

“The Proof of Your Faith”
(1 Peter 1:6-9)

Introduction: In a world that is full of trials and temptations, we need encouragement to continue the Christian race. We need to be encouraged that there is an end to the race and that we are going to finally make it to the finish line. We are daily faced with the temptations which the devil throws at us to turn us out of the way. We are daily struggling with our own sins, wrestling with them as with a Goliath or as with a Delilah, trying to break free from its powerful grip. It often seems that the Lord allows trials to pour forth with great fury, and we become inundated all at once, just trying to hang on to what we have until the storm passes over. But we shouldn't think this strange. Peter writes later in this letter, **“Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you”** (4:12). Jesus said, **“In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world”** (John 16:33). As long as you are on this earth, you will have tribulation as a part of your life. The Christian life, although we would like to think that it is a life which is free from worries and cares, is just the opposite. Not only do you have many trials in common with the unregenerate, but you also have those which are peculiar to the saints of God. The trials of holiness.

This was especially true of these Christians to whom Peter writes, as well as Peter himself. As we have seen, they were severely threatened by possible persecution, persecution which may just as easily have affected them in the regions of Asia Minor, as it did the saints who were in Rome. They needed encouragement, and encouragement is exactly what Peter is giving to them now. It is not a warm and fuzzy kind of comfort, one which is nothing more than kind sentiments cheaply given away by one who likes to flatter others, that he gives. But it is comfort which is built upon the sure and steadfast truth of the Scriptures. It is comfort with substance and one which will endure forever. It is true consolation. What from what he tells them, and what the Spirit says to us this morning, we see that

As a Christian, you have the best reasons to rejoice even in the midst of the worst trials.

Here he gives us three reasons to rejoice: (1) We have the promise of God that He will keep us until we receive our everlasting inheritance, (2) that trials, even though they are not at all pleasant, serve to vindicate our faith and will result in praise in the day of Christ, and (3) faith enables us to see Him who is invisible and to know that we are receiving the salvation of our souls.

I. The First Reason to Rejoice Is that God Has Engaged Himself to Keep Us until That Day. Peter Says, **“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials.”**

- A. That in which Peter says they “greatly rejoice” is what we saw last week.
1. They could rejoice because God had caused them to be born again to a living hope which no one could ever destroy or take away.
 2. They could rejoice because God had promised to give them an inheritance which would never perish, spoil, or decay.
 3. And they could rejoice because God had pledged His infinite power to protect them

until the day that He would give them the promised reward.

- B. They Could Rejoice Then Even though They Were Distressed by Various Trials.
1. If you were a soldier on the front lines of a war, you would certainly be afraid.
 - a. You might easily be maimed for life, or even lose your life.
 - b. But if someone, who had the power to protect you, guaranteed that you would come out of the battle without a scratch, wouldn't that cause you to have an entirely different attitude, an attitude of joy and thanksgiving?
 2. If you were a student in college, you would be concerned about many different things.
 - a. Will you be able to pass every test and get a passing grade on every paper?
 - b. Will you receive the education that you need in order to be able to get a good job?
 - c. Will your grades be high enough to get into graduate school?
 - d. But if someone, again who had the authority or ability, guaranteed to you that you would make it through with straight A's, wouldn't that go a long way in relieving your concerns?
 3. Even so, when you are faced with trials, trials of all different kinds, and you are despairing of whether or not you will endure to the end of them, shouldn't it relieve your distress and give you cause to rejoice that God has saved you and has guaranteed that you will persevere to the end? Of course it should!
 - a. Having the assurance of God's grace is the greatest comfort that you can possess.
 - b. If you know that you are the Lord's, you also know that He will see you through the very worst of trials.
 - c. Nothing that the enemy of your soul can do will be able to take your comfort from you. As the hymn we sang this morning says, "Though troubles assail us and dangers affright, though friends should all fail us and foes all unite, yet one thing secures us, whatever betide, the promise assures us, 'The Lord will provide'" ("Though Troubles Assail Us", John Newton).
 - d. If you have this assurance, you will also have its comfort. But the bottom line is always whether or not you have this assurance. You can only have it if you are trusting in Christ Jesus, and living according to His holy will. Obviously it is something that we should always be striving to have and to and to have in vigorous exercise.
 - e. If we cannot find that grace present in our hearts, we must not become angry with those instruments that the Lord would use to reveal it. Instead we must strive, using God's appointed means, to increase that grace in order to find it, or to possibly obtain it, if we never possessed it.
 - f. But once we find it, all praise be to God, what joy it produces, joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Peter 1:8). It is a joy which cannot be described. It is one which can only reveal itself by outbursts of praise. David said of the Messiah, "**I WAS ALWAYS BEHOLDING THE LORD IN MY PRESENCE; FOR HE IS AT MY RIGHT HAND, THAT I MAY NOT BE SHAKEN.' THEREFORE MY HEART WAS GLAD AND MY TONGUE EXULTED; MOREOVER MY FLESH ALSO WILL ABIDE IN HOPE; BECAUSE THOU WILT NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW THY HOLY ONE TO**

