

1 Peter 1:6-9

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[0 : 0 0] Life has its ups and downs. We have good days and we have bad days. We experience times of joy and times of sorrow. The writer of Ecclesiastes famously expressed this reality that is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven. And he went on, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance. I think few of us would quibble with this as a realistic description of the human experience. What we might find more difficult to get our heads round is the possibility of experiencing joy and sorrow concurrently. Joy and sorrow would appear to be the most unlikely of bedfellows. Peter, in words that we find in the chapter that we've read, would seem to be saying just that, that the Christian experience can be and periodically, perhaps often is, one of both rejoicing and grieving or sorrowing concurrently. Let's read again the verses that we want to consider this evening in chapter 1 and verse 6. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have to, you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

These have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by the fire may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. And even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. In these verses, we have what we might call a most intriguing Petrine sandwich, as in a sandwich concocted by the apostle Peter. Not a sandwich you would find at Subway, but I trust a lot more nutritious for us this evening as we consider it. You see in verse 6a, Peter speaks of his readers greatly rejoicing. So, that's the top layer if you're picturing this sandwich. The believers to whom he writes greatly rejoicing. And then in verse 8, he also speaks of the experience of the believers as of inexpressible and glorious joy. That's the bottom part of the sandwich. But in the middle, sandwiched in between the reality of deep and exultant joy, Peter also recognizes the reality, the concurrent reality of suffering, grief in all kinds of trials.

And this evening, we want to try and digest this Petrine sandwich, and we'll do so, or try to do so, in the order followed by Peter, and already just mentioned. Noting the joy that he speaks of in verse 6, then noticing the trials and the grief that he speaks of in the verses that follow, and then finally, the manner in which Peter returns to the theme of the believer's experience of joy as he speaks of it in verses 8 and 9. First of all, then, let's notice what Peter says about the believer's experience of joy there at the beginning of verse 6. In this you greatly rejoice. Just these words will occupy us in the first part of the sermon. In this you greatly rejoice. And there are three matters that we want to consider in regard to this declaration of Peter, in this you greatly rejoice.

Our first concern is to establish what this is. In this you greatly rejoice. Well, what is this that Peter is referring to? What is the cause of the believer's rejoicing that Peter describes? Well, I think it's very clear that Peter is referring to what he has just been describing. This points back to what he has just been saying. And what has he been talking about. Well, he's been talking about what we were considering this morning. He's been talking about our inheritance kept for us in heaven. He's been talking about our living hope of enjoying full salvation, of taking our place in God's new creation.

[5 : 01] This is what Peter has been speaking about. And then he goes on to say, In this you greatly rejoice. Peter, I think, very clearly is speaking of the rejoicing that accompanies our appreciation and expectation of future blessing. In this we rejoice. As his readers rejoiced, so we too. In this we rejoice. That's the first thing I wanted to just notice regarding this first declaration that we're considering. In this you greatly rejoice. But the second thing I want us to notice is the nature of this rejoicing. What does Peter say about the nature of the rejoicing that is the experience of the believers? Well, he speaks of them greatly rejoicing. There's an evident endeavor by Peter to describe the magnitude of their rejoicing. This is no small matter. They greatly rejoice in these truths in these truths and in the expectation of what awaits them. But it's not only the adjective that they greatly rejoice that is interesting, but the very word that he uses. The word translated rejoice, certainly as used in the New Testament, carries the meaning of deep spiritual joy, the joy of salvation, the joy that comes from and rejoicing, the joy of salvation. This is the nature of the rejoicing spoken of by Peter regarding the believers. They greatly rejoice in God and in His salvation, in these spiritual realities that he has been making reference to in the previous verses. But the third thing I want us to notice about this declaration of Peter with which we're beginning our thoughts this evening, in this you greatly rejoice.

The third thing I want us to notice, and I think it's a telling point to make, and I think also a challenging one, and that is that what Peter is doing at the beginning of verse 6, he's not exhorting the believers he is writing to, but he is describing the believers he is writing to. Now, you might think, well, that's not a great consequence. But just pause for a moment to think what this means, what the implication of this is.

Peter is not saying to the believers, you know, in the light of what God has done for you, in the light of this great inheritance that awaits you, you ought to rejoice. He's not saying to them, you really should rejoice, you know, in the light of what God has done and of His great grace and generosity. You know, you really are duty-bound to rejoice. That's not what he's doing. What Peter is saying is, you are rejoicing.

