

Logan Smith
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1 Peter 1:3-9

Rejoicing in Hope Amidst Every Trial

Just yesterday, I led two graveside burial services: one for our beloved Sister Lena, who went to be with the Lord a few months ago; the second was for a lady I just met Thursday night, in the hospital, during her last few hours on earth. As I sat here in my office last night, preparing for what was going to be our sermon text today - from John 8 - I just started reflecting on the day, and the week, and recent weeks, and all the suffering and sorrow and pain I've witnessed in the lives and families and marriages of those I love - of many of you, my dearly beloved church family. Some have recently lost loved ones. Some have had surgeries and medical issues. Some are watching loved ones walk through terrible times of suffering and pain, and have no clue what may happen to them in coming days. Some are walking through painful trials in their marriage. Some have lost jobs, or have suffered at their jobs, and are living in uncertainty about what the future holds or where they are supposed to be. And that's all just from this past week. I'm sure you could add more to the list yourself. So as I reflected on all this last night, the Lord brought this sermon text to mind. Now, I very rarely change what the sermon will be on - our practice here is to preach through whole books of the Bible, one passage at a time - but I think this passage will be good for all of us to hear this morning. And that's because all of us suffer in this life. Many are walking through grievous trials currently, but if you aren't, you have probably have before, and you will again, should the Lord tarry. Life in this fallen world inevitably includes times of difficulty, trial, and suffering.

Whatever trials are in our lives right now, I think all of us can face similar temptations and doubts in such seasons as this. We are tempted to live by *fear* instead of by *faith*. We are tempted to be *anxious* and to *doubt* God's promises to provide, instead of *trusting* in His faithfulness. We are often inclined toward a spirit of *grumbling, complaining, and despairing*, rather than a spirit of *hope and joy*. **We can feel hopelessly lost, swept about by the winds and waves in the storms of suffering, left to drift aimlessly into the abyss of uncertainty.**

Such a response to suffering is common. We can see this easily as we look at the world around us, in our neighbors, on Facebook, in the news. But what about us? What about the

Church? Should we as Christians feel this same sense of dread, fear, anxiety, and hopelessness? Or do we have reason to have *joyful hope*, no matter what comes our way?

The answer given to us by God in 1 Pet. 1:3-9 is a resounding: ***YES, we have joyful hope, even in the midst of our trials and sufferings.***

This book was written by the Apostle Peter in the first century, to the various churches scattered throughout the world. And even though they all lived in different places and even spoke different languages, they had a lot in common: they all had to walk through suffering, and they all had reason to rejoice in those trials because of the salvation they had in Christ. And even though we live 2,000 years later, on the other side of the globe, we have these same things in common, too. We are not the first Christians to deal with sufferings and difficult trials, even in overwhelming, seemingly inescapable degrees. The first generations of Christians in the early church dealt with various trials of all kinds. They had the afflictions common to living in a fallen world: sickness, injury, and death. They faced financial insecurity, economic upheaval, and uncertainty. And they also faced *persecution*; persecution and suffering because they followed Christ was common, and it was only going to get worse for these Christians Peter wrote to. The Roman emperor's anti-Christian agenda was so explicitly horrible it lives in legendary infamy to this day, where Christians were imprisoned, robbed, brutally beaten, tortured, and murdered.

It is in the light of this suffering, including persecution, but also other kinds of difficulties - "various trials" as he calls them, in verse 6, every kind of trial we may face - that Peter writes this letter, to the early Church and for *every* church. Peter writes to encourage Christians to hold fast to the faith of the gospel of Christ in the midst of suffering. And how does he do so? *He begins by reminding us of the glorious promises of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He starts out by holding up for us the sure hope that we have in Christ: the sure hope of salvation and eternal life with God through the work of Christ.*

I. Praise God for the sure hope of salvation and eternal life we have in Christ (vv.3-4)

If we want to endure suffering with hopeful joy and a firm faith, then we must first look to the great hope we have in the gospel of Christ.

