

***A JOYFUL PEOPLE***  
**1 Peter 1:6-9**  
**September 21, 2008 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church**

In his fine work *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cure*, Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes the following observation concerning the Christian life:

From the moment we become Christians we become the special objects of the devil. As he besieged and attacked our Lord, so does he besiege and attack all the Lord's people... It is because we belong to Him (Christ) that the devil will do his utmost to disturb and upset us. *He cannot rob us of our salvation, thank God, but while he cannot rob us of our salvation he can make us miserable.* He can, if we are foolish enough to listen to him, *seriously limit our enjoyment of our salvation.* That is precisely what he tries to do constantly.<sup>1</sup>

Lloyd-Jones goes on to show that those who are “spiritually depressed” are robbed of their joy in Christ by any number of things that distort the freedom the believer has in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The wonder of their justification by faith alone in Christ alone according to God's grace alone is attacked by Satan in various ways: by getting us to focus on one particular sin, by comparing ourselves to others, by leading us to dwell on the past or to fear what lies ahead, to deceive us into relying on our feelings rather than the sure Word of God. But one of the devil's greatest fiery darts is to lead us to have a wrong understanding of the place of suffering in the Christian life.

We are told today by some who claim to have a deeper understanding of the gospel and a fuller filling of the Spirit that suffering is never God's will for the believer. If you are suffering, we are told then it must be a result of sin in your life. We might call these “the friends of Job.” You remember that Job's friends were convinced, and thusly tried to convince him, that all that happened to him, his loss of family, loss of face, loss of fortune, and loss of health, were all somehow related to sin in his life. They assessed Job's sufferings as God's judgment. But what they failed to recognize is that all of these sufferings were instigated by God for the purpose of broadening and strengthening Job's faith and to teach his “friends” the truth.

The same is true for the believer today. As we will see in our text this morning, those who teach that glory comes apart from suffering are doing the work of the evil one. It is a lie from the very depths of hell. In no place in Scripture is the Christian promised that it is never God's will for them to suffer. As a matter of fact, just the opposite is true. Peter exhorts the believers to which he wrote, and us as well, to *rejoice in our present sufferings because they are a means of God's grace to move us along in our walk of faith.* That is the theme of the entire letter and the pointed teaching of this text. So while many today proclaim God's glory for the believer without sufferings, Peter says you cannot have glory apart from sufferings, sufferings by which our faith is strengthened and our joy is made full and our glory is made complete. Therefore, the Christian's joy is directly tied to a faith that is sometimes tested by God through sufferings. It is that faith and the resulting joy that we look at together this morning.

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<sup>1</sup> D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Its Cures*, 66 (italics mine).

## **I. A Faith that Begins Right (1:6a)**

Our text opens with the words, “**In this you greatly rejoice.**” “**In this**” points back to the opening verses of the letter that we have looked at over the past few weeks. The cause of this rejoicing is the gift of salvation that Peter has already described. Two things mark a person that has a faith that begins right.

### **1. A special people**

First, they are a special people chosen by God, set apart by Him to have a relationship with Him. This was all according to God, who according to His foreknowledge determined before the foundation of the world who would be His children and set them apart to be holy and blameless (1:2; Eph. 1:3). There was nothing in man that led God to bestow on them His saving mercies and there was nothing in man that would so incline Him to love God and serve Him. As John so aptly put it, “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins... We love because He first loved us” (1 Jn. 10, 19). That describes God’s foreknowledge, not simply looking down the corridors of time and knowing who would and wouldn’t receive Christ, but entering into a loving relationship with those who were at enmity with Him.

Peter goes on to say that this was accomplished “by the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (1:2). Those who were “dead in their trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1) had no capacity to love God. They loved self rather than God, they worshipped and served the creature rather than their Creator (Rom. 1:25). In all ungodliness and unrighteousness they suppressed and exchanged what they knew to be true for a lie (Rom. 1:18, 25). This is called the depravity of man that we will look at more together this evening as we begin a series on the doctrines of grace. Here we see that God in His grace, when man was dead, sent the Holy Spirit to shatter a hard, obstinate heart and change their will, their affections, their passions from the creature to Himself in applying salvation to those whom He foreknew.

