

“GOSPEL JOY”

I. INTRODUCTION

In the passage we studied last week, verses 3-5 of chapter 1, we saw how salvation can be understood in terms of our present experience, our future hope, and the period in which we wait for that future hope to be revealed. In other words, salvation can be understood in terms of the “now,” the “not yet,” and the “in-between.” Those who belong to Jesus Christ already possess this salvation, but we have to wait until the return of Christ before we will experience it in all of its fullness. Nevertheless, we have the assurance that God will preserve us until that day arrives. God guards us by his power, through faith, so that we will inherit the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

In today’s passage, we learn more about our present experience of this future hope of salvation. At conversion, when we first lay hold of Christ by faith, God causes us to be born again to a living hope. Christian hope is not a hope that has no bearing upon life in this world. Our hope is not a dead hope, but a living hope. When a person becomes a Christian, the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last day is drawn backward in time, into the present. For this reason, the life of faith is characterized by the joy that belongs to the new creation. That is the message of the passage before us today. In these verses, the Lord teaches us that, by faith, we already have a foretaste of the joy that belongs to the new creation. In this sermon, we will focus upon four things that this

passage teaches us about the relationship between faith and our future hope: (1) faith produces joy; (2) faith is tested and purified by trials; (3) faith is not by sight; and (4) the goal of faith is our final salvation. These four points form the outline for today's sermon.

II. FAITH PRODUCES JOY

We begin with the notion that faith produces joy. Peter says, "In this you rejoice." But what is the word "this" referring to? What is it that we rejoice in? It is the thing that Peter was writing about in the preceding verse: the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Peter is saying that we rejoice in our living hope of salvation, which will be revealed on the last day.

But this leads to another question. Verse 6 speaks of rejoicing in the present tense. It says "you rejoice." Why does Peter use the present tense to refer to something that will not take place until the future? Why not put it in the future tense, since it is referring to a future hope? Why not say, "In this you will rejoice"? That would make sense, especially since the very next portion of verse 6 speaks about the trials that we experience in the present. Wouldn't it make better sense to speak of our joy as something that is yet to come?

We might be inclined to think this way, but there is a good reason why the word “rejoice” is in the present tense. Peter is not talking about a joy that we will have in the future. He is talking about a joy that we already have in the present, even though we are still waiting for the full revelation of the salvation that is the source of that joy. As I said a few moments ago, Christians already have a foretaste of the joy that awaits us in heaven. We all know that it is possible to rejoice over something before you come into full possession of it. I am sure there were some Red Sox fans who began to feel the joy of winning a world championship after the Sox took a three-games-to-nothing lead in the World Series, even though they had not actually won anything yet. And we all know that a child begins to experience some of the joy of Christmas morning on Christmas Eve, even though he hasn’t opened any presents yet. We can experience joy while we are anticipating something that will bring us joy in the future.

But Christian joy is even better than the joy of anticipation. Our joy, what we might refer to as gospel joy, is not just a joy that comes as a result of expecting something that is yet to come. Gospel joy comes from actually taking possession of what the gospel promises us. Even though we have yet to see salvation as it will be revealed on the last day, those who have experienced the new birth have already entered into the glorious “year of the Lord’s favor,” which we read about in Isaiah 61. We have already taken possession of the “everlasting joy” of which Isaiah speaks in that passage. And we can be certain of this because our Lord said it was so. In Luke 4, Jesus entered the synagogue at Nazareth,

read the words of Isaiah 61 aloud, and then proclaimed, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Jesus ushered in the great and glorious day that the prophet Isaiah foretold. And this means that the joy of the new creation is already here for those who belong to Jesus Christ, even though that new creation remains veiled to human eyes. Christians have already tasted the blessings that will be revealed on the last day, even though we still live in a fallen world. Our joy is not merely the joy of anticipation. It is also the joy of actual possession. By faith, we already possess Christ, and all of his benefits and blessings. And this produces gospel joy.

III. FAITH IS TESTED AND PURIFIED BY TRIALS

This brings us to our second point: faith is tested and purified by trials. The gospel produces true joy in