Peter begins our section, in verse 3, by leading us in praise to God the Father. He praises God, and exhorts us to praise God, because of the "great mercy" that the Father has shown us in

the gospel of Christ. He first notes that God “caused us to be born again” (v.3). Peter is clearly referencing the “new birth,” or the “spiritual birth” that marks the beginning of one’s new spiritual life as a Christian. This is the same “new birth” that we heard Jesus speak about just a few weeks ago in John 3, where he says that we must be “born again” in order to enter the Kingdom of God and be saved. Just as we were all born physically, marking the beginning of our physical life as human beings, so we must all be born again *spiritually* in order to have spiritual life as Christians. We must be made new; we must be born again by the grace of God through the Spirit of God. This is why Peter begins by noting that this birth is according to God’s “great mercy,” not according to our own works or merits; after all, we can’t claim any credit for being born, can we? In the same way, Peter is emphasizing the fact that *God Himself* brings about this spiritual new birth in our hearts. God initiates our new life with Him, because the emphasis is not on us, but on His grace. And this is great cause for rejoicing and praising God!

In other words, Peter here is referring to our conversion, the moment in which we move from death to life *by grace through faith in Jesus Christ*. When someone hears the gospel and responds in repentance and faith, this is the work of God’s grace in their lives, bringing about a “new birth” of the spirit. When this happens, we are no longer enemies of God, but children of God. And this brings about a new life, in a new family, with a new inheritance.

In verse 3 Peter states we have been born to a “living hope.” In verse 4, we have been born to “an inheritance.” In verse 5, he ties these realities to our “salvation.” He is unpacking here the glorious realities of the salvation we receive by faith. When we use the word “salvation,” we often refer to when we were “saved,” referring to our conversion. This is obviously a biblical category, as we just saw this referred to as the “new birth.” But the scriptures also speak of our salvation as something we are looking forward to, that has not yet been completed. So we can say that we have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved. This is what Peter is doing here.

He refers to the final hope of our salvation, when we will be raised to eternal life with Christ. This is our “living hope.” We do not live in fear, neither of this life nor of death, because our hope is “living,” it is sure and certain. In our day, we often use the word “hope” to mean simply “wishful thinking.” As in, “I *hope* the weather cools off next week,” or, “I *hope* the

Browns win the Super Bowl this year.” Obviously, these things are not certain, nor do we have any control over them. Sometimes we even use this word to mean, “hoping against all reason,” like if someone were to say, “I hope the Tennessee Titans win the Super Bowl.” As much as I’d love that, it’s probably not gonna happen. Or if you look at your weather forecast just before going out for a picnic, and it’s calling for 80% chance of rain, and you say, “I really hope it doesn’t rain on us.”

But this is *not* how the word “hope” is being used here. It’s a different definition, a different word. Biblical hope, as it is being used here, is trusting in the sure promises of God. It means we believe in what God has promised, and we look forward to it, even anticipate it, with certainty. It’s like when you’re a kid, and you know it’s a guarantee that every Christmas, you go to grandma’s house with all the family, and yummy food and presents, and endless joy, and so all year long you have your hope set on Christmas. As Christians, we have been born again, by the Spirit of God, into a new life that brings with it a new, living, certain hope of eternal life!

This sure hope is our *inheritance* - the guarantee of what is to come. When you are born into a physical family, you are born into that family’s inheritance, whether it is an inheritance of rags or riches. In the same way, when we became Christians, we were born into the family of God. As His children, we, too, have an inheritance. What is our inheritance? Eternal life with God in the New Heavens and the New Earth! We receive what Jesus has earned by His perfect righteousness and obedience - which is *all things*! We will be raised with Him into eternal life, where there will be no more sorrow, suffering, or sin. No more pain, sickness, death, or grief. No more fear, anxiety, poverty, or uncertainty. *That* is the great hope of salvation that Christ has accomplished for us. *That* is the glorious inheritance that awaits us, if we hold fast to Christ by faith and persevere to the end. And this inheritance cannot be taken from us; it is “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.” An earthly inheritance can be stolen, corrupted, or even spent before you even see a cent of it. Not so with the inheritance we have in Christ. It is a sure and living hope.

