

## Our Tested Joy

So last week we looked at Peter's way of describing this awesome salvation that God has established for us. Peter starts off vs 6 by saying in this you rejoice. All of the fantastic benefits God shares with us, which we went over last week is what we are rejoicing in. But it's almost as if Peter anticipates that some people are going to say living this Christian life is hard. It doesn't feel very hopeful now, that inheritance seems so far off. Peter understands. So Peter pivots some.

Peter knows full well that we all endure some tough, distressing times in life. He almost drown in a storm trying to walk on water. He wanted more than anything to stick with his teacher until the end, but he denied him at the first three opportunities he had to identify with Jesus. Then he watched the man who represented his greatest hope in life be crucified right before him. Imagine the disappointment the nights Jesus was in the tomb! Then he was imprisoned for continuing to support Jesus after Jesus ascended to heaven.

Peter experienced painful, fearful, and difficult times in his life. So after talking about how God is committed to guarding an inheritance for us and committed to guarding us for that inheritance, Peter brings up the roll of trials in preparing us for this great future outcome.

Look my friends, we are going to explore some real-life things today. We are going to talk about the composition of real faith but we are also looking at why we sometimes face such intense distress. These are hard things. May the Spirit of God lead us today.

Let's look at the nature of our trials, the purpose of our trials, the way through our trials.

### The Nature of our Trials

Peter starts out by informing us that our **trials are brief**. He says for a little while. Sometimes minutes seem like hours and hours seem like days and days seem like years. But the reality is that our trials are temporary in nature.

Most trials last for a few hours or days. Like the passing of a thunderstorm, they can come with a fury, but they are very often short lived and then we emerge on the other side of the test.

This is not to say that some of us don't face trials that last for years. Some may have a distressing situation that lasts for most of a lifetime. But there will come a day when it ends. Unlike our inheritance, our trials do not go on and on forever.

So that is why Peter can write in truth that our trials last a little time because he is comparing it back to our unperishing inheritance. 80 years compared to endless years? Yes 80 years is a short time. Even though the suffering may be intense and disheartening for those long years, it will seem short after 1000's upon 1000's of years of enjoying such a majestic salvation.

We humans in our fragility and desire for comfort. We would like to avoid trials at all cost. In fact, a friend many of ours, John Kellogg Sr, used to say that we humans are just trying to get to our moment of death as comfortably as possible.

But notice Peter says next, **if necessary**. You have likely heard the expression related to storms in life that you are either in a storm, coming out of one, or about to enter one. This phrase speaks to the reality that storms or trials are prevalent in life.

What is that about? Necessary means required to be done. Who requires trials? Not me. I feel like I would be fine without them. Could it be God? Does God require believers to go through trials? Does God think its necessary for someone to go through cancer, or for someone to go through this painful divorce or is it necessary to mourn the death of a very close loved one? Does God determine for someone to be in that difficult work situation?

My best answer is sometimes. Here's what I mean. We know from the totality of Scripture that God never commands us to sin. Nor does he ever approve of our sinning. He also does not delight in us being in pain. Some people enjoy watching the world burn, but God does not derive joy from us being in distress.

However, God does allow and sometimes even wills that some of our sufferings play out in our life. I don't see evidence that all sufferings are willed by God in the sense that he is the author each time I suffer. Remember the story we looked at last week. Satan asked to sift you like wheat. He asked permission to try and break Job. God did not author those things but allowed them.

There are some trials that are designed by God. Israelites exile to Assyria and Babylonia were put together by God. Jesus' path to the cross.

Then there are other trials we go through, that aren't necessary. It says "if". For instance, if I went and banged my head on this heavy podium, that would not be because God made me do it. That would be my own ignorant choice and the consequential soreness would be entirely of my own doing.

We must recognize whether the trial is allowed or directed by God, necessary or unnecessary, that all of them are governed by a sovereign God. If we believe in a God who is in control of all things, then our sufferings is a thing and fits under all things. Because God is sovereign, God allows for and even guides our sufferings and distresses.

Peter elaborates later in this book, but this reality can give us great comfort. If God requires sufferings in our life then above the plans of evil men and above the strategy of the devil, is the purpose and design of God over that suffering. The brothers meant selling Joseph for evil, God meant it for good. The devil meant crucifying Jesus for evil, God made it good for you and me.

Next Peter says that our **trials grieve us**. They inflict real pain and sadness in our lives. Some people experience chronic physical pain in their lives. A body part that always produces discomfort. Some people experience deep emotional pain. The unexpected loss of a loved one can overwhelm any of us with immense sadness that never seems to dull. The ending of a significant relationship such as a divorce or being cut off from a close family member can cause heartache that is hard to recover from.

There are also mental trials which produce lots of stress. We can have financial hardship that cause us to worry. We can carry anxieties over situations that generate fear in us.

If a trial is worth its salt, then it is going to produce some kind of distress in our lives. Some of these sufferings last for years even after the immediate threat of the trial is over.

The final description of trials that Peter gives us is that **there are various kinds**. Life comes at us in a variety of ways. No one living has the exact same experience as anyone else. And even if we did, we would likely choose to understand or interpret the experiences in different ways. We have already discussed variety in terms of trials lasting different lengths of time and causing varying degrees of grief.

