

Inexpressible Joy

1Peter 1:3-9

I can think of nothing that human beings share more in common and I can think of nothing that can put us more into conflict with one another than the pursuit of joy.

There is something in the human heart that wants to be happy.

I'm guessing there are some people who woke up this morning miserable.

I won't ask for a show of hands because I don't want anyone to grab someone else's hand and put it up.

I'm guessing if we woke up like Eeyore or Ebenezer Scrooge we would rather that whatever we perceived to be making us feel that way wasn't going on.

It is either that or being miserable makes us happy, but either way there is a desire for joy.

To one degree or another we all have that desire in common.

What is also true is that we pursue joy/happiness in different things.

If a cup of coffee improved your mood this morning I am happy for you but it would have the opposite effect on me.

I find great enjoyment in sailing or a round of golf, others would sooner watch paint dry or grass grow than to do either of those things.

Some people chase after money for happiness and others find their delight in a minimalist lifestyle.

The search for joy is why people turn to alcohol, drugs, entertainment, gambling, and alike.

Wanting to ease pain or be less miserable is coming from a desire to be happy.

It is what causes anger and fighting among people.

If we perceive someone standing in the way of thing that we think is going to make us happy, it makes us angry.

For example, if I had a button that could make coffee disappear from the planet entirely and I pressed it I imagine my life would be in danger.

If a co-worker is standing in the way of a promotion some people would feel justified in trying to sabotage them in order to get ahead.

It is why parents neglect their children, it is why spouses walk away from marriages, it is why people burn down buildings, and it is why people steal, cheat, and kill.

I see a great irony in all of this. Everyone wants to be happy but most people are miserable.

Why? Why does something we desire so much escape us and leave us in the exact opposite state we long for?

Is it because the desire for happiness or joy is bad in and of itself?

That would be quite impossible to square with all the commands we find in the Bible to rejoice.

In fact, Jesus speaks multiple times in John's gospel of His desire for the joy of His followers to be full!

So if joy is a command from God and a desire that Christ has for us, then wanting joy must be good.

If wanting to be happy is good, then where does everything go wrong?

Everything goes wrong in what we look to for joy.

[True joy, I believe according to the scriptures, is a feeling of delight that comes from being fully content. It is a deep sense in our inner most being that we have all of what we want without any fear of it being taken away. If that is right, then it is impossible to have true joy/happiness if we look for it in created things. None of it lasts, least of all our ability to possess it. The good news is it is possible to have true joy. It is possible because Jesus came into the world to make His people right with God and give us the gift of eternal life in the light of His glory forever. That is the joy our text **1Peter 1:3-9** points us to. While the full experience of that is in the future coming of Jesus, this text shows us how to experience that kind of joy in the present. Peter gives us at least three lessons here about having joy in our lives. The first thing this text shows us is that...]

Point #1 – Theologically rich worship is essential to joy. (Verses 3-5)

The only way to have true delight is to understand Who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing for the sake of His people.

Look with me at the **first half of verse 3.**

The word translated 'blessed' here is a word of praise or exultation.

It is a word that is calling our attention to the fact that God deserves worship.

Notice Peter is very specific about who God is here.

This is worship is directed to 'the God', there is only one and He is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

While the Holy Spirit is not mentioned here our minds are still directed to consider the Triune nature of God.

We believe in One God who exists in three distinct Persons.

We are also faced with the incarnation of Christ, that is God the Son taking on humanity without losing any divinity in One Person.

Jesus is both Lord and Messiah. He is both God and saviour and that is only possible because Christmas happens.

God is worthy of praise because of Who He is, to that Peter adds something of what God has done. **(Verse 3)**

There are several important reminders here for the believer.

It is God who has caused us to be born again.

He has taken us from being spiritually dead on account of our serious and repeated breaking of His laws and made us spiritually alive.

We have been changed from people under the sentence of death to people who have an imperishable hope.

That happens because Jesus willingly died in our place on the cross and was raised from the dead.

As one commentator puts it, “we have a living hope because we have a living Saviour.”

Look at what else God has caused us to be ‘born again to’. **(Verse 4)**

An ‘inheritance’ is something we are expecting to receive in the future. He is clearly speaking here about being with God in eternity.

Commentator David Wells describes the qualities of this inheritance like this, he says, “Imperishable means it always remains untouched by death, undefiled means it is unstained by evil, and unfading means it is unimpaired by time. It is death proof, sin proof, and time proof.”

