

## Uncomfortable Trials, Unseen Christ and Unspeakable Joy

<sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> 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, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, <sup>8</sup> whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, <sup>9</sup> receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls. (1 Peter 1:6–9)

Every year, a few organisations team up to produce the World Happiness Report. This report combines information from 140 countries to produce a ranking of the happiest countries in the world from first to last. Last year, the happiest place in the world was supposedly Finland, followed by Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, the Netherlands, Costa Rica, Norway, Israel, Luxembourg etc. So how do they judge how happy people are in these countries? Here are some of the criteria they use: life expectancy, income levels, social support systems, generosity from others, and freedom.

To sum that up: happiness is your material condition: how much money you have, how healthy you are, who will take care of you if you're poor or sick, and the autonomy to spend your money the way you want. Supposedly, have this, and you'll be happy. Have any of these threatened, and you'll be unhappy. South Africa, by the way, was 95<sup>th</sup> on the list, so we apparently have a lot of grumpy people. In fact, if those standards of happiness are your standards of happiness, you will probably be dissatisfied and unhappy a good portion of your life.

But the Bible says that God's people, believers in Christ, have a very different happiness index. In fact, the Bible would call the World Happiness Report by some rather unflattering titles. It would call that outlook worldly, fleshly, carnal. It would call that outlook, walking by sight.

Scripture makes the claim that Christians have an inner joy and hope inexplicable by the world. Christians could rate their happiness and joy at high levels, and yet not be doing well by the standards of the world: not necessarily have lot of money, great health, social acceptance and support, plenty of freedom. This is our strength through trials, difficulty.

How is that possible? We began seeing that in the way Peter opens this letter, teaching us about our living hope. In these first twelve verses, Peter wants us saturated with truths about what God has done for us; who we are in Him. He does not include a single command, because we must first be established in what God has done for us, before we move to what we will do for Him. First grace, then works, first His love for us, then our love for Him. So he began by showing us some triumphant truths: God has mercifully given us new life within: the resurrection life of Jesus now throbs within our souls. He showed us that our true possessions: home, wealth, rewards, family, society are in Heaven, where we'll behold the face of God. Unageing, unspoiling, unfading, reserved. And then He showed us that we are kept by the power of God through a faith that He sustains.

The reason he is doing this is because these truths give us a deep hope that is bigger and better than suffering we face outwardly. The joy of the Lord is your strength; and to have joy even when outwardly life is difficult is what sustains you. You can have a happiness index off the charts, while failing on all the metrics the world uses to judge happiness.

Peter is now going to drive that point home now in verse 6 through 9 by telling how this works. How does this faith we have translate into a living hope, into an inner joy? You'll see Peter speak of this joy in verse 6, and in verse 9, which brackets this whole sections.

What Peter does here is he gives you the two things that usually destroy joy – uncomfortable trials,

and an invisible hope, (look for the word *though* in the passage) and he explains why Christians still rejoice. Although harried by trials, although not seeing Christ, Christians can have joy, Christians can have a living hope. This is happiness in spite of some negative things, and because of some far better and greater things.

So, let's consider two sources of unspeakable joy in the life of a Christian, one in verses 6 and 7, and the other in verses 8 and 9.

### **I. We Rejoice When Faith is Proved/ Tested/ Verified/ Authenticated/ Is Not Deterred**

<sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup> 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, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

Here is the first mention of joy: in this you greatly rejoice. This means to be exceedingly joyful, exult, be glad, overjoyed, overflowing with joy. The words *in this* reaches back to all we studied in verses 3-5 – the new internal position we have as born again believers, our indestructible possession in Heaven, the invincible protection of our faith. We have that living hope, and we rejoice because by faith we accept them, believe them, hold on to them.

But then there is a bump in the road, an annoying interference to what might be our tranquil joy in being saved, eternally secure. He says, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials.

Christian, outwardly, all is not perfect: you have been grieved, distressed, made sad, sorrowful by various trials. This seems contradictory: he just said we greatly rejoice, and now he says we've been grieved. Which is it? Well, it can be both. Paul describes himself and the apostles in 2 Cor 6:10: “as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing”. The Christian experience is one where sorrow and joy can both be present, but one is deeper, one is more foundational, one is more defining of your whole being. And that one is joy. The sorrow, the unhappiness, the discomfort, the grief, the distress will be there: because pain is pain, suffering is suffering, and Christians don't rejoice in the painfulness of pain. Trials are clouds, but joy is the whole sun-light sky.