He's describing what they are doing rather than exhorting them to do it. I think for Peter, it's inconceivable that the believers could do anything other than rejoice at the prospect of their God-kept inheritance. And I said this is challenging because I'm not sure if it is always true of us as believers. And probably the best I could do in this regard is to simply pose the question to you this evening, what about you? Do you greatly rejoice as you consider your inheritance and what is kept for you in heaven? Well, that is what we can say regarding this first part of this section that speaks of the rejoicing of the believers. And what we want to do now is to move on really to the meat of the matter and the filling of our sandwich, which is Peter's consideration of this reality of the believers' trials and accompanying suffering. You see, in verse 6b, and immediately what he says following his declaration that they greatly rejoice, and into verse 7, Peter describes for us the believers' experience of trials and the accompanying grief or sorrow. And what does Peter say about our experience of suffering? I think we can, of course, speak in those terms. What does Peter say about our experience of suffering? Because what he says of the believers that he is writing to is surely true also of us. Well, I think we can divide what he says, or the instruction that he gives, under two main headings. First of all, the reality of suffering, and secondly, the purpose of suffering. Both of these things, are touched on, more than touched on, by Peter in these brief words that he dedicates to the matter here at this point in his letter. First of all, then, the reality of suffering. Peter identifies a number of features or aspects, we might say, of the trials and the accompanying grief in the experience of the believer. And there's four aspects that I want us to notice regarding the reality of the believer's suffering. The first one that we can notice that Peter mentions or makes reference to is its duration.

What does Peter say regarding the duration of our suffering, of the trials that we endure? Well, what does it say there in verse 6? In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. I think it's clear there what part of what he says has a bearing on this matter of suffering's duration. Peter says, now for a little while.

[11 : 10] Before we move on to think about the significance or the meaning of a little while, which is really what we're most concerned with, let's just notice that little word now, though now for a little while.

I think that that word is significant because it really confirms what we've already been taking as a given, that the rejoicing and the suffering are concurrent. You see, notice at the beginning of the verse he says, in this you greatly rejoice, the present. He's describing what they are doing there and then. And then immediately goes on to say, though now you're suffering. So, it's very evident, I think, in the language that he uses that Peter is understanding this experience of rejoicing and of suffering as being concurrent. As I say, I've already taken that as a given, but I think that little word now confirms what we've been taking as a given. But move on to this matter of a little while. We're thinking of the duration of the believer's suffering, and Peter speaks of for a little while. How long is a little while? Quite difficult to define that, isn't it? What does a little while mean? How long is it?

Of course, that depends on the nature of the trial that we are enduring. The little while that Peter speaks of could be. Often it will not be, but it could be several years, even decades in the life of a believer. Now, we might consider that if that were the case, such a marathon of trial or suffering, for it to be described as a little while might seem to trivialize it. But of course, that is not what Peter is doing, by no means. Rather, what he is doing is giving the believers a sense of perspective, of eternal perspective. What Peter is saying is that the suffering that you are enduring, enduring, however long it might seem to be, and indeed is in your experience, is in comparison to the eternal enjoyment of our inheritance, it is but a little while. And in what Peter is saying here, we do hear echoes of the words of Paul addressed to the believers in Corinth. We find that in 2 Corinthians 4 and verse 17, words that I think we are familiar with, for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. That little while may be, on some occasions, a very little while. It may be a day of sorrow. It may be a week. It may be a month. But it may be, and of course we know, and we're conscious in, if it's not our own experience and the experience of others, how there can be trials that last way, way, way longer and seem never-ending. And yet, even such trials come under this umbrella description of Peter, of a little while. So, as regards the reality of suffering,

Peter touches on this matter of its duration, but he also touches on the manner of, or the matter of, its variety, the trials that we endure. Notice what he says, In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. Especially those last words, all kinds of trials. I think it is the case that Peter is deliberately broad in the language he uses. He is not just speaking of persecution. We touched on last week how the context of this letter was not a context of intense persecution, though there were sporadic bursts of persecution. No doubt the believers were being pressed in in different ways because of their faith, but persecution wasn't the overwhelming reality for them, certainly not violent persecution. And certainly here, when Peter speaks of all kinds of trials, he is going and looking beyond persecution, looking beyond even those trials that are a direct result of our

Christian identity and witness. Peter is saying that all trials and any kind of trial come under this description of all kinds of trials. Those trials that are common to all men and women, regardless of whether we are Christians or not. It could be ill health of ourselves or of others, the loss of a loved one. We could multiply the examples. We could multiply the examples. Different kinds of trials, troubles at work, lack of work, financial difficulties, and we could go on. They are not the monopoly of Christians.