Why has God done this work in us through the power of raising Jesus from the dead? He has done it according to “his great mercy”.

We do not deserve any of this, what we deserve is the wrath of God poured out in hell forever, but the LORD does not give us what we deserve.

Instead He is keeping an inheritance in heaven for us.

Not only is an inheritance being kept, we are being kept according to **verse 5**.

Believers are “being guarded” that is protected or kept safe by the ‘power of God’ for ‘salvation’.

There is both constancy and sufficiency for us here.

God doesn't sleep, He doesn't take breaks, and He never leaves on vacation.

For the believer, in every moment the LORD is standing guard over our new life in our living Saviour.

He is doing so according to His 'power' which is able to accomplish all that He pleases at all times, in all places, and for all of His people.

Wow! Now just jump ahead to the first four words of verse 6.

"In this you rejoice..."

All of this for which God should be worshipped lays the foundation for joy.

[We all know that thinking something is praise worthy is necessary to enjoying it. Take sports for example. Anybody here a football fan? I'm guessing you know something about the rules of the game and you have some information about the team that you cheer for tucked away in your head. When your team wins, are you happy? No imagine watching the game with someone who knows nothing about football and nothing about the team you are cheering for. When your team wins are they going to share in your joy? Probably not!]

In the same way if our understanding of God is shallow and self-centered we won't find much joy in Him.

Instead we will chase after created things settling for moments of happiness that fade and leave us worse off than we were before.

Christmas is a perfect example of this.

How many people are most excited about Christmas because they are hoping to get stuff?

There will be countless people who will be delighted when they open a gift and have that happy moment fade away.

[How different that could be if people would know and praise the LORD for Jesus coming into the world? To think upon the Being of God, the mercy of God, and the power of Jesus' resurrection. To lay hold of eternal things in our hearts and minds and to praise the LORD for them. If we have that we have a foundation for true joy. If we have that foundation then we are ready to hear this next lesson from these verses. Here is the lesson, that...]

Point #2 – A tested faith is a joyful faith. (Verses 6-7)

When the LORD does things in our lives to display that His work is happening in us we can truly rejoice in what we say we believe.

Look with me again at verse 6.

The beginning of the verse is not in the form of a command. The scriptures do command the believer to rejoice in the LORD, but not here.

Here Peter is saying to these believers, you are rejoicing in who God is and what He has done.

He says they have this joy though they ‘have been grieved by various trials.’

By trials the apostle likely means challenges that the believers are facing from outside the church as a result of their faith in Christ.

While no specifics are given here, it seems safe to say that they are facing some real difficulties that are causing real hardship and pain.

So they are rejoicing in God while being ‘grieved’ by trials.

There two important things to notice about the challenges they are facing.

First, they are for a ‘little while.’

How we understand that time frame completely depends on our frame of reference.

His focus in the first five verses has been on eternity so we have to see this in that same light.

How long is a ‘little while’ in light of eternity? Would ten years be a little while? Twenty? A hundred?

If we are thinking in light of eternity then we can’t live long enough to get past a ‘little while.’

So even if we face things that last years, decades, or a lifetime they will seem short when we enter into eternity.

Listen, grief is temporary for the Christian, joy is forever.

The second thing to notice about these trials is they may be necessary.

This is where knowing and loving the true nature of God is so important to joy.

If we really understand and rejoice in the truth of verses 3-5, then we will understand that every trial that happens only happens at God’s direction.

Therefore, whatever trial may happen in the life of the believer is necessary in the mind of God.

Why is it necessary? What is He doing? (**Verse 7**)

When the trials of life are testing the faith of someone truly born again, those trials are proving that faith genuine.

In other words, if it is real faith it will hold up and if not it won’t.

[Peter uses the illustration of gold here to make his point. Just like today, gold was considered incredibly valuable in the ancient world. So just like today people at that time dug it out of the ground. Now, in order to separate the gold from the other stuff it is mixed with when it first

comes out of the ground, it is placed in a furnace and heated to its melting point. When it gets hot enough the impurities rise to the top get skimmed off and you are left with pure gold. That is only true of genuine gold. That is not true of fool's gold. Fool's gold, also known as iron pyrite, looks a lot like gold but when it gets subjected to intense heat it breaks down.]

