because it brings maturity, but as the means by which the redemption obtained by Christ's suffering is applied to the believer.

In other words, suffering identifies the believer with Christ. And that's what Peter's getting at. He's implying that these trials will come. It's a matter of when. He does imply that they're temporary. Now,

that may be very short lived. That may be your whole life. I don't know. But he puts it in context. The temporality of trials in the name of Jesus pales in comparison to the eternity of being with Jesus.

So how is faith tested? Which, you will be tested. I will be tested. I have been tested. I will be tested again. Life in many ways is a test. It's only a matter of when. And rejoicing in God's salvation—the story of how God is working from the beginning, to the fall of why things are screwed up, to how things are being redeemed in Christ, and ultimately how things are going to end—is the way that we actually have a framework to understand these things. It becomes the compass. It becomes the beacon's life for how we walk the path. So then it is important that we are appropriately enduring suffering as Christ endured suffering.

And number two, that we rightly categorize our suffering. Because suffering is real. Suffering may happen to you personally. It may already be. I hope suffering doesn't happen in your life. The goal of this passage is not to walk away saying, "I'm not suffering? I guess I'm not a Christian." Or, "I need to go find some suffering." No. But if it does happen to one of the members of the body of Christ, it happens to all.

Peter's encouragement in suffering lasts but for a moment compared to the inexpressible wonder of the completion of all things. This will sound a little redundant, but it bears repeating—suffering should not be enjoyed as if they are itself the source of our joy. Suffering should not be embraced as a badge of self-worth or a metric of our faithfulness. Suffering doesn't always have a reason. Sometimes, of course, it is brought about by our own bad choices, our foolishness, our sin. Often it is because of other people's bad choices and foolishness and sin. But often it has no specific transcendent meaning. It just is absurd.

That's the problem of evil. It's absurd. The evil from outside of us and the evil within us is absurd, because it's not a part of God's created purposes. It's the foreign intruder. It's the thing that doesn't make sense in the equation but that has entered in, and it's starting to corrupt everything. And despite the anguish of our suffering, despite its absurdity, God's created and providential purposes, he is making all things new through his son, Jesus Christ. And rejoicing in the salvation of God gives the church the context that we grieve in the midst of these trials.

Part of that means, if you've never suffered, it's to listen to someone who has. And again, specifically, listen to Christians who have suffered because of the name of Christ. Read of what's happening in the world. But I also guarantee it, it's happening in this room. And I'm not calling to over-inflate and overreach what I'm trying to define here as if every little thing is suffering in the name of Christ—because I don't think that's true. But listening to each other will help us not only minister to that person who is suffering, to be encouraged, to hold fast to faith, to realize that faith in Jesus is more precious than gold. Because when you're suffering, you want to do everything in your power to not suffer. You want to mask it. You want to numb it. You want to medicate yourself. You want to forget it. You want to pretend it's not there. But the gospel of Jesus Christ calls us to not only believe and trust in the righteousness—one, because Jesus is righteous and he himself suffered—but then he also calls for us to take up our cross and follow him. And he follows in a path of suffering.

So that's intentional. That's proactive. Now, we can't suffer in a way that brings about salvation in other people's lives. But when we enter into the suffering of another person and we intentionally take on suffering, that is—it puts off the aroma of Christ. And I pray that we smell like him. To some, that will not smell good. But to others, it is a breath of fresh air. There is much to rejoice in. There is much to grieve. Christian community is not pretending we have nothing to cry about. Christian community is not deceiving ourselves that we are beyond crying, as if we have grown up, as if we've gotten our life together. Christian community is not confusing the kingdom of God with the politics of the nation. Christian community is not saying Jesus is a real neat guy, I like him. No, Christian community is rejoicing together by saying, "Worthy, worthy, worthy is the Lamb," and having him wipe away our tears. So it's taking inventory of what you have lost by following Jesus Christ, taking inventory of what you have

gained. That is how we hold this paradox in tension—because it is a both/and. We lose much when we follow Christ, but we gain everything.

If you want to flip over to Matthew 19, I just want to briefly mention this, because this is a picture of Peter's discipleship. Matthew 19:25. It's the story of the rich young man who comes to Jesus and says, "Lord, what must I do to be saved?" And he walks away very discouraged, because Jesus tells him, and he didn't like Jesus's answer. So verse 25:

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished, saying, "Who then can be saved?" But Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed you. What then will we have?"