UNDERGO DECAY” (Acts 2:25-27).

- g. If we have assurance, then no matter what kind of trial we must face, we will have the confidence that the Lord will see us through. And even in the midst of the trial, though trials are distressing, we will be so filled with joy, as to break out in doxology. Such a blessing is this assurance.

II. The Second Reason Peter Gives Us To Rejoice in the Midst of Various Trials Is That Trials Serve to Vindicate Our Faith, or to Show Us That We Have Saving Faith, Which Also Strengthens Our Assurance.

A. First, He Says Trials Are Necessary.

1. He says, **“Even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials”** (v. 6).
2. But why are trials necessary?
 - a. They are necessary because they are God’s appointed means to work holiness in your life.
 - b. He brings trials along when He knows that they will be good for you.
 - c. And because those occasions for trials -- which could be the sin that we fall into, the weaknesses that we have that need to be strengthened, the loss of our personal reliance on God, and a multitude of various other reasons -- because these occasions frequently exist in our lives, He will frequently bring trials.
 - d. There is no question that they are necessary. This passage could properly be rendered, “Since it is necessary.”

B. But the Main Reason for Their Necessity in the Text Is that Are Necessary to Test Your Faith as to Its Genuineness.

1. God uses trials in the lives of those who are in His covenant community, to show them whether or not they have true saving faith.
2. In this case, the purpose of a trial is the same as that of the Law.
 - a. The Law is able to show us our guilt and our need of the One who removes guilt. It is able to show us how far short we fall in our obedience and our need of the One who has obeyed perfectly on behalf of His people. The Law is able to point us to Christ.
 - b. But trials can do the same thing for us. They can show us what we are really made of. James says, **“Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life, which *the Lord* has promised to those who love Him”** (James 1:12).
 - c. If he passes the test, he receives the crown. But by implication, if he does not pass the test, he does not have true faith.
 - d. Jesus said, **“And the one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word, and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no *firm* root in himself, but is *only* temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away”** (Matt. 13:20-21).
 - f. God sometimes winnows His threshing floor with the heat of trial to purify the congregation of chaff. When our San Francisco church went through the trial of the homosexual organ player, it refined that church like nothing else could. Those who feared the world more than God, who would rather compromise to preserve their

own lives than fight, left the church. Those who were not afraid to stand for the truth, stayed. The Lord even graciously brought more of His people into the congregation to strengthen it. And today, that church is much stronger because of the trial which the Lord brought.