But let me be clear: We only have this hope through faith in the gospel of Christ. This good news of hope in Christ is only good when we understand why we desperately need God’s grace and salvation. We all start off spiritually dead in our sins, enemies of God and without

hope in this world.. Every single one of us has sinned against the Lord, for we are all born physically with a sinful human nature. We have all sinned, have become enemies of God, and deserve his eternal wrath in Hell. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves; we don't just need to turn our lives around, but we need entirely new lives! It would be like trying to make ourselves be born. We can't do it. We have no control over whether or not we are born. In the same way, we cannot cause ourselves to be born spiritually either. Only God can do this. Only God can save us.

If you are an unbeliever this morning, the hard truth is that you do not have hope - not currently, at least. But you *can*. This is the hope held out for you: that God sent his only son, Jesus Christ, into the world to live the perfect life that you and I never could; Jesus Christ took our sins on Himself and died in our place, bearing the wrath of God we deserve. He was also raised from the dead, and whoever trusts in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, putting their faith and hope in Him alone, will be forgiven of our sin, declared righteous, and will be raised with Christ. There is nothing you can do to take away your sin, but Christ can! And He's already done everything necessary to do so! Look to Jesus and truly believe and trust in His finished work as sufficient to take away your sin and give you righteousness and eternal life in Him! This is the glorious hope of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ! This is how you, too,, can be born again!

When we repent of our sin and put our faith in Christ, we are born again spiritually, with a new life and sure hope of eternal life in Christ; and all of this is because of God's glorious grace and mercy. This is far better than we deserve! So no matter what else is going on in your life - no matter what trial you're going through, no matter how much pain and suffering you bear, you have reason to joyfully praise God because He offers you a living hope of eternal life and salvation, infinitely better than you deserve and far worth whatever you're going through now.

So first, we must remember how great and sure of a hope we have in Christ. Secondly, we must...

II. Rejoice, because God will preserve and refine our faith, even through suffering (vv.5-7)

We can have assurance that this blessed future hope of eternal life is ours because God guarantees to secure it *for us*. Christ accomplished salvation for us, in His death and resurrection. But He also promises to *apply* and *carry out* salvation in us, specifically, as individuals. Our hope is sure because *God promises to hold us fast, to guard, keep, and protect us from falling away*. We see this in verses 4 and 5: this 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.” In other words, He promises to preserve us so that we will obtain salvation and enter into eternal life in Him. *Our assurance is rooted not in ourselves, but in the very “power of God.”* You can have assurance of your salvation by trusting not in your own strength, but in the Lord’s. We trust in God’s grace, power, and faithfulness.

And how does he guard and keep us? How does he preserve us? “Through faith” (v.5). Now this might seem to contradict what we just talked about. We said that our confidence and assurance is rooted not in ourselves but the work and power of God. But this is accomplished through “*our faith,*” *through us believing*. Does it rest, after all, with us, then? If our assurance is based on us, and our own willpower to keep believing, and trusting no matter what, this wouldn’t be very encouraging. After all, I can always doubt my own faith and sincerity, can’t I? How do I know I won’t stop believing and fall away when the going gets too tough? But What God is promising here is that *he will never let us stop having faith. He is promising to sustain your faith in order to “guard” and “keep” you in Christ.*

The emphasis here is **not on those who have faith**, but is rather on **the object of our faith: Christ, and the promises of God** in the gospel that we are putting our faith in. The focus is not ultimately on our faith but on God’s faithfulness. That is what we are to trust in and ground our assurance in.

God promises to hold us fast even in the midst of our suffering. We see this in vv.6-7: “In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the test 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.”

