



1 Peter 1:5-9  
*The Christian Paradox*

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials,

7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

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,

9 receiving the end of your faith -- the salvation of your souls.

I decided to call this sermon *The Christian Paradox*, because it seems to me that these verses from Peter contain what seems to be a paradox, but which is actually a central truth of the Christian faith. The Dictionary defines a paradox as: “A seemingly contradictory statement that may nonetheless be true” and then gives as an example “*the paradox that standing is more tiring than walking.*”

The seemingly contradictory statement here is the idea in verse 6 that Christians are people who “greatly rejoice” even though they are presently grieved or distressed, the KJV translation is even more expressive “ye are in heaviness” by various trials and tribulations. Normally those would seem to be mutually exclusive ideas, if I am obviously currently depressed, and going through hard times, few people would describe my state as “*greatly rejoicing*” and yet, Peter is right to describe the true Christian life that way. Brothers and Sisters, our pilgrimage through this world is hard, we are afflicted, we have many tribulations, the circumstances of our lives may sometimes make us weep and cry out to God for relief, and yet at the same time we can still be said to “greatly rejoice.”

Now before I go any further, I want to say immediately that you should not for a moment confuse this idea of greatly rejoicing with the false notion that Christians have to be happy and cheerful all the time no matter what, nothing could be further from the truth.

While I was at seminary, one of my friends and the Pastor he worked with were killed when their car was T-boned at an intersection by a chronic drunk driver. This was a genuine tragedy, 2 young Christian men both with wives and several young children had been killed. And yet the associate Pastor at their church stood up and in a bouncy voice said, we aren’t sad today, we’re happy because these young men aren’t here they are in heaven. And so all the Christians there who had lost friends, or fathers, or husbands, were expected to put on a happy face and get in step with the bouncy atmosphere. I remember thinking at the time, *this is so wrong*, Jesus wept over the death of his friend Lazarus, the believers at Joppa wept over their friend Tabitha, even though Jesus knew he was going to raise Lazarus and the believers trusted that Peter would raise Tabitha. Paul said **Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.** Not “*force those who are right to weep to rejoice.*” I was actually grateful for the presence of a girl’s basketball team those guys had coached, because while I

doubt that most of those girls knew the gospel, they at least had the sense to cry when someone you love has died.

Brothers and Sisters, it is ok to be sorrowful and to be grieved, in fact Peter says it is necessary – that is what is meant by *if need be* – that we go through times of trial and that those trials might hurt. There is a purpose to it, and it is that God ordained purpose that makes those trials and the grief and hurt they produce both understandable and bearable. We don't need to deny the fact that the trials themselves hurt, or pretend that the terrible things that happen because of sin in this fallen world aren't in and of themselves evil. Our Master Jesus Christ Himself was often grieved by the trials he passed through, you remember that in the garden of Gethsemane, as He was about to go to the cross in order to pay for our sins, He said to His disciples: *"My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death. Stay here and watch with Me."* What made that grief bearable was that He understood the purpose for it. Jesus suffered, but not in vain, but for the highest possible purpose, he endured that suffering expressly because He knew that Glory was at the end of it, and that His suffering was a means to that end. You remember when Christ appeared to the two disciples on the Emmaus road who were dejected and confused because they didn't understand why Jesus had suffered and died, He said to them:

***"O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken!***

***26 "Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"***

So too, the follower of Jesus knows that He will have to suffer, if He is going to take up the cross and follow in His Master's footsteps. But he also knows that properly understood, even that which grieves Him can be a reason to ultimately rejoice. As Robert Haldane put it:

***This rejoicing, however, is not in tribulations considered in themselves, but in their effects. It is only the knowledge of the effects of afflictions, and of their being appointed by his heavenly Father, that enables the Christian to rejoice in them. Being in themselves an evil, and not joyous but grievous, they would not otherwise be a matter of rejoicing, but of sorrow. But viewed as proceeding from his heavenly Father's love, Hebrews 12:6; Revelation 3:19, they are so far from depriving him of his joy, that they tend to increase it. The way to the cross was to his Savior the way to the crown, and he knows that through much tribulation he must enter into the kingdom of God, Acts 14:22.***

Now for the unbeliever, there is no rhyme or reason for his tribulations, for them as Shakespeare hopeless Macbeth put it ***"life is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, Signifying nothing."***

The believer though, knows that there is a God, that He is Good, that He is in control of everything that happens, and that He will use even evil events for the Good of Believers.