This salvation was applied by the Spirit, and accomplished by Jesus Christ in His atoning work on the Cross. Those whom God foreknew are “sprinkled with His blood” (1:2). His sacrifice in our place, the once for all sacrifice for sin, accomplished God’s purpose. To be “sprinkled with His blood” is to receive the very righteousness of Christ, so that God the Father looks at us just as though we never sinned. To be “sprinkled with His blood” is to have all of our sins put on Christ so that the guilt for our sins and the penalty associated with those sins has been satisfied. This is the great work of justification in Christ alone.

Those who trust in Christ’s saving merits alone through God’s grace alone applied by the Spirit alone have a faith that begins right. They have a faith that, though it may be small and wavering, have faith nonetheless. And it is a faith that is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness.

### **2. A hopeful people**

Peter then reminds his readers that this salvation is secured by the power of God (1:5). What God has accomplished through Christ for His children can never be reversed. This is the source of hope for all who believe. Their inheritance is one described by Peter as “imperishable and undefiled and will never fade away” (1:4). It is an inheritance already “reserved in heaven” (1:4). So Peter stresses the fact that the supreme cause of our salvation is God. We can have hope because God saved us by His mercy, causing us to be born again, raised to a new life in Christ and His resurrection (1:3).

However, all of this is received “through faith” (1:5). Faith is the means provided by God that activates this salvation in which we have hope from the human perspective. Faith is taking

hold of all that God has done in Christ. It is trusting in God and His way of salvation rather than on our own works. Christianity provides the only hope for a desperate people. All other world religions are based upon the works of man, which are nothing more than filthy rags in God's sight. The Christian can have hope because his faith is in the merits of another, the righteousness of Christ. That describes true faith, and it is the only faith that begins right.

Dear friends, if your faith is in anything or anyone other than Christ alone, then you are to be most pitied. In our pluralistic age, we are led to believe that all roads lead to salvation. As long as you are seeking to do good then everything will be all right in the end. But that is not what Scripture says, Scripture that proclaims the redemptive history of man in Christ alone from beginning to end. Do you have a faith that began right? If not, then you will not have a faith that continues right.

## **II. A Faith that Continues Right (1:6b-8)**

Having reminded them of their cause for rejoicing, Peter then interjects, “**even though.**” The very words give what is coming next. What follows we glean will be something that could challenge our faith and our hope, something that from our earthly perspective would not further our faith but be an obstacle to our faith. It is here that Peter introduces for the first time directly the theme of suffering, a theme which he expands upon throughout the letter.

### **1. The necessity of sufferings (v. 6b)**

Having established the road to glory in the opening verses and the resulting hope the believer should have in this glory that is already theirs, Peter lets them know that the path to glory in this life will often be paved with sufferings, and this too is a reason to rejoice. He does so rather subtly by the words, “**if necessary.**” I say subtly because Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is easing his way into this topic that was misunderstood by his readers and continues to be misunderstood by many today. I say subtly because “**if necessary**” spoke directly to the condition that these already found themselves. They were already in the midst of suffering, so what Peter is really proclaiming is that these sufferings *were* somehow necessary. We will see why they were necessary as we look to their purpose in a moment.

It is important, however, that we consider the *nature* of the sufferings of which Peter speaks. Often our sufferings are simply us getting what we deserve because of our ungodly actions towards others. The thief on the cross that came to his senses demonstrated this when he cried out, “We indeed *are* suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong” (Luke 23:41). Peter certainly understood this. In 1 Peter 2:20 he asks, “For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience?” In describing the way of the wicked in 2 Peter 2:12-13 Peter wrote, “But these, like unreasoning animals, born as creatures of instinct to be captured and killed, reviling where they have no knowledge, will in the destruction of those creatures also be destroyed, suffering wrong as the wages of doing wrong.”