We don't have to fear; when the going gets tough, we can just lean on the Lord, trusting that He will not let us go. But these verses also say more than this. Not only does God preserve us during our trials, but he even uses them as a *means* to preserve and strengthen us. God sovereignly uses our trials and suffering to *refine* and *strengthen* our faith through "testing." In v.6, Peter says we rejoice in this assurance even while we go through "various trials" - trials of *any kind*. But don't miss the fact that these "trials" come if they are "*necessary*." God is sovereign and in control. Nothing can happen to you unless God allows it. And He is your good and loving Father who has guaranteed an inheritance of eternal life and promises to see you safely home. And He says He will only allow suffering into your life *if it is necessary*. If you're suffering, know that it is no arbitrary; it's because God has deemed it *necessary* for you.

But this begs the question, then: necessary for what? Why does God deem it necessary to allow times of suffering and difficulty into our lives? V.7 tells us why: **So that our faith may be proven genuine and refined through testing.** Suffering reveals the "proof," or "tested genuineness" of our faith. The idea here is that suffering reveals whether or not we truly believe and have faith in the promises of God. Suffering reveals the fault lines in our lives and shows us how we're doing spiritually, how well we're trusting God.

But don't forget: Peter just told us that God promises to *sustain* our faith and hold us fast through such suffering and trials. How do we hold these thoughts together, then? It's because suffering doesn't *just* test our faith: it refines and strengthens our faith. God brings **refinement through testing**. The point is that this "testing" and "proving" has a *refining* quality. God deems it necessary to allow suffering into our lives by **refining** and **strengthening** our faith through *testing its genuineness*.

This is why Peter uses the analogy of "testing" gold: Gold is refined by being tested through the crucible of fire. It is "tested" by the refining fire in that its genuineness is proved because it does not perish. And yet it is refined and strengthened through the process because the impurities are stripped away, leaving behind the pure, genuine gold. Only the "precious" metal of gold survives the fire.

And yet, we are reminded, our faith is even more "precious" than gold. Gold will one day perish. And yet our faith will not. As we have already been reminded, our inheritance and

salvation are “imperishable,” “undefiled,” and “unfading.” How much more so, then, our faith survives the testing of fiery trials in this life! Our faith is from God, by His grace. God promises to sustain our faith, and even uses our sufferings and trials to refine and strengthen our faith.

Suffering is a way that God preserves us for salvation. **1.** God uses suffering to prove and refine our faith; **2.** God promises to preserve us, for our salvation, through our faith; **3.** Therefore, a part of how God holds us fast and preserves us in this life is by using suffering in our lives. *God sustains our faith and preserves us in Christ for our salvation, in part, through suffering.*

God uses our suffering to point us back to His faithfulness. He uses suffering to “stress test” our faith. He exposes the fault lines of doubt, sin, temptation, and weakness in our lives. And in doing so, he reminds us of his goodness and faithfulness, of the sure hope we have in Him. And so this is His grace to us: he points us away from ourselves and back to Jesus.

How does this play out? Let me give an example. Let’s say you have a ton of money; you have a great job, you make a great salary, and you have tons of money in the bank. YOu have a comfortable life with lots of financial stability. So you don’t worry or get anxious about money problems. You don’t really think about money much at all; you don’t have to. And so if someone asked if you were tempted to make money an idol, you might say, “No.”

But then the trial comes; crisis strikes. You lose your job and salary and your entire fortune over night. *Now* is the real time of testing: are you trusting in your money or in the Lord? How you respond to this trial will reveal a lot about where your heart is at. YOu may realize that you’ve been putting your faith in your money and comfort way more than you realize. And so now God has graciously given you an opportunity to confront that sin and temptation in your heart, to repent of it, and to turn and *trust Him instead of your money*. You draw near in your hour of need, you spend more time in the Word and prayer, you seek the Lord’s will, you pray and ask the Lord to provide and ask Him to help you trust in His promises to care for all your needs. And as the Lord walks with you through this trial, He proves Himself faithful, He strengthens and refines your faith and helps you trust and love Him all the more deeply.

So plug in whatever trial you’re going through. When suffering comes into the life of the Christian, God graciously uses it to turn us away from our vain hopes and idols back to Himself.