Peter tells us, the primary purpose of the believers trials in verse 7, namely that your faith may be tested and improved. He uses the analogy of Gold smelting. That is when Gold is placed in a crucible by a refiner and heated in the fire to the point where it melts. At that point all the impurities, the dross as it is called rises to the surface, and forms a skin which the refiner removes, and thus the gold is purified. True gold cannot be destroyed by the fire, it is only improved by this process of going through the fire. True Christians are also only improved by trials.

But just as wood, hay, and stubble, would be burned up in such a fire, so too, the false Christian's faith wavers and collapses under testing. They lose their health, or their fortune, or a loved one, or they just don't get what they want, and instead of Job's confession in the midst of grief ***"The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; Blessed be the name of the LORD."*** They walk away from the faith

forever. Those are the usually the thorny ground hearers from the parable of the sower, the cares of the world and desires kill their profession and so prove that they were never truly converted, never truly changed, never made over again into a something more precious and enduring than gold. Their leaving proves that they were never truly converted.

As John puts it: ***“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”*** (1 John 2:19)

But for believers, all of this testing and purifying in the end strengthens their faith, so that they are better able to endure to the end of their lives. Day by day, their self-confidence is melted away by trials like dross, and day by day their dependence upon and trust in their savior Jesus increases. Day by Day, they look more like Him and less like they did when He found them.

As that process goes on, you are also learning the difficult process of giving up acting according to their circumstances, and learning to walk by faith and not by sight. That is of critical importance, because unbelievers regularly act sinfully because they think the circumstances demand they do so, weak believers do the same thing. Their immediate reaction to suffering is to do something, anything to eliminate it. I don't think I need to spell out what will happen to a marriage if that is your immediate reaction to trials. But the same thing can happen in a host of circumstances, including ministry. In those times your love of the unseen Christ and your trust in Him needs to take over, and you need to be able to say. *I will do what He has told me to do, because I have tasted and seen that He is Good, and that He means to do me good through all things.*

Now the Apostles like Peter, had been with Christ, and they had seen and experienced His ability to carry them through trials. How he had for instance stilled the storm on the lake. Believers today have not yet seen Christ face to face, yet they are still carried through trials and temptations and are enabled to rejoice, and see in their deliverance the evidence of their salvation. This salvation is something they have, they are saved, they are preserved, and yet they do not have the fullness of it. There is an already not yet quality to it. Paul unpacks that idea in his own ministry, between the not yet of not yet being in heaven with Christ and still living life in this world and the already of having been saved and knowing that you will arrive safe in heaven some day. He described Himself and His Ministry this way in **2 Cor 6: 9** ***“as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed;***

***10 as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”*** All of them seem to be Paradoxes, yet the Christian knows them to be true and sees how there is really no contradiction.

***Friends, let me leave you with one application of all this in two parts:*** We live in a fallen world, and as a result both believers and unbelievers suffer tribulations and trials. But for someone who knows Jesus, the suffering, while it hurts not only can be endured, it can be a cause ultimately of rejoicing, because the believer knows that God has ordained even suffering for the believers Good and God's glory.

I've seen that amply as I've been visiting with Darrian Martin and speaking to his father Robert. On the other hand, too often I've visited with families and individuals where there is only fear and anger, and grief without hope.

The storm breaks against both houses, the pain caused by the storm is just as bad in both cases and just as real, the great difference is this - the storm destroys the House that isn't founded on the Solid Rock of Christ. Eventually it falls.

Not so the House founded on Christ. They hear Him speak in the middle of the storm saying "Peace be still" they love Him and they trust Him, more than even their fallible senses, and know that He has said *"These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."*

*How will you face the storm? What is your foundation? Will you have peace at the end of it?*