But there are different types of trials as well. We touched on physical, mental, emotional trials. There are also trials of our own sinful choices. Sometimes we put ourselves in difficult positions and must face the consequences. Sometimes swift and drastic changes cause us to lose our safety and security. That can be troubling. Sometimes we go through trials where we feel trapped and feel there is no way of escape. You may feel trapped in a difficult relationship or significant debt. Some of our trials happen because we live in a fallen world full of sickness, disease, and other fallen people.

### Purpose of Trials

So what is God's purpose for us in these trials? For one it **tests the genuineness of our faith**. How do we know if our love and trust in God is growing larger and larger? The trials we go through reveal our faith progress.

Trials allowed or designed by God reveal how real or sincere our faith is. Peter talks about refining gold. Gold is a very precious metal but many times there are impure and invaluable things mixed in with the gold. So what you can do is heat up the gold into a liquid and then the other stuff rises to the top. It will show you how much other stuff is embedded in your piece of gold.

Our trials show us what kind of other stuff is wrapped in with our faith. What doubts, fears, complaints, disobedience are intertwined with and diluting our faith in God.

**Trials also strengthen our faith**. Not only do they shine a light exposing what kind of faith we have. But trials serve as a strengthening agent to our faith. When we emerge from a time of

pain, our confidence and appreciation for God often increase. Peter went through his trial on the night of Jesus' arrest and denied Jesus. Later in Acts, while he himself was arrested, he was instructed not to preach about Jesus. He told them, I will face whatever consequences you have for me because I must obey God rather than man. His faith to suffer because of his belief in Jesus had measurably grown.

Back to Peter's refining gold illustration. We have heated our gold into a liquid and see the impurities floating at the top. Then you can use an acid to dissolve the impurities that have presented themselves on top. When your gold cools again, what you have remaining is more genuine or valuable gold than before you put the fire to it. If you repeat that process over and over again, you will eventually have nothing but pure gold left.

With each trial, a little more doubt is removed, complaints fall away, a desire to disobey weakens. And our faith is emerging stronger.

And there is a third purpose for trials. It **leads to praise, glory and honor** when Jesus returns. As we successfully endure trials that challenge our faith and we hold firm to God. It leads to rewards by Jesus when we go to him or he comes for us. Well Done, my good and faithful servant.... Jesus praising us for being full of faith.

But it is not only that God honors or praises our faith, but faith, strengthened by the distresses we overcame will cause us to honor, praise and glorify God more appropriately in heaven. Even though I couldn't see you on earth Jesus, the testing and purifying of my faith was deepening my love for you, my belief in you, and my joy in you. Trials sharpen our appreciation for God which results in us giving more praise and honor to him.

### The Way through our trials

Now that we know the nature of trials we face and a little about why we face them, is there any suggestions Peter has to help us get through our suffering or distressing times?

In short, the suggestion is to draw near to Jesus. But we can't see him now with our own eyes, so how do we draw near? Peter suggests three components of faith which work together at the same time and amplify each other that can be a great way to make it through trials.

**The first way is through our love.** We can be building our love for Jesus. Love means to take a deep interest in or preference in someone. When we love Jesus, we value his character and find him to be important to us. We desire to spend time with those whom we love. Because there is no place we can go to escape the presence and reach of God. Then wherever we find ourselves when we are going through the trial, we can actively be loving Jesus. When you are at a place where worry over a specific situation entirely consumes your mind, do you continue to take a deep interest in Jesus? Can you cut through that worry by loving God through concentrating on his word or committing to prayer? It is possible to prefer to praise Jesus instead of dwell in fear over your situation.

The **second way is through belief.** When the Bible speaks of belief related to Jesus it means that we accept God as being true or certain. As we are believing God, our confidence and trust in him is rising. This is where we get to apply what we learn about God from the Word of God. For instance, Scripture tells me that God is never going to leave me or forsake me. Do I realize that truth in my loneliest moments? Scripture tells me that God is working all things together for my good. When I hold onto that through a personal sickness or the sickness of a loved one, is there a time when the goodness of God, even if it is a subtle thing, resonates in my heart as I journey through the sickness?

The **final way through the trial is rejoicing or finding joy.** Rejoicing is showing great delight or finding pleasure in something. If you have been a Christian for any length of time, you have no doubt heard the phrase count it all joy when you face trials, or we are supposed to rejoice in our sufferings. Is the Bible really telling us to be like, yes that hurts so good keep that pain coming? No the joy is not focused on the pain or suffering but focused on something beyond that. Remember, Peter says our trials are often the source of grief, so what is the source of our joy?

Our source of joy is looking past the trials to the reward on the other side. “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn you name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven.” Let’s go back to the first phrase, in this you rejoice. We rejoice when we go through trials because the great things we talked about last week, being born again into a living hope, being guaranteed to receive a tremendous inheritance are the back-drop for the trial we are going through. We recognize that God has a purposeful design in that suffering that is producing something in our faith that will carry us forward to the end result the salvation of our souls.

Peter says this reality should produce such a profound joy that it is hard to express in words. When our faith brings us through a trial, a joy associated with belonging to God, proving that he is with us and for often rises up in us.

So even though we cannot see Jesus with natural eyes, when we exercise our faith through loving him, believing in him, and rejoicing in him while suffering, those three things increase and cumulatively increase our faith. As our faith increases in God so does the value to us of our end reward. So where is your sight line, as you go through your trial? Is it in the violent water around your own feet? Is it on the wind that makes your standing treacherous? Or is it on the wonderful savior standing securely on top of the stormy water?