

THE TRIAL OF YOUR FAITH
1 Peter 1:3-9; 4:12, 13

Intro: We have come to the last Sunday of 1991. There are only two days after today remaining in this year, and then, the Lord willing, we will be in 1992. Traditionally this time of the year, whatever the year may be, is a time when we look back, and then look ahead. There are programs we will be able to see and hear dealing with the outstanding news events of the past year--and there have been many of them. And there will also be predictions as to what 1992 may hold for us as a nation as well as individually. The outlook for the future is not good regardless of where a person might live in the world if we are looking at this world merely as human beings. I am not going to try to speculate about the future, or even try to interpret the past except to say that the one thing that we as Americans are overlooking as we look back, and then look ahead, is the terrible way in which we have displeased God increasingly during the past year. And that can only mean greater trouble of all kinds in the days ahead if there is not a change. If a nation ever needed a spiritual awakening, ours does! We all should be praying that the Lord will use us to spread the Gospel, trusting the Lord to give us the joy of seeing many turn to Christ.

However, today I am speaking to those who have trusted in Christ--and that includes most of you, maybe all of you. The Lord knows those who are His. The life of every Christian is a paradox. I mean by this that there are things about the experiences of the people of God which seem to be contradictory. On the one hand, we have things that make us supremely happy; on the other hand, we have things that make us very sad. It has been like that for the Lord's people every year since the beginning of time, and there is no possibility that it will be any different in 1992. We could probably say the same thing about people in the world, but the difference is that what makes us happy does not make them happy, and the things which try and test us are different from the experience of people who do not know the Lord.

The Apostle Peter in this epistle was writing to people who were glad, and, at the same time, they were sad. And his purpose in writing this epistle was to encourage them in their gladness, and to help them in their sadness. This is what we need today, and that is the reason I have chosen to speak from this passage. I know that there is not a single person listening to my voice who has everything going his way, as a popular song has expressed it. On the one hand, you are happy in the Lord; on the other, you have reasons to be sad because of trials that you are experiencing. This is true of all of us.

Now I invite you to join me as we look at these opening verses in 1 Peter as we look for a few moments at our gladness, and then at our sadness. And I hope that we will all leave this place today happier than we are sad even though our burdens may be very heavy.

First of all, let us consider:

I. THEIR (OUR) FIRST REASONS TO BE GLAD (1 Pet. 1:3-5).

As far as the verses of our text are concerned, you will notice that Peter began by speaking of our gladness in verses 3, 4, and 5, and then he concluded on the same note in verses 8 and 9. So I am going to deal with these contrasting aspects of Christian experience just as Peter did, speaking first of our gladness, then of our sadness, and ending by speaking again of our gladness. Let us note carefully what he said.

Before I begin let me point out again that he was writing to believers, and it is only those who have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior who can be happy about the things that Peter mentioned here.

First of all we see that:

- A. His joy was in "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 3a).

We live in days when very, very few people speak lovingly and gratefully about God. We hear men, women, young people, and sometimes even children taking His holy Name in vain, using it blasphemously and wickedly, but not like the Apostle Peter spoke of Him. Peter actually attributed to God every reason that he had for being happy--every reason! You can see that if it were not for God, Peter's life would have been totally different. And if he had any joy at all, it would have been like the majority of people in the world, a joy in good experiences, or good possessions, or in having the honor and praise that comes from men. But Peter's joy, and the joy of the people to whom he was writing was not that kind of passing joy. He was thankful for God—"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the only true God.

And Peter was rejoicing in the fact that this one, true God was a God of mercy. In fact, he spoke of God's "abundant mercy." This is a word which means not only that God has a lot of mercy, but it means that it is inexhaustible, and that God is continually showing mercy to his people. Peter knew that this was the only basis on which God could do the wonderful thing that He had done for him. Mercy is given

where there is misery, and there is no misery like that of a person who is suddenly awakened to realize that he is a sinner and under the judgment of God. Peter knew that what God had done for him was completely undeserved, and that it was something that Peter could never have done for himself, nor could he have ever earned such a blessing.

What was the blessing?

- B. Peter's joy was in the new life that God had given him through Christ (v. 3m).

I call your attention to those words, "hath begotten us again." Peter had been born once to his parents, and that is how he got physical life. But he had been born a second time, a miraculous work of God in his heart, and that is how he got eternal life. And that is what changed that rough and tough fisherman into a child of God.

But notice that he said "us," not just me. What God had done for Peter, He had done for those to whom he was writing. They, too, had been changed by that work of God in their souls by which they had been made new creatures. That blessing was at the cost of the death of Christ, followed by His resurrection, as we read in the latter part of this same verse. It was a gift from God to Peter, but it cost the Lord Jesus Christ more suffering on the Cross than any of us can possibly realize.

But this is not all.

- C. Peter's joy was in the future prospect that was before him as a child of God (vv. 3b, 4).

In verse 3 he called it "a living hope." And he went on to describe it more fully in verse 4. (Read.) Peter's inheritance, and the inheritance of all of the Lord's people, will not disappear. It does not have any defects in it. It will not dry up. But it is kept in absolute safety.