But trials, problems, difficulties, pains, struggles, sufferings will be present. Notice three things about trials. First, they come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. In fact the Greek word translated various actually means multi-coloured. Trials come as financial troubles, family problems, health problems, business problems, church problems. Paul calls them weaknesses, insults, catastrophes, persecutions, and pressures. He also describes it as being hard-pressed on every side, *we are* perplexed, persecuted, struck down, but not destroyed— (2 Corinthians 4:8–9)

Second, trials are temporary. He says, “now for a little while”. Trials and problems don't last forever. Some trials are sudden. Some take days, or weeks. Some drag on over months and even years. A few may be lifelong trials. But no trials go in into eternity and last forever.

Third, trials are sovereignly determined by God. “If needs be”. This is the idea, since it is necessary. God has determined it. “**Every** joy or trial, Falleth from above, Traced upon our dial, By the Sun of Love.”

What God ordains is always good;  
His loving thought attends me;  
no poison can be in the cup  
that my Physician sends me.  
My God is true; each morning new  
I trust His grace unending,

My life to Him commending.

Now Peter is going to tell us why trials not only do not destroy the joy we have in our living hope, but in a strange way, may actually *increase* the joy.

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, honour, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,

Here is the purpose: your faith will be found to be genuine, and bring praise, honour and glory one day in the presence of Christ. Genuineness = “proven character, *without alloy*”. Trials test whether your faith is authentic or not. Trials are a furnace in which the heat of suffering reveals whether your belief, your faith, your trust in Christ is the real, God-given kind we saw in verse 5 which will last to that final day, or if it is a man-made, temporary, selfish attachment that will be burnt up by trials. If faith proves to be real, the believer will receive “praise, glory and honour” when Jesus Christ returns.

Peter now uses gold as both a comparison and a contrast to the believer's faith. The comparison is that gold, a precious substance is purified by the heat of fire. Gold, especially in ancient times would be purified with great heat, the impurities then skimmed off the surface. Heat and then skim, heat and then skim. Ancient goldsmiths would wait until they could see their reflection in the gold before being satisfied that it was pure. And the connection to suffering is clear. Even Seneca, the most important literary and public figure in Rome in the mid- to late-first century, used the same metaphor in his proverb, Fire tests gold, affliction tests strong men. For as the heat of problems increases, what it brings out of us are the impurities of our hearts: our impatience, our sense of entitlement, our pride, our anger, our unbelief, our fear. Trials don't introduce these things into us; no, trials are just the heat bringing them out of us.

But here is the joy: if you have the gold of true, God-given faith, the heat of trials exposes the impurities in your faith, but it does not burn up and destroy your faith altogether. If what you have is the wood, or straw, or cloth of a worldly attachment to Christ, a selfish 'belief' in Jesus, a fleshly, carnal faith, then at some point, the heat is going to get too much, and it burns up.

Some of Peter's readers were going to face an actual trial by fire. Others were going to face different types of suffering. But all Christians face trials to purify their faith. All Christians have to have this heat so they can look within and say, “this enduring love for Christ, this is not coming from me. Left to myself, I would have abandoned Christ a long time ago.”

And no one knew that better than Peter. When the heat of Christ's message came, and it was unpopular and offensive, it burnt up the attachment some had to Jesus.

<sup>66</sup> From that *time* many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. <sup>67</sup> Then Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also want to go away?” <sup>68</sup> But Simon Peter answered Him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup> Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (John 6:66–69)

Peter found within himself an attachment, a union, a cleaving to Christ that could not help but remain. A little while later the heat of Jesus' arrest came, and some real impurities came out of Peter's faith: fear, man-pleasing. He saw that his boasting that he'd never deny Jesus was dross, selfish, fleshly, self-confidence. But heat exposed it, and the dross got scraped off, and what remained was pure gold. And just three or four years after Peter wrote this letter, Nero condemned Peter to death by crucifixion, and tradition has it, that he asked to be crucified upside down, feeling

himself unworthy of being crucified as his Lord was. His faith endured.

The false disciple under trial announces, “I don't believe that anymore” “Religion is not for me” “The born-again thing didn't work for me” “I just couldn't keep faking it” “I got burnt by churches and all the hypocrisy”. Whatever it is, the trial burnt up whatever attachment there seemed to be.

But if you you are a real believer, something else happens. You face the loss of a possession, the loss of a loved one, a deep financial burden, great opposition from work or family, rejection, slander, hostility, difficulty, sickness, pain, and something else happens. Initially there is the dross, the impurities: you struggle, and wrestle, and hurt. Maybe you complain, and cry out, and wonder out loud where God is, you're angry, and frightened, and hurting, and not grateful. But then God gets a hold of your heart with His Word. You begin to confess those responses as sin. And now underneath all that, you say, but I have Christ. I have my God. If He has taken that away, or withheld that, it must mean I don't need it. If He's allowed it, it must mean it's needful for my growth. But in the end, these are temporary problems, and I have Christ. I am born again, I have His life in me, I have an inheritance that is eternal, I have a faith kept by His power. These problems will pass. The words of Paul take on new life: <sup>18</sup> For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)

<sup>17</sup> For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, <sup>18</sup> while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal. (2 Corinthians 4:17–18)

And that's where this mention of gold is not only a comparison, but a contrast. Because gold, Peter tells us as precious as it is and as durable as it is, will ultimately perish. The gold of this world will not survive the fire that will melt this earth when God creates a new heaven and new earth. But there is something more precious than gold, because it is more durable than gold, more permanent than gold: and that is our faith.

