

Rejoicing in Trials – 1 Peter 1:6-9: June 15, 2008

Peter continues his introduction to his letter to the pilgrims of the dispersion – that is, those who had to leave their own countries because of their faith in Christ as Savior. He is writing to them to encourage them in their faith, and as he does so he emphasizes some very important truths.

First, he tells them that they had been chosen by God (verse 2) and that the whole Trinity was involved in their salvation. It is this foundational truth that cause him to praise God with the words – *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,...”*

But, he doesn't stop there. He tells more of what God, through His abundant mercy has done – listen carefully to what he says: *“who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”*

As I said last week, these verse should cause us to stand up and take notice. Because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, we have a living hope – and that hope is a place reserved in heaven for us. And this place in which we have a guaranteed reservation is a place that is perfect – it is without sin and corruption and it will always be there.

And so he continues with his words of encouragement. Turn with me to 1 Peter 1:6-9 (READ). Now, we must always remember that what he tells his original readers is that which applies to us also – that is the very reason God provided His Word for us. So consider what he says.

First, he tells them that should greatly rejoice – *“In this you greatly rejoice ...”* In other words, in light of all that he has just told them they need to greatly rejoice. God has chosen them and he has prepared and reserved a place in heaven for them, so therefore, *“In this you greatly rejoice ...”*

But then he tells them that in spite of what God has done for them, their lives were not going to be a bed of roses. Consider what he tells them next: *“though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,...”*

Remember, the theme of this letter is rejoicing in spite of persecution. Christians were persecuted severely for their faith. Jesus told them it was going to happen. He told his Apostles, and all who would follow him.

In the Sermon on the Mount, recorded for us in Matthew 5:11,12, we read the words of our Savior: *“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”*

In Matthew 10:22 Jesus says: *“And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.”* In Luke 21:12, Jesus tells his disciples: *“But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons. You will be brought before kings and rulers for My name's sake.”* And in John 15:18 Jesus says: *“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you.”*

Later on in this same letter Peter says: 1 Peter 2:20-23: “*For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously;*”

The world hates the Christian. It was true in the time of Christ, and it is true now. Read world history to see how many times people have tried to wipe out Christianity. Remember that Hitler not only targeted Jews, but Christians also – as did the former Soviet Union and China. Regardless of how you feel about President Bush and what he has done or hasn't done, I am convinced that the reason that people hate him so much is because of his outspoken faith in Christ.

Jesus said, you can expect this. And so does Peter. But, there is a purpose for the trials and persecution that we go through. Consider what he says next: “*that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire...*” In other words, the trials that we are undergoing will prove the genuineness of our faith.

Metals are refined by fire – and God uses the trials that we go through to try us and see if our faith is real and how strong it is. Anyone who has read the book about my wife's parents can see how they were tested by fire, and you can read any number of the multitude of missionary biographies out there and see the same thing.

In the Scriptures, we have the words of our Savior himself in the Parable of the Sower, where he talks about the seeds that have been planted on different kinds of soil. And as Jesus explains the parable, he says this about the stony soil: Matthew 13:20,21: “*But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.*”

We also read of the trials and tribulations of Stephen, Peter and Paul and how they remained steadfast under persecution, even death.

Why, because as Peter continues, he reminds them of what awaits them – the future glory that will be revealed, as he continues: “*may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ...*”

As I said last week and at my father's funeral, we have something better awaiting for us — something far, far — infinitely better – waiting for us. Peter tells us that this will happen *at the revelation of Jesus Christ ...* That is, when we leave this earth we will receive our inheritance in heaven, the ultimate will not happen until the return of Jesus Christ.

Remember, the return of Christ is imminent. It can happen at any moment. 1st Century Christians were looking for it, as are 21st Century Christians. But just because he hasn't returned we still have faith in him. We have faith in him as the Christ who came, lived, died and rose from the dead for our salvation. This is what those who Peter were writing to believed – the same truth that we believe today.

And the same truths that he said about their faith, is the same for us: 1:8: “*whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,*”

Think about this – Peter, along with the other Apostles, and a relatively few others had actually been eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Jesus – his teaching and his preaching, his death, resurrection and ascension.

And through the witness of those who had been there, multitudes were coming to faith in Christ as Savior. Remember, those who believed, had not seen Christ – they had only heard about him.

In our study of Acts we have seen this repeatedly – the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, Lyddia, the seller of purple, and the Philippian jailer. In all these cases – and with all who believed – they had not seen Christ. They had only heard the testimony of those who had been with him and seen him.

And then, as the church grew – other Christians, those who had not been eyewitnesses to the life and ministry of Christ, were leading others to Christ – the snowball effect – but they hadn't actually seen him either ... they actually hadn't been with him. Yet, through the grace of God, these people believed.

This is who Peter is addressing: *“whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,”* In other words, even though you haven't seen Jesus Christ, you believe that he is your Savior, and that you have been willing to flee your homes because of your faith in him, you are willing to undergo trials and tribulations, and yet you *rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ...*

This is the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who believe. None of us have seen Christ, and yet we believe. None of us were eyewitnesses to his life, death, resurrection and ascension – and we yet believe the gospel accounts.

We believe what has been writing about Jesus in the Scriptures. We believe what untold millions of Christians have believed throughout the centuries – as the Apostle Paul put it so clearly in 1 Corinthians 15:3,4: *“For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures,”*

This is the gospel. It is simple and it is clear. And then as we turn back to 1 Peter we see the result: 1:9: *“receiving the end of your faith; the salvation of your souls.”*

This is what it is all about. At Pop's funeral, Rev. Dosch, who had baptized my father in 1956, recounted that time – and how at his baptism, tear came to his eyes. The impact of the gospel – that Jesus came, lived, died and rose from the dead for him brought tears to his eyes. This was his expression of the joy his salvation.

Again, this is what it is all about. I said to more than one person at my father's funeral – I don't know how people without faith do it. How do they approach death? How do they deal with death?

Because, as you see my friends, we have a “living hope”, we have a place reserved in heaven for us, but the bottom line is that we have the salvation of our souls. We are sinners ... we were dead in our trespasses and sins, and so we needed a Savior.

God provided that Savior in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and in His abundant grace and mercy he has chosen some of us to be the recipients of that salvation – coming to faith in Christ – *“receiving the end of your*

faith; the salvation of your souls.” Praise be to God.

So, as we go through the various trials in our lives, we should thank God for them, as they prove the genuineness of our faith, and the fact, that in the midst of them we can still have joy because we know the end of the story – the salvation of our souls and a place reserved in heaven for us.