How different this is from many earthly inheritances! They can disappear, or someone else can take them from us, or we can find that they were not what we thought they were. But that is not the case with our heavenly inheritance.

But the inheritance is in heaven, and Peter was still on earth when he wrote this letter. How did he know that he would ever make it to heaven?

Look at verse 5. Not only was Peter's inheritance kept, but Peter was kept also, "kept by the power of God, ready to be

revealed at the last time."

What was Peter's inheritance? It was to be in heaven. Yes, but more than that. It was to see the Lord, and to be with the Lord. Yes, but even more than that. It meant that he would be like the Lord! When you think of all of this you can see why Peter and all of us who know the Lord should always have real joy in our hearts regardless of our trials and testings.

And that is why he said in the first part of verse 6, "Wherein ye **greatly** rejoice." Such a great inheritance calls for great rejoicing. It is no wonder that Paul told the Philippian church, "Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice" (Phil. 4:4).

IT WAS AGAINST THIS GLORIOUS BACKGROUND THAT PETER WENT ON TO SPEAK OF:

II. THEIR PRESENT SADNESS (1 Pet. 1:6, 7).

They had "manifold temptations," or trials. That is, they had trials of different kinds. They were a people who were suffering for their faith in Christ. We know that from the introduction to this epistle. (See vv. 1, 2). They were a happy people, but they were also a sad people.

The Lord doesn't promise us that we are going to get to heaven trouble-free. We all have our trials. They are necessary trials because God has purposes to work out through them that cannot be accomplished in any other way. Sufferings have way of sanctifying. And how thankful we can be for those words "for a season." It will not always be like this. In fact, trials come, and trials go, although they are sometimes trials by fire, i.e., intense suffering for the sake of the Gospel.

But what is the purpose?

Our KJV says, "The trial of your faith"—and that is a good translation. But we need to know that this is a trial, not to destroy our faith, but to prove that it is real, that it is genuine, that we are not like many people who profess to be Christians, but who collapse when the testings come.

You see, the question which faces every child of God in every time of testing is this: Am I going to trust the Lord, or am I not going to trust Him? You see, believing in Christ does not stop when we are first saved. "We walk by faith." Our life on earth is a life of trusting in a God Whom we have never seen, and in a Savior Whom we have never seen. The

Lord puts us in situations where we are absolutely helpless so we will trust Him, and find that He is sufficient. Remember the story of Jehoshaphat which we had not long ago in our SS lesson. Also cf. verses like Prov. 3:5, 6. Think of the verses which speak of waiting on the Lord, and trusting in Him.

We have all failed in the past, but the Lord has brought us to the place where we have trusted Him. Blessings are ahead in 1992, but so are trials. Let us get prepared to praise Him continually for all we have in Christ, but let us also be prepared to trust Him day by day so that we can bring the greater glory to His wonderful Name. Our trials not only have to do with what the Lord is making us now, but with what we will eventually be when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven. The Lord is coming again. Peter was exhorting the believers to whom he was writing to make sure that the Lord would find them rejoicing in Him and trusting in Him.

And so we come finally to:

III. MORE REASONS TO REJOICE (1 Pet. 1:8, 9).

This has to do particularly with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Will you notice what Peter says we as believers do? We don't do any of them perfectly, but, if we know Him, we do them.

Although they, unlike the Apostle Peter, had not seen the Lord, yet

- 1) They loved Him.
- 2) They were trusting ("believing") in Him.
- 3) They were rejoicing in Him--"with joy unspeakable and full of glory." They were in the midst of trials, but they were happy in their relationship with the Lord.

This being true, God was using the trials in their lives to further the object of their faith, which was the full "salvation of" their "souls."

Concl: I am going to speak tonight about our love for the Lord, and so I won't spend a lot of time on that this morning. But I do want to ask you if you love the Lord, really love Him. One of our men told the Lord in prayer at our prayer meeting yesterday morning that he wanted to please the Lord more than anything else. I knew that we were listening to a man who really loved the Lord because that is the way you feel when you love Him.

And as our verse here (v. 8) indicates, if we love Him, we are going to be trusting Him, and if we are trusting Him, we are going to be rejoicing in Him. And all of this is not

something to that goes on after that trial that you are going through is over. It is that which is going on right in the heat of the trial.

I know that many of you are going through some real trials, some severe trials. Some of you are concerned about your children who are not walking with the Lord. Many of us have family members, or dear friends, who are not saved. Sometimes the testing is physical. You may have other trials because Peter said in this passage that there are many different kinds. But the main point in this passage, as I understand it, seems to be that, although our trials may involve others, yet the main purpose of the trials is what God is doing in our own hearts. So let us learn in our trials to rejoice in the Lord and what He has done, and continues to do for us, and let us trust Him because we love Him and know that if He could save us from our sins, then there is nothing that we need but what He can and will provide it for us.

Let me close with the words of this same Apostle Peter which you will find in 1 Pet. 4:12, 13.

May it please the Lord in the coming year to so work in our hearts that we may be instruments in His hand for bringing His blessing to others, as He may see fit to use us.