*"When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,  
my grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;  
the flame shall not hurt thee; I only design  
thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.*

To have this living union with Christ, this attachment to Him that survives the loss of all things earthly, and still says like Job, “Thou he slay me, yet will I serve Him”, that is a more valuable thing than all the gold in the world. Perseverance. Endurance. A faith that endures. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, <sup>3</sup> knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.. (James 1:3)

To have a living faith is like an umbilical cord between mother and child, with life flowing from one to another. Living faith in Christ means His life is in you, and so the attachment to Him is living. All that the world can throw at you cannot sever that life, it only serves to highlight it.

Christians sometimes ask the completely wrong question. They go through trials and start asking, “What have I done wrong?” But if you never faced trials, it would mean you had no faith to be tested. If you have a problem-free life, the question you should ask is, “Am I really saved? Am I one of God's children, because God doesn't let any of His children pass through this life without having the fire of trials show them that they have the gold of faith within.”

And when the pain of suffering happens, we flinch, as we feel the pain, but then we see the glint of

gold underneath, and we say, “Beautiful, permanent, precious – my living hope in Christ.” Thank you Lord, for freeing me from another worldly attachment, from trusting in another temporary support, from leaning on another earthly crutch. Thank you for redirecting me to my living hope, and showing me the God-given faith attached to it. We rejoice when our faith is proved.

But you'll notice Peter mentions joy twice in this passage. The second time is in verse 8 and 9, which is the second reason Christians rejoice even when trials mount.

## II. We Rejoice in What Our Faith Sees

<sup>8</sup> whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, <sup>9</sup> receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of *your* souls.

Once again, strong words for joy. Joy inexpressible: a joy that defies words. A joy so strong and so deep, that you have no words for it. Only music can capture this joy, and when you try to explain it in words, you feel you are doing it a disservice. Full of glory means this joy is full of beauty; it's a pure, lovely, holy joy, because of its object.

So what is the source of the joy? <sup>8</sup> whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see *Him*, yet believing.

You love Him, though you have not at some time in the past physically seen Jesus. Peter had seen Jesus, but he knew his readers had not.

You believe in Him, though you do not in the present see Him.

Now see how these phrases are parallel and they explain each other. Both speak of not seeing Jesus, and in spite of not seeing Jesus you love Him, and you believe in Him.

What that means is that the experience of believing in Jesus is the experience of loving Jesus. And both are captured in this experience of joy inexpressible and full of glory.

So, the second reason for joy is that faith, or believing, brings the experience of loving and enjoying Jesus Christ. Faith brings the invisible into the visible, brings the future into the present. It is not just that we rejoice that our faith is proven to be real. We rejoice because of what our faith sees, and experiences!

Our faith can experience the beauty of Christ before we get to Heaven. Notice verse 9 has the idea of the future flowing into the present, receiving now, the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. The idea is, one day, you will be in the presence of Christ in Heaven, your soul saved, but even now that perfect state of experiencing Christ flows into this moment. There is an already and not yet moment here. The not yet is what theologians call the beatific vision, when we see Him face to face. That's still coming. But the already is now, our faith is able to experience and love and rejoice in Christ, though He not be visible to our eyes, and though being in His presence is still future.

But wait. Is Peter describing the moment to moment experience of every Christian, that we live in non-stop ecstatic joy? No. He is describing what faith is capable of seeing when exercised, particularly in times of suffering.

Because it is in times of suffering that we are most likely to remember the Word of God. Hebrews 4:2 reminds us that the word which they heard did not profit some people, not being mixed with faith in those who heard *it*. So if we come to the Word, recall it, mix it with a seeking, obedient faith, the result is what we call illumination. Illumination is the Spirit of God taking truth about Christ, and causing that truth to now shine.

What is it like? Let me compare it to a few experiences you know. It is a bit like **memory**. You

begin to reminisce about some thing that happened. And perhaps you do it with another. And as you recall that moment, you smile and you even laugh, because that memory is almost coming alive, coming into this present moment. Illumination is bit like that: truth about Christ, what He has done in your life, His works, historical, worldwide, in nature, culture, history come alive as you meditate on them, and the Spirit brings illumination.