For He always proves faithful. The vain hopes of this world give way. And yet the sure hope of the gospel of Christ never fails, nor fades, nor perishes. It is secure. And the hope it offers is a true hope indeed! For in Christ we have the riches of eternal life, the very riches of the Kingdom of God and Heaven as our inheritance! 1. Faith in the Christ *Sustains* us in our suffering. 2. Faith in Christ is proven *genuine* in our suffering. 3. Faith in Christ is *strengthened* in our suffering.

III. We really can endure all trials with joyful faith in Christ (vv.8-9)

Peter assures us, over and over again throughout this passage, that we can indeed have joy in Christ amidst our various trials of all kinds throughout this life. In fact, it is *expected*. V.3 begins the passage with a joyful praise to God, indicating this entire passage is meant to spur us on in joyful worship in light of these truths. In v. 6, we “greatly rejoice” in the sure hope, inheritance, and salvation we have in Christ, even in the midst of “various trials.” Now in vv.8-9: “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.”

The point is clear: we are called to rejoice; we are able to have great joy, even through sufferings and trials in this life, because of the hope we have in Christ. Our great assurance of God’s faithfulness and love towards us cause us to have a firm faith in and love for Him (v.8).

However, this doesn’t mean that joy comes easily, or naturally, especially during times of suffering and difficulty. In fact, you might even read a passage like this and feel discouraged, remembering how *little* joy you have in these times. So a couple of things for us to keep in mind: First off, this joy doesn’t mean that we’re always happy; our joy in the Lord looks different in times of mourning and lament, which are still Biblical categories. Yet we maintain the joy of the Lord as we cry out to Him in faith. Nor does it mean that we are happy or joyful about our circumstances themselves. Our trials and sufferings themselves, especially when they are the direct result of sin and evil, are still wrong, and we should rightly lament them, and even pray and work against them. God uses them for good, but He does not condone nor delight in them, and neither should we. Furthermore, if you, like me, have failed in this regard recently, then remember point 1: we are forgiven by the blood of Christ.

So then, how do we persevere with joy, even in trying times?

1. **Remember that your salvation and your glorious future of eternal life with Christ far outweighs any suffering or trial in this life (6-9)** - It is well worth it to suffer now and have eternal life with God forever. When we put the sufferings and difficulties of this life into eternal perspective, these trials seem only temporary and they are far worth it that we may obtain eternal life. Think of it this way: would you rather have an easy and comfortable life now for the short time you have left on earth, and suffer eternity in Hell, or would you rather undergo trials and suffering now for this brief time and then rest in eternal peace and joy in Heaven? Hopefully, our answer is obvious!
2. **Remember that God uses suffering for your good, in order to refine your faith as a means of holding you fast until you reach the end of your race** - Your suffering is not meaningless. Whatever difficult trial you are going through right now, the Lord is sovereign over it. He loves you, and He will use this to strengthen your faith, hold you fast, and draw you closer to Him. So trust your Heavenly Father and rejoice in this amazing promise.
3. **Remember that suffering with faith results in God's glory (v.7)** - As v.7 tells us, The proven genuineness of our faith, because it comes from the grace and faithfulness of God, "results in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Therefore, our joy in such things rightly turns to worship and praise. God uses our suffering and our faith to glorify His name. When you endure suffering through faith, you are honoring and glorifying your Father in Heaven.

So it is good and right for us to respond to this word by praising God and proclaiming our faith in Him, yet again, by coming to eat of the Lord's Supper, a physical and tangible picture of the living hope of salvation we have by grace through faith in Christ alone. If you're a baptized believer in good standing with a gospel believing church, we invite you to join us at the Table in just a moment.

If that doesn't describe you, we invite you to instead turn to Christ in faith, so that this sure hope and inheritance life can be yours, too. Repent of your sin and unbelief and trust in Jesus Christ to save you. If you have any questions about this, we'd love to speak with you after the service. Until then, let's have a moment of silence as we prepare to come to the Table.