However, I want us to look at the place that the suffering of the saints *for good* has in Scripture, and the verses are numerous. The idea that it is never God's will for His people to suffer simply has no biblical basis. As a matter of fact, I would suggest that it is heretical. The Scriptures are replete with the teaching that suffering for good is part of God's plan for His people. I emphasize suffering for good. Often our sufferings are for doing what is right, and these sufferings are from the Lord.

Consider Joseph. When tempted by Potiphar's wife, he resisted, asking, “How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?” and the second time he fled. What was the

result? He was imprisoned and forgotten for a time (Gen. 39-40). Later, when confronting his brothers who sold him into slavery, Joseph gives one of the best summaries of suffering for good in Scripture, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Gen. 50:19, 20). Or what about Job? The Lord’s own confession of him was that he was “blameless, upright, fearing God and turning away from evil” and yet in the same instant, twice, the Lord asks Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job?” (Job 1:1, 8; 2:3). What about David, who we know had sin in his life, yet God called him a man after His own heart and allowed him to suffer under Saul.

At this point, those who teach that it is never God’s will for His child to suffer often interject, “But that was the Old Testament saint. We have Christ, who suffered for us and took all our sufferings upon Himself on the Cross. Therefore, we need not suffer and when we do it is because we are not faithful.” But while I could wax eloquent on how these have misinterpreted texts that speak to Christ sufferings, such as “The chastening for our well-being *fell* upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed” (Is. 53:5), I will simply note the joyful sufferings of the saints in the New Testament after Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Consider the Apostles in Acts 5:

**Acts 5:29, 41** – <sup>29</sup> We must obey God rather than men.” The leaders were furious and wanted to kill them. Gamaliel’s advice, “If you kill these men, you will incite a riot. Consider the fact that others have come and made His claims similar to His and gained a following and these movements have died out.” His assessment, a statement of truth, “If this is the actions of men, it won’t last. But if it is of God, you can’t overthrow it anyway.” And then notice the attitude of the Apostles after being beaten and released, <sup>41</sup> So they went on their way from the presence of the Council, rejoicing that they had been considered worthy to suffer shame for *His* name.

Peter understood this as well.

**1 Peter 3:13-17** – <sup>13</sup> Who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? <sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed. AND DO NOT FEAR THEIR INTIMIDATION, AND DO NOT BE TROUBLED, <sup>15</sup> but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always *being* ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; <sup>16</sup> and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame. <sup>17</sup> For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.

**1 Peter 5:7, 10** – <sup>7</sup> Cast all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you...<sup>10</sup> After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you.

And the Apostle Paul:

**Philippians 1:29-30** – <sup>29</sup> For to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, <sup>30</sup> experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear *to be* in me.

**2 Thessalonians 1:4-5** – <sup>4</sup> We ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. <sup>5</sup> *This is* a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering.

What should we deduce from the plain teaching of Scripture?

**Psalm 119:75-76** – <sup>75</sup> I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. <sup>76</sup> O may Your lovingkindness comfort me, According to Your word to Your servant.

But what is the reason for these sufferings for doing good, for living for Christ and for His name's sake?

## 2. The purpose of sufferings (v. 7)

First, to prove and purify our faith. **“So 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.”** The faith that continues right is the faith that is tested. By nature, we don't like tests. However, tests are needed to prove that we have truly understood whatever it is we are being tested on. Of course, from an earthly perspective, these tests are not always the best gauges of our understanding. They *sometimes* fall short because they are bad tests or because we had a bad day. But that is never the case with God's tests of faith. They are always right, good, and accurate assessments of our faith and given for our own good. *Have you ever considered that God already knows how faithful we really are?* It is we who do not know, so God tests us for our own benefit so that we might know ourselves how faithful we really are. This is one of the ways God provides to help us, “Be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you” (2 Pet. 1:10).