[16 : 26] Many suffer in this way. But what Peter is saying is that whatever the trial, the many and manifold trials that you might have to face, all of these are covered by the instruction that I am giving concerning them.

So, in terms of ourselves and the practicality of this, I think it's very practical because whatever your trial that you're maybe confronting or enduring or suffering, even now, that is covered by what Peter has to say. But Peter, I think, also touches on one other aspect of the reality of suffering, and that is its intensity. And what Peter goes on to say about the purpose of our trials, that is what he goes on to say from verse 7, and we're going to come to that in a moment, but we're jumping ahead a little bit just to notice this aspect, the intensity of our trials, because when he does consider the matter of purpose, he employs the comparison of gold being refined by fire. We notice there in verse 7, these have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire. And by that comparison, we are given an indication that the trials that we will often endure as believers will be, or certainly can be, of great intensity. Of course, they're not always of great intensity. There are different trials. There are, as Peter says, all kinds of trials. Some are passing, some are, we might say, manageable. They don't produce deep and profound sorrow or grief, but there are those, and Peter is very conscious that there are those that are of great intensity. And as I say, this comparison that he employs points in that direction. So, we can notice here how the reality of suffering is dealt with or is touched on, as Peter touches on or makes reference to its duration, its variety, its intensity. And one other thing, one very significant thing that

Peter also touches on here, and that is what we might call its necessity. Trials or suffering, the necessity of them. This aspect of the believers' trials and the suffering that accompanies our trials leads us in helpfully to what will follow this discussion of its necessity. It will lead us into what we want to say about the purpose of suffering, though we're not quite there yet. But why do we say, or on what grounds can we speak of, the necessity of trials and of suffering? Well, the reason we can speak in these terms is because that is the language that Peter himself uses. Notice there in verse 6, in this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief. Especially the way that's phrased, you may have had to suffer. Peter doesn't say, though now for a little while you may be suffering or you may have suffered. No, he says you may have had to suffer. And that is deliberate on Peter's part. The language that he uses is the language of necessity. It may be more clear or more evident what Peter is saying if we notice how that verse is translated in another version. And here I'm going to just quote from the English Standard Version, the ESV. There this part of our section is translated in this way, in this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials. So, there it's more explicit, this reality that our trials are in some sense necessary. Now, in what sense? What does that mean? Why do we speak of, or why does Peter speak of trials and the resulting grief as necessary?

Well, I think the necessity of them can only be understood in the light of God's good and infinitely wise purposes for His people. Our trials are necessary as they form part of God's good purposes for us.

Now, that may be difficult to understand, may be difficult to accept, perhaps to understand, maybe that's not so difficult, but to accept that is difficult. But it is, when we do accept it and we do come to terms with it, it is actually very encouraging because it reminds us that our trials are never random. Our trials are never pointless. They only and always occur if necessary. And here we are speaking of God's necessity.

[21 : 37] Now, this is not to say that we will always understand God's purposes. We often won't understand His purposes. It's not even to say that we will always concur with God's necessity. We may think very differently to Him as to what would be useful or necessary for us. But nonetheless, the necessity of them is grounded in God's wise and good purposes for us. If I could maybe just quote, not something I often do, but just quote what John Calvin says in regard to this truth that Peter is commenting on or getting across by means of these words. This is what Calvin says, Peter's purpose is to show that God does not try His people without reason. For if God afflicted us without a cause, it would be grievous to bear. Hence, Peter has taken an argument for consolation from the design of God, not because the purpose always appears to us, but because we ought to be fully persuaded that it ought to be so because it is God's will. This really boils down to learning from our own Lord who was able to declare not my will, but Thy will be done. So, when we notice this other or this fourth aspect of the reality of suffering, its necessity, it does lead us to the second point concerning our trial and suffering, and that is its purpose. We said that there were two things we wanted to think about in regard to our suffering, not only its reality, but also its purpose. In verse 7, Peter clearly states that there is a purpose to our suffering, and he indicates what the purpose is. These have come so that. The language of purpose is very clear. These have come so that. There is a purpose, and he's going to go on to tell us what that purpose is. And I think we can distinguish three overlapping or connected purposes. The first one is one we've maybe in the passing touched on, and that is the testing and refining of our faith. Now, this is not stated explicitly by Peter, but it is the clear implication of the comparison made with the refining of gold. Fire does not destroy gold. Rather, it purifies it. So it is with our faith. In fact, even gold, as Peter notices or comments, ultimately will perish, despite its refined state, whereas our faith of greater worth than gold is imperishable, just like our inheritance. So, by utilizing this comparison with gold, we can identify this purpose in suffering to test, to refine, to purify our faith. But secondly, and this Peter does state explicitly, its purpose is for the proving of our faith. You see, that is what he very expressly says. These have come so that, and then we jump to what he says further on, so that your faith may be proved genuine. The necessary trials ordained by God for his people serve to prove the genuineness of our faith. Now, again, this is difficult for us to altogether understand or accept, but Peter is very clear on this point. And then there's a third purpose.

