

JOY IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS

A Meditation on 1 Peter 1:3-8

At times, Christians will simultaneously rejoice and grieve. We greatly rejoice as we anticipate the consummation of our salvation, while we also suffer grief for a little while (maybe 1 year, maybe 10 or 20) due to all kinds of trials (1 Pet. 1:3-6). It is always helpful to place suffering within an eternal framework. Peter did this, and Paul did this as well: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

Peter tells the believers *why* these trials have come. While the Bible may not tell us exhaustively why trials come, it does tell us enough to comfort our afflicted souls. At the very least we can see that trials serve God’s purposes in our lives, and that alone can be reassuring. Peter says, “These (i.e., trials) 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” (1 Pet. 1:7). Consider five points.

First, our faith is of greater worth than gold. In Peter’s day—a day like ours—gold was one of the most precious possessions one could own. Yet, in God’s sight, faith is “of greater worth than gold.” “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love” (Gal. 5:6). “And without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Heb. 11:6). Never underestimate the pleasure God takes in being trusted.

Second, trials come to refine our faith. The Bible is clear that “we live by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7), “...and everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). If we are going to please God and not sin, we must serve by faith, give by faith, worship by faith, and do everything by faith. However, herein lies our problem, since our faith is terribly tainted. Like gold, it is mixed with contaminants, which lower its value and spoil its beauty. Therefore, God refines our faith in the fiery trials of life. The outcome is a faith, which is more vigorous and more beautiful than ever.

Third, trials come to test the genuineness of our faith. Are you a true Christian, or is your faith spurious? You will never know with certainty until your faith goes through the refining fire and emerges pure and stable. Mature Christians have learned to rejoice in their sufferings, because they know that “suffering produces perseverance; perseverance character; and character hope” (Rom. 5:3-4). Hope that we will one day see and enjoy the glory of God (5:2), which is now more sure as a result of having one’s faith proven genuine by the fire.

Fourth, trials have come that our faith—refined and proven genuine—“may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” Trials prepare us for the revelation of Jesus Christ, when we will stand before Him in judgment. Josef Ton writes, “The ‘praise’ will be God saying to His faithful child, ‘Well done, good slave,’ as he stands before the judgment seat of Christ. The ‘glory’ will be sharing in the glory of Christ that was given to Him as a result of *His* sufferings (1 Pet. 3:22; 4:13-14)... and what an extraordinary ‘honor’ it will be to be given dominion with Christ over all of God’s possessions!” (Josef Ton, *Suffering, Martyrdom, and Rewards in Heaven*, p. 262).

Finally, trials need not dampen our joy. It is in the context of suffering that Peter writes: “Though you have not seen him...you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Pet. 1:8). Pastor Ton testifies to this joy in the midst of trials:

“On the fourth of October 1974, the Romanian secret police ordered a house search of our home in Ploiesti. Seven policemen invaded our house, and in the course of seven hours, they turned every room upside down, confiscating my entire library, as well as all of my personal papers and notes. I was forced to sign each book before it was taken away, and as I was doing this, my eyes fell on a book with this title: *Joy Unspeakable and Full of Glory*, followed by the subtitle: *Is it Yours Right Now?* I stopped, staring at that book cover, and began to pray, ‘Lord, if this joy is not mine *now*, it will never be! Please Lord, make it mine now!’ At that moment, my whole being felt as though it had been inundated with light. From that time on, I was no longer the victim of a house search, but the host of seven men to whom I witnessed about my faith and Lord. The joy of the Lord had become my strength (Neh. 8:10), and all through those subsequent years of persecution, that joy was constantly with me. As a result, I often preached about ‘joy unspeakable and full of glory,’ encouraging many others with it. Amazingly, the fact that I was able to preach about joy, in *those* situations during *those* times, determined many others to stand up for the Lord in the same way” (*Ibid.*, p. 263).

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