This testing is illustrated by a fiery trial and the smelting process of gold. Gold is a precious and valuable metal. Yet to attain its purest form, it has to be refined by fire so that the impurities can be removed. Peter says that sufferings of various kinds are caused by God to prove the believers faith is genuine. Just as fire purifies gold, so trials cleanse us from all the filth and leave us to trust in God. The difference, Peter reminds us, is that the faith of God's people is more valuable than gold because one day gold will perish, but the faith of the believer endures until the end. One writer suggests, “It is as if Peter is saying to his readers, ‘Your faith will lead you right into the presence of God—into heaven itself.’”<sup>2</sup> Or as Peter put it, **“may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”**

A second purpose for sufferings is to focus our faith. **“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.”** What a beautiful definition of true faith! The writer of Hebrews described faith as “the assurance of *things* hoped for (that Peter covered in 1:3-5), the conviction of things not seen.” These to whom Peter wrote had never seen Christ face-to-face, yet their normal everyday experience is to love Him. Peter addresses the present age with the word **“now.”** Though not seeing Him at the present time, they still believe in Him and are filled inexpressible joy and the fullest praise.

**1 Peter 4:12-14, 19** – <sup>12</sup> 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; <sup>13</sup> *but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing*, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation. <sup>14</sup> If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you... <sup>19</sup> those also who suffer according to the will of God shall entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right.

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Bentley, *Living for Christ*, 35.

Peter reminds his readers of the identification they have in sharing Christ's sufferings, and in this they should rejoice.

### 3. The fellowship of our sufferings (v. 8)

We have One with whom we have fellowship in our sufferings, the One who Himself "for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2).

**Luke 24:26** – "Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?" (Christ's death always in the context of *suffering*)

**Acts 3:18** – But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled.

Why did Christ suffer?

**Hebrews 2:9-10** – <sup>9</sup> But we do see Him who was made for a little while lower than the angels, *namely*, Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, so that by the grace of God He might taste death for everyone. <sup>10</sup> For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through sufferings.

How did Christ suffer?

**1 Peter 2:19-25** – <sup>19</sup> For this *finds* favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly. <sup>20</sup> For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer *for it* you patiently endure it, this *finds* favor with God. <sup>21</sup> For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, <sup>22</sup> WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; <sup>23</sup> and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting *Himself* to Him who judges righteously; <sup>24</sup> and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. <sup>25</sup> For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls.

Paul ties His sufferings together with ours :

**Romans 8:16-17** – <sup>16</sup> The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup> and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed *we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him*.

**Philippians 3:8-11** – <sup>8</sup> More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup> and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, <sup>10</sup> *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings*, being conformed to His death; <sup>11</sup> in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

### **III. A Faith that Ends Right (1:9)**

Having shared that suffering is a means of God's grace to strengthen one's faith, Peter gives the ultimate conclusion for those sufferings, "**obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.**" Curtis Vaughan suggests, "The context suggests that the joy that suffering Christians experience is the joy of the end time overflowing into the present."<sup>3</sup> Twofold – present and future – as we go through various tests and trials in the present, we obtain more and more of this future goal, the complete "**salvation of our souls.**" This happens as we continually believe in Christ and continually rejoice because of what He has accomplished for us. Notice Peter did not say, "obtaining as the outcome of your *works*" the salvation of your soul, but "**your faith.**" This is a faith that begins right and continues and grows in Him and by Him *especially* in the midst of God-ordained sufferings.

**Romans 8:18** – For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.

### **Conclusion**

**Exodus 3:7** – The LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings."

1. Our present sufferings are often good.
2. Our present sufferings are temporary.

**1 Peter 1:6** – even though now for a little while

**Psalm 30:5-6** – <sup>5</sup> Weeping may last for the night, But a shout of joy *comes* in the morning. <sup>6</sup> Now as for me, I said in my prosperity, "I will never be moved."

3. Are you a joyful sufferer?

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<sup>3</sup> Curtis Vaughan, *1,2 Peter, Jude*, 27.