We need to move on. The third purpose is the resultant praise of all of this. You see, he goes on to say there in verse 7, these have come so that your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes, even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Now, the big question here concerns what or who receives the praise spoken of.

Now, the language of praise, glory, and honor at first sight immediately draws to our mind the idea that, well, surely it is God who is the one who is to receive this praise, glory, and honor. Of course, he is worthy of receiving praise, glory, and honor. However, as we follow the thread of Peter's argument, it does seem more likely that what Peter is actually saying is that it is our faith that is the object of praise and honor. God himself praises the believer who, in the midst of trials and through trials, has been enabled to prove his faith as genuine. This would certainly tie in with what Peter goes on to say in this same letter. If we jump to chapter 5 and verse 4, there we read, and when the chief shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Yes, we as saved sinners receive a crown of glory, not because of any merit of our own, but God in his grace and generosity grants us this crown of glory. We're also reminded of the commendation given to the faithful servant in the parable of the talents. Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master. Praise, honor, glory, being distilled on the faithful servant. And so, the purpose of suffering is the testing, the refining of our faith, the proving of our faith, and ultimately the resultant praise that is afforded to this proven and purified faith. But Peter, though careful to deal with the reality and purpose of trials and suffering, cannot help but return to the concurrent reality of joy in the believer's experience. And that brings us to the final part very briefly, as Peter picks up again on this matter of joy. In verse 6, at the beginning of the verse, as we've already noticed, the cause of joy was our living hope, the prospect of that joy which is as yet, or of that experience which is as yet a future experience. But in verses 8 and 9, the cause of our joy is a present reality rather than a future prospect. Though you have not yet seen Him, you love Him, even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him, and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. We rejoice in the present receiving of the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls. We rejoice in the present relationship we enjoy with our Savior. We love Him. We believe in Him. We trust in Him. There's something quite endearing about what comes across as Peter's commendation of the believers who love and trust, despite never having seen Jesus. The language he uses, though you have not seen Him, you love Him.

Even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him. There seems to be in Peter this sense of pride as he considers these believers who, unlike him, who had seen Jesus, who had lived with Jesus, who had walked with Jesus, who had laughed with Jesus, who had cried with Jesus, who had heard Jesus teach Him face to face. And yes, he loves Him, and he trusts in Him. He says, but you, you've never seen Him, and you love Him. You don't see Him, and yet you trust in Him. And he praises them. He honors them. He recognizes the love and the faith that they have. But the point regarding their joy is the one that we end with.

[29 : 56] The joy that flows from receiving the salvation of our souls, from enjoying this relationship with our Savior. The description Peter gives of this joy is even richer than the language used in verse 6.

In verse 6, he speaks of the believers greatly rejoicing. But here in verse 8, as he speaks of their present experience of receiving salvation, of a relationship with Jesus Christ, he speaks of them being filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. What can we say about this joy? Well, really, if Peter can't describe it, and he can't, that's why he uses the language of inexpressible. If Peter can't describe it, then I am certainly not going to try. It is inexpressible. It is a joy that cannot be described, only experienced, only experienced, that God would grant us a measure of that joy.

Well, as we draw things to a close, let me just say this to you this evening. Yes, there is a time for joy and there is a time for sorrow. But let us be aware that oftentimes it is the same time that we are to experience these things. Let us pray.