It is a bit like **anticipation**. You begin thinking about something you are looking forward to. You start envisioning what it will be like, and perhaps, again, someone is with you and you start picturing and speaking of it, and you begin enjoying in this present moment what is still future. Illumination is like that. Truth about Christ, His promises, what He will do, and your faith lays hold on them, and the Spirit brings those future realities to you so you enjoy and delight in them in the moment.

It is a bit like **recognition**. You are straining to remember something, who this person is, where you have seen them before, what their name is, and suddenly, it all comes to together, and you recognise the person, and what was obscure just a moment ago suddenly becomes familiar. Illumination is like that. You are straining to see the meaning of a biblical text, and comparing it to your trials, and the Spirit illuminates you and you recognise His answers to your prayers, and you recognise His character being formed in you, and you thank Him.

It is also a bit like **understanding**. If you are struggling to solve a problem: number that don't add up, something that appears to be missing on the plans or the budget, and you wrestle with it, until finally there is an aha! Moment – you solve the problem, find the solution, gain the insight. Illumination is like that. You wrestle with Scriptural texts, trying to piece together the meaning, and how it applies to you, and then Spirit of God

Illumination is like those everyday experiences of memory and anticipation and recognition and understanding. The difference is that you are using the Word of God, trying to apply it to life, especially to your trials and suffering, and the Spirit of God brings the felt reality of these things.

That implies believers must be taking in the Word of God like a steady diet of protein to build spiritual muscle. A constant and steady intake of promises, principles, precepts, of the person of Christ. And then a serious kind of thinking about the Word in light of our trials. That combination faith, which comes by hearing and hearing of the Word of Christ, plus the Spirit's illumination, brings joy.

Consider what I say, and may the Lord give you understanding in all things. (2 Timothy 2:7)

Remember when Pilgrim and Hopeful had been imprisoned in Doubting Castle by the Giant Despair, and there they sit in chains. Suddenly, Pilgrim remembers that he has a key in his pocket that can unlock the doors, and the name of the key is Promise. The promises of Scripture, if known, memorised, and therefore close to the heart, can be used by the Spirit of God to show us the glories of Christ in the middle of trials.

To remain in despair or despondent during your trials likely means one of two things: lack of knowledge of the Word that the Spirit could illuminate, or lack of believing thinking about the truth. You either don't have the key in the pocket, or you're not taking it out.

And it is most often in times of deepest trial that we may be led to our deepest meditations on Christ, and so, by faith, come to our deepest experiences of Him.

So what is your happiness index looking like? What makes you despondent? What makes you lose hope? Is it financial? Is it health? Is it relational? If those things destroy your joy, perhaps you are yet to truly taste and see that the Lord is good, that the gain Christ far exceeds the loss of anything in the world. Maybe today is your day of salvation, repenting of a selfish faith, and receiving Christ

as Lord and Saviour.

But perhaps you know and cherish the reality of these verses. You are grieved by trials. But if you'll let them, there be a deeper joy under the surface: I still believe! I have the gold of faith! And leading from that, unspeakable joy: I see Him! As Shadrach, Meschach and Abednego saw the fourth man in the furnace, so I see Him with me in the fire.

Samuel Rutherford was an English pastor imprisoned for his faith from 1636 to 1638, and knew all about suffering. He once wrote,

“If your Lord calls you to suffering, do not be dismayed, for He will provide a deeper portion of Christ in your suffering. The softest pillow will be placed under your head though you must set your bare feet among thorns. Do not be afraid at suffering for Christ, for He has a sweet peace for a sufferer. God has called you to Christ's side, and if the wind is now in His face, you cannot expect to rest on the sheltered side of the hill. You cannot be above your Master who received many an innocent stroke. The greatest temptation out of hell is to live without trials. A pool of standing water will turn stagnant. Faith grows more with the sharp winter storm in its face. Grace withers without adversity. You cannot sneak quietly into heaven without a cross. Crosses form us into His image. They cut away the pieces of our corruption.

Lord cut, carve, wound; Lord do anything to perfect Your image in us and make us fit for glory! We need winnowing before we enter the kingdom of God. O what I owe to the file, hammer, and furnace! Why should I be surprised at the plough that makes such deep furrows in my soul? Whatever direction the wind blows, it will blow us to the Lord. His hand will direct us safely to the heavenly shore to find the weight of eternal glory. As we look back to our pains and suffering, we shall see that suffering is not worthy to be compared to our first night's welcome home in heaven. If we could smell of heaven and our country above, our crosses would not bite us. Lay all your loads by faith on Christ, ease yourself, and let Him bear all. He can, He does, and He will bear you. Whether God comes with a rod or a crown, He comes with Himself. "Have courage, I am your salvation!" Welcome, welcome Jesus!"