- g. Of course, the Lord can also use those trials to show the unregenerate their bankruptcy in His sight, and to prepare them to come to Him and to receive His Son by faith.
 - h. God sends the trials to test the heart.
3. But He also uses trials to refine and purify true faith.
- a. Peter tells us, **“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”** (v. 7).
 - b. He brings trials that He might prove your faith, to show you whether it is there, to show what its character is.
 - c. The jeweler puts a diamond under the gaze of his eyeglass to see if it is genuine, and if it is genuine, what its character is, whether it is flawed or not and how bad the flaws are.
 - d. God puts you under the gaze of His glass through trials. He is proving you. He is testing you to see if your faith is genuine, and if so where its flaws and weaknesses are.
 - e. And when His scrutiny reveals that there is true faith present, it brings joy, even in the midst of trial.
 - f. It is the genuineness of your faith, which is revealed by the trial, that is precious.
 - (i) A false faith is worthless. But a genuine faith is precious beyond words.
 - (ii) It is the most precious gift that could ever be given. It is precious because not everyone has it. It is precious because it can only come from God, and He does not give it to everyone. It is precious because with it you have the title to eternal life with God and with His Son, Jesus Christ, but without it you have the sentence of condemnation apart from God for all eternity.
 - (iii) If God tries your faith and it is found to be there, then you have the most solid grounds of the greatest joy that you could ever have.
 - (iv) What you have is far more precious than gold. When gold is refined, part of it is burned away. One day it will all vanish in smoke when the Lord destroys this world of wicked men. But your faith will not perish. The fire of a trial does not diminish it, but only makes it grow stronger.
 - (v) Those whose treasure consists only of gold will find on the day of God’s judgment that their gold has become worthless. But those who possess justifying faith will find “praise and honor and glory.” Jesus will say, **“Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master”** (Matt. 25:21).
 - (vi) The genuineness of your faith will prove to be a true friend to you now in this life, in the midst of your trials. But it will especially in that final day, when you face the biggest and most important trial of all.

III. The Third Reason Peter Gives that You May Rejoice in the Midst of Trials Is That by

Faith You May See the One Who Is Invisible and Obtain Comfort.

- A. Peter Says with Regard to 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.”**
1. One of the greatest joys that you can always have as a Christian is to know that you are in a saving relationship with Christ.
 2. If you pass the test of your faith, and it is proved to be genuine, then you have a faculty that the unbeliever does not have: you can see Christ through the eyes of faith.
 - a. The essence of faith is seeing and believing in that which you have not seen.
 - b. The author to the Hebrews writes, **“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen”** (11:1).
 - c. Everyone lives by faith, but not saving faith.
 - (i) There are many things the unregenerate person believes which he has not seen.
 - (ii) He believes that dinosaurs exist, even though he has never seen a living one.
 - (iii) He believes that George Washington really was a president of the United States.
 - (iv) He believes that his name really is what his parents tell him it is.
 - (v) Faith believes something on the testimony of others. You have not seen it, yet you believe it.
 - d. Saving faith has this quality as well. It believes something to be true, not because you have seen it with your own eyes, but because you have believed the testimony of God’s Word. Again the author to the Hebrews writes, **“And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him”** (11:6).
 - e. Saving faith sees the invisible One as though He is visible.
 - f. If you have true saving faith, you know these things to be true.
 - g. As Peter says here, even though you have not seen the Lord Jesus Christ, yet you love Him.
 - h. And even though you do not see Him standing before you now, yet you believe in Him; you trust in Him.
 - i. And oh what joy you can have because of this!
 - j. Peter says this should produce in you joy unspeakable and full of glory, a joy which is beyond words and greatly valued.
 - k. It should do so because even now, in the midst of your trials, you are receiving the goal of your faith, the end for which God gave it to you: the salvation of your souls.
 - l. Such is the preciousness of this faith, that it can know that it has embraced the Savior and in doing so have embraced eternal life.
- B. Should This Give You Comfort in Your Trials? Yes It Should!
1. Some of you here know what I mean. There can be no greater comfort through the most difficult times of life than knowing that you are the Lord’s and He is yours.
 2. But there are some of you here that don’t understand what I mean.
 - a. The truth of God does not affect you very much, and therefore you don’t derive comfort from it.

- b. If that is the case, then meditate on the Word and ask that the Lord would cause your heart to be opened to it and deeply affected by it. It is only by the degree that the Word of God impresses you, that it will impact your lives.
- c. But others of you may be unaffected by it because your heart is still hardened against it. In that case your heart needs to be softened by the work of God's Spirit to turn up the soil of your heart so that His Word can penetrate and take root.
- d. If that is the case with you this morning then come to the Savior and embrace Him by faith. Ask Him to mold your hard heart into a pliable one, one that is fit for the Master's use. Ask Him to take you as His own child, though neither you nor anyone of us here deserves it. God is rich in mercy. He bids you to come.
- e. May the Lord use the words of the apostle as given by His Spirit to encourage us in our pilgrimage when we pass through the waters. Amen.