

Inexpressible and Glorious Joy
1 Peter 1:1-9
April 27, 2014

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These 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. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

There are many blessings showered down on a child of God. One of those blessings is an very special kind of joy. Sometimes this joy might be expressed as singing, dancing, and great rejoicing. At other times it might be just a special inner peace that comes from knowing God is in control no matter what the world looks like. Today, we will look at our Epistle reading so we might better understand this thing called Christian joy.

The first thing we need to know is the basis for this joy. The foundations of Christian joy are found in the past, the present, and the future.

Here are some things that happened in the past that lead to our joy. First, verse two tells us that we have been *chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit*. In other words, before the creation of the world, from before the beginning of time, God called you to be his own. He called you personally. God knows you as an individual. And, from all eternity, God decided to bless you with *the sanctifying work of the Spirit*.

The second thing from the past that leads us into joy also comes from verse two. Peter explains we have been set apart *for obedience to Jesus Christ*. God has chosen you to be obedient to Jesus. The only true joy in this world comes from obedience to Jesus. You can chase any dream you like, but if you are disobedient to Jesus you will never be satisfied. You will never find true joy.

Besides obedience, the text says we were chosen to experience the *sprinkling by his blood*. In Old Testament times, the priest would come out to the assembled worshipers with a bowl of blood from the sacrificial animal. He would sprinkle the blood on the people to show their sins had been forgiven. Your being sprinkled by the blood of Christ means your sins, all of your sins, have been forgiven. God chose you to be forgiven

through the blood of his one and only son.

The last reason from the past for our joy is God *has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*. Everyone is born in a natural way. But that birth is a birth into eternal death. Everyone is born sinful – enemies of God. But God has given us a new birth. In the waters of baptism, you were adopted into the family of God. You were literally born again. This new birth marks you as one bought back by Christ the Crucified.

In the present, we have reason for great joy because, according to verse five, we *are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time*. That means that we are safe. There is nothing that can harm our eternal destiny. In his letter to the Roman churches Paul explains this protection: *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Rom 8:38-39).

The future also holds a reason for our joy. Just like we are untouchable in this world, what awaits us in heaven is also untouchable. We are joint heirs with Christ and our inheritance is being held aside for us. Verse four holds this promise for the future. You have *an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you*. When Jesus said he was going to heaven to prepare a place for you, he meant it. Personally. Just for you.

Now, let's turn our attention to the greatness of our joy. Our joy in Christ is so great we can rejoice in every situation. We can even rejoice in our trials. We can never suffer so much that our suffering exceeds the joy we find in Jesus.

In the fourth chapter of this letter, Peter explains: *Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed*. (1 Pet 4:12-13).

Peter knew what he was talking about. In the fifth chapter of Acts we read: *They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name*" (Acts 5:40-41).

Some might ask how anyone could be joyful over suffering. But, we know trials and suffering only serve to strengthen a Christian's faith. The book of Romans explains it like this: *We also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope* (Rom 5:3-4).

Trials and sufferings come in two kinds. The first kind is suffering because of the name of Christ. Here in America, we don't generally face physical religious persecution. But make no mistake, the Christian Church in America is being persecuted.

Groups like the A.C.L.U. are doing their best to destroy every reference to Christianity in our society. Groups like Planned Parenthood are promoting the legalized killing of unborn infants, and calling Christians who object narrow-minded and accusing them of trying to deprive women of their civil rights. All forms of media label Christians as intolerant bigots because we won't condone the sinful behaviors they promote. If you are an American Christian you are being persecuted.

But we rejoice in this persecution because Jesus said we should. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: *Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you* (Mt 5:11-12).

The other kind of trials and sufferings are things from our humanness; sickness, heartbreak, frustration, approaching death, and the like. During these times, Christian joy comes in knowing God is in control. God doesn't send bad things into your life, but he does allow them. When he does so, we take joy in the promise that God will bring all things in line with his good and gracious will. Here's that promise: *We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose* (Rom 8:28).

We have looked at the basis for Christian joy and the greatness of Christian joy. Now let's ask a question we might hear from a curious unbeliever: How can I get Christian joy? We need to answer the question for two reasons. First, if a curious unbeliever asks you this question you will have an answer. Second, if you feel like real Christian joy is missing from your life, this might help you recapture what you've lost.

The first step to Christian joy is loving Jesus. Many people know about Jesus, but they don't love Jesus. However, to have Christian joy, Jesus must be living in you. And, you can't separate Jesus living in you from loving Jesus. Listen to how Jesus explained it: *If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him* (Jn 14:23).

Notice loving Jesus demands obedience to Jesus. As we learned earlier, Christian joy and obedience to Jesus go hand in hand. Disobedience to Jesus puts you outside of the Father's will and there is no joy outside of God's will.

The other requirement for Christian joy is to have faith in Jesus. Again, many people know about Jesus, but they don't really have faith in Jesus. Believing in Jesus is more than academic knowledge of Jesus. You can read the Bible from cover to cover and not believe in Jesus. People have been doing that for thousands of years.

Imagine this. I have a length of rope in my hands. I can explain how the rope is made. I can tell you about how twisting all the fibers together makes the rope very strong. I can tell you how many pounds this rope could hold without breaking. However, unless I'm willing to dangle over a cliff suspended by this rope, I don't really have any faith in the

rope.

The same difference holds true between knowing about Jesus and having faith in Jesus. True faith in Jesus involves trusting all of his commands to be for our ultimate good. True faith in Jesus requires trusting him to fulfill all of his promises. And, again, true faith in Jesus results in wholehearted obedience to him.

When you have this kind of faith in Jesus, combined with a total love for Jesus, you will be blessed with an inexpressible and glorious joy; a joy that is based in the past, the present and the future; a joy that will carry you through all the trials and sufferings of this life; a joy that will carry you through to the end of your journey on earth and usher you into the eternal presence of the Father.

So we join Peter in saying: *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”*