And as Peter goes, he speaks from the heart, and he usually says things beyond his understanding. But then that is when God is gracious, and he gives him understanding. Because Peter can now say, "I have left everything. I have gained everything. And with God, all things are possible." Gosh, it's too good to not say. So there's one more quote from Tim Keller's book, *Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering*, that speaks to what I've been talking about—how we do this together in community.

The implication is that these sufferers in turn become comforters to others—and on and on it goes. The church becomes a community of profound consolation, a place where you get enormous support for suffering and where people find themselves growing, through their troubles, into the persons God wants them to become.

That is the path of discipleship. It is being tested through the fire and coming out with the dross taken away and pure faith remaining, because of what Christ has done.

Lastly, rejoicing in God's salvation rests upon outcomes. We've talked a lot about this already with Randy a couple weeks ago. It's just oozing in here. How do we weave together the past, present, and future? We live presently by holding fast to what Christ has accomplished in the past, but we look forward to what is ahead, and that is the outcome that is secured for us. It's dependent upon Christ's work on the cross. It's dependent upon Christ's life, his perfect obedience, fulfilling all the commands, and it's fully realized in the future. And there's other outcomes.

Interestingly enough, a lot of people do research on this stuff—resiliency, how do we grow through suffering. There's a psychologist, Robert Emmons, that has—they've looked at a couple things, and it comes down to three things. People who endure and get through suffering become more resilient, they strengthen friendships and family relationships, suffering changes priorities and philosophies. Because this is the irony. People who invest much or most of their energy—this isn't me, this is Robert Emmons—"People who invest much or most of their energy into the goals of personal achievement and happiness are the most vulnerable to the adverse circumstances of life."

So how do we cultivate this kind of rejoicing that is rooted in faith, refined through trials, and rests upon the outcomes? We hold onto what we have believed, and we look ahead to what we will obtain. This receiving the outcome, the salvation of our souls, this is—again, he's referencing salvation and the fulfillment of all things, but we get to presently experience this. This is the assurance of our salvation in Christ bearing into our lives right now.

And the translation that he mentions, the salvation of our souls, is not a Greek thought. It's a Hebrew thought. "Souls" is not something abstract from the body. This is a wholeness, a fullness. Our very spirit and our very bodies are going to be fully redeemed in Christ. Jesus is worthy of our rejoicing. He willingly obeyed all the commandments. He joyfully bore the humiliating shame of dying on a tree. And now he gloriously reigns, making all things new, and bringing about the fullness of his redemption in all things. I'll conclude with one more quote from Russell Moore in the book *Onward*:

As American culture changes, the scandal of Christianity is increasingly right up front, exactly where it was in the first century. The shaking of American culture will get us back to the question Jesus asked his disciples at Caesarea Philippi: 'Who do you say that I am?' As the Bible Belt recedes, those left standing up for Jesus will be those who, like Simon Peter of old, know how to answer that question. Once Christianity is no longer seen as part and parcel of patriotism, the church must offer more than 'What would Jesus do?' moralism and the 'I vote values' populism to which we've grown accustomed.

And Russell Moore says, and I say also, "Good." That is good. Because the reality of this life is something else Jesus said in John 16:20, "Truly, truly I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy." And later in verse thirty-three, "I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart: I have overcome the world."

Rejoicing in God's salvation is inexpressibly joy-filled. Some people shout. Some people run. Some people cry. Some people grow silent. But it is an expressible reality. It does not always mean that everything is hunky-dory. Rather, the gospel of Jesus invites us in truthfully acknowledging that nothing is as it should be, and Jesus is making everything the way it was intended. We can rejoice by faith that God is active and present in the story that he is telling about the world, just as he was active and present in the suffering of Jesus. How wonderful is it that he is mindful of us in our suffering? We rejoice, because we know the end of the story. God's saving purposes will be fully realized. They already are in Christ. Let's pray.

Our Heavenly Father, we give you praise. We give you glory. We give you honor. And we see how those things are even attributed to us for having faith. But even to receive those accolades from you is to give them back to you as the One who is worthy to be praised, the One who is worthy to be honored, the One who is worthy to be glorified. Help us, O Spirit, to hold fast to faith. May we endure sufferings. Afflictions, yes, that is so true—comfort us, meet us there, but likewise, prepare us for what everybody might be anxious about, what people might be fearful about. Some people might long expectantly, rejoice in, everything changing. But all in the midst of chaos, may we resoundly say, "You are sovereign, and you are King." We pray these things in your son Jesus's precious name. Amen.