

Trial by Fire (1 Peter 1:6-9)

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:6-9)

“Life is hard and then you die.”

I’m sure you’ve heard that famous line. It was originally given to us by a guy by the name of David Gerrold, but what he actually said is a bit more profound: “Life is hard. Then you die. Then they throw dirt in your face. Then worms eat you. Be grateful it happens in that order.”

The Christian perspective, though, is a bit different: Life is hard. Then you die. Then you go home to be with Jesus which is way better. And then you get to look forward to a resurrected body that will never grow old, never die, never sin and will inhabit a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Last week, we focused on our blessed hope. Our hope is not in this world. No matter what lies the prosperity preachers try to sell you, our best life is not this one. We have an inheritance waiting for us. It is incorruptible. It is undefiled. It will never fade away and it is reserved in heaven for you, if you have trusted Jesus for your salvation.

This inheritance was reserved even before the universe was created. God elected us. He saved us by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. He gave us the faith to believe and He will surely sustain us. If you can believe Jesus died for you, if you can trust Him as your Lord, if you can believe that God raised Him from the dead, then the Bible tells us that you are saved. That means you have been chosen by God for salvation before the worlds were created. And He will sustain you; He will not lose you. You have an inheritance waiting and it is a glorious inheritance.

But before you can fully enjoy your inheritance, you have to navigate your way through this life and this life is hard. This life is perilous to the walk of faith. This life will test your faith. Will your faith survive the trials of life? Will your faith survive persecution?

I read the stories of Christian martyrs, and I can’t help wondering if my faith could stand up in the face of such horrible hardship and persecution. Well, if my faith was something I generated, I know the answer would be “no”. But if my faith is truly a gift of God, I know it will endure anything, even trial by fire because true faith will persevere. True faith is strengthened by the trials of life.

Peter begins this passage with the phrase: *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.* From the world’s perspective, that statement is pretty counter-intuitive. How can you rejoice while you are being grieved? How can you maintain the joy of your salvation when you are enduring trials and persecution?

Of course, the cause of this great rejoicing is what Peter calls our living hope. It is the inheritance we have been promised as the begotten sons and daughters of Almighty God. If we can just keep our minds on what Jesus has purchased for us, the challenges of this life

are much easier to bear. We need to focus on the blessings we have in Christ and we have an incredible set of blessings. As Paul writes to the Ephesians:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. (Ephesians 1:3-6)

What a wonderful future we have waiting for us! God is so gracious that He even gives us glimpses of His glory right now, But for all the beauty, all the glory of this creation, we still have no concept of the immeasurable worth of our coming inheritance.

Yes, we can rejoice in the glory of our coming resurrection, but we still need to be realistic about our life here on earth ... *though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.*

Remember that Peter was writing to a people who were undergoing persecution and the persecution was going to get worse. Nero, who probably set the fire that destroyed much of Rome, needed a scapegoat so he blamed the Christians. And things would not go well for the Christians. But despite this, they could still rejoice.

In fact, rejoicing is the appropriate response to persecution if you are a Christian. Talk about counterintuitive! Let me say it again; rejoicing is the appropriate response to persecution if you are a Christian.

Let me give you just one example from the book of Acts, chapter 5. Peter and the Apostles had been preaching the Gospel in the Temple, and God authenticated their message with a whole bunch of miracles. The religious leaders arrested them and tossed them in the common prison, but an angel engineered a jail break and they went right back to the Temple and continued to preach. After that, they were arrested again and commanded to cease and desist: Stop preaching this Jesus. Their response is recorded in verse 29:

But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29)

That response would result in a pretty significant beating. Actually, the council wanted to kill them, but Gamaliel intervened.

And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. (Acts 5:40)

This brings me to the verse I want to point out:

So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. (Acts 5:41)

They rejoiced! Rejoicing is the appropriate response to persecution.

Listen, you don't have to be happy about getting beat up. That's not the point at all. But when your faith endures trials of any kind, it confirms the authenticity of your faith and that is cause for rejoicing. Because when you have been grieved by various trials and your faith endures, you know it is of God.

... that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, (1 Peter 1:7)

Have you been grieved by various trials? I know you have. I know some details and it grieves me to think about some of the stuff you are putting up with. We have a lot of folks enduring serious medical issues. Some of you have experienced trials in your relationships, with your family members, your children. There are struggles with marriages. There are financial struggles. There are emotional struggles. And of course, we all continue to struggle with sin. When you encounter these trials of life, they will either draw you closer to God, or they will push you away.