In the same way genuine faith is proved true and refined through trial.

I love that he says genuine faith is “more precious than gold that perishes”.

The list of things in this creation that last as long as gold is pretty short, but even the gold of this present creation will perish when the heavens and the earth pass away.

Do you know what won't pass away? Genuine faith in Christ.

That faith it says will result in “praise, and glory, and honour” at Jesus' coming.

Here is a really important question, “Whose praise, and glory, and honour”?

Again go back to verses 3-5. Who is Peter praising? Who causes us to be born again? Who raised Jesus from the dead? Who is keeping our inheritance? Whose power is guarding us?

Peter praises God for those things because God is the One doing them.

No one in eternity is going to sing our praises because we held onto faith through fiery trials.

Everyone is going to sing God's praises because He kept His people through every fiery trial.

[God isn't proving anything to Himself by keeping His people, He is showing us that our faith is genuine and knowing that in your heart is for your joy. That is the very point he is coming to in verses 8-9. Having laid the foundation of worship and explained the goal of testing, and he shows us this third lesson which is that...]

Point #3 – Joy comes from confidence in salvation. (Verses 8-9)

The more certain we become of God's present and future grace at work in us, the more delight we have in our hearts.

Listen to what it says at the beginning of verse 8. (Stop at believe in him)

These words immediately bring to mind the apostle Thomas.

Remember what he said when the other disciples told him Jesus had been raised from the dead?

He said, “Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe.” (Jn. 20:25 ESV)

The Lord graciously shows up just over a week later and says, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.” (Jn. 20:27 ESV)

Thomas then says to Jesus, “My Lord and My God.”

Jesus then says to him, “*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.*” (Jn. 20:29 ESV)

Peter knows firsthand the power of Jesus’ resurrection. He was there, he saw the miracles, he knew what it was to fail and he knows what it is to be kept by the power of the Spirit.

The people he is writing to have never seen Jesus but they love and believe in him and that too is the work of the Spirit.

Seeing Jesus and experiencing miracles is no guarantee of faith. Lots of people heard Him teach and saw Him do miracles and wanted nothing to do with Him.

It is better by far to have a heart changed to know and love the LORD then to have seen Him first hand and reject Him.

So here they are persevering by God’s grace through trial, here they are loving Jesus, and here they are believing in a Saviour they have never seen with their own eyes because He has proved Himself true and they know it in their hearts.

That brothers and sisters is the result of Divine action and look at what goes with that!

‘You love him..., you believe in him **AND** [you] rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.’

They know a level of being happy that can’t be put into words.

They have found a feeling of deepest delight because they are fully content in Jesus!

They are confident in the work of Christ and therefore they have joy!

Because that is happening Peter can say to them in **verse nine**.

Yes they are without a doubt looking forward to their future inheritance, but they are also ‘obtaining’ the outcome in the present as well.

The inexpressible joy in Christ they are feeling is a glorious foretaste of what is to come.

That is amazing.

They are confident that their faith in Christ is well placed and their confidence gives them true happiness.

[One of the greatest examples of faith in the last few hundred years of the church is a man by the name of George Muller. He is best known for his work in caring for orphans. At times things would be very scarce. So scarce they would sit down for breakfast and thank God for food that was not yet on the table. After their prayer the doorbell would ring and someone would be there with what they needed. Incredible faith! I love what Muller said about the start of his days. He said, “*The first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day is to have my soul happy in the LORD.*”]

That is the kind of joy Peter is talking about here.

That is the kind of joy God offers through faith in Christ.

No one can keep you from it.

You never have to be afraid of it running out or being in short supply.

It can never harm anyone else, but rather having this kind of joy will be the greatest expression of love you can possibly have for those around you.

No one can take it from you, not even the devil and all the demons put together, because it is being kept by the power of God.

Amazing!

Are you happy this morning? Will you have joy tomorrow and the next day and the day after that?

How we answer that question all comes down to what we are trying to find joy in.

If we want to find joy in the LORD it begins with theologically rich/God centered worship.

It may be that true and deep joy will come through trials. While we should never pray for hardship or persecution we can trust God with every single one.

When faith is proved true and we grow in our confidence in the LORD we will find the greatest delight because in Him we will find the greatest contentment.

Another way to say would be, “In Christ, being held by the power of God through all things we find inexpressible joy.”