If trials push you away from God, it is an indication that your faith is not genuine. Perhaps the seed of the Gospel was sown on rocky ground. Or maybe it was sown among thorns so the cares of this life choke it out. If that is you, you need to repent and turn to the cross. Pray for the faith that endures.

But when your faith endures through trials, when you cling to God when everything else is falling apart, you know that your faith is genuine. Yes, it is being tested by fire, but the fire does not consume your faith; it refines it. When you emerge from the trial, you are far more confident in the faithfulness of God. Then you can really rejoice!

James makes exactly the same point:

My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. (James 1:2-4)

God does not sustain our faith by making life easy. God sustains our faith by bringing us through hardship. But no matter what you have to face in this life, know that Jesus is going to be right there with you, beside you to lead the way, inside you to provide the power for you to persevere.

... lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20)

The sort of faith that endures through trials glorifies Jesus Christ. Pray that your faith ...

... may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

It is your whole duty. It is your chief aim to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. You are here on earth for that purpose, to bring glory to Jesus Christ. And when you endure trials and persecution with genuine peace and joy, it is a powerful testimony. Think of the centurion at the foot of the cross. After seeing Jesus endure unspeakable torture with supernatural grace, he watched the manner in which He died:

So when the centurion, who stood opposite Him, saw that He cried out like this and breathed His last, he said, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!" (Mark 15:39)

When you have to face the difficulties, the challenges, the hard times this life inevitably deals out, think of the opportunity you have for Christian witness. You are never without hope. As a Christian, you never have to despair.

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)

Peter continues his exhortation in verse 8. Speaking of Jesus,

... whom having not seen you love. (1 Peter 1:8)

Let me ask you; do you love Jesus? It's an important question. We emphasize the fact that you need to believe in Jesus to attain salvation and it is certainly true. But actually, that's not enough. You see, Satan believes in Jesus. The demons know who Jesus is; they certainly believe in Him.

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! (James 2:19)

But though the demons tremble before Jesus, they don't love Him. Satan certainly doesn't love Jesus.

Do you love Jesus?

I've mentioned it before, but I need to remind you that John gives us a test we can apply to ourselves to make sure our faith is genuine:

*Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. **By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.** For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. (1 John 5:1-3)*

Saving faith leads to obedience. Not perfect obedience, unfortunately. We still stumble; we still sin, but the true Christian is one who wants to please the Lord. We want to make Him happy because we love Him. And we know we love Him because He first loved us.

Why wouldn't you love the One who endured your eternity of hell? You could not fulfill the Law, so He did it for you. Then He took the hit on the cross so you would not have to suffer forever. Oh, what immaculate, wonderful love!

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you. (John 15:13-14)

There it is again ... the test of obedience. If Jesus is your Lord, then you must want to do what He commands because you want to please Him. You want to hear those words: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Let's continue looking at verse 8:

Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, (1 Peter 1:8)

You cannot now see Jesus with your physical eyes, but you can see Him with your eyes of faith. Those eyes of faith cause you to believe and because you believe, you rejoice. You experience a joy that cannot be expressed or fully understood. It truly is glorious. But you only experience this joy when you take your eyes off your troubles and feast them on the glory manifest in Jesus Christ. Learn to see from the heavenly perspective. You are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places.

Finally, Peter gets right back to the blessed hope, the wonderful promise:

... receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:9)

In a sense, you were saved before the foundation of the world. God chose you. He elected you. He gave you to Jesus. And as Jesus said:

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. (John 6:37)

In another sense, you were saved at a point in time, the hour you first believed. When you understood that you were a sinner bound for hell, *but* Jesus loves you anyway. You called on His name by faith. “Jesus, I believe you died for my sins. I believe you were raised from the dead. I believe you are living now at the right hand of the Father. Jesus, save me. Be my Lord ... I will be your *dulos* ... your bondservant. Just be merciful to me, a sinner.”

Jesus answers that prayer of faith.

But in still another sense, your complete salvation is yet to come. By accepting Christ, you are freed from sin’s penalty, but one day, you will be freed from the very presence of sin. That’s what Peter means by the “end of your faith.” On that day, we will no longer need faith, because we will be able to gaze on the glory of Jesus Christ.

... we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

Are you looking forward to that Day? I sure am! Nothing in this world can possibly compare. No trial, no persecution, no angst, no torture can blemish our future. We are children of the King, unless you believed in vain. Hang on to the promise. Hang on to the Lord Jesus Christ. He will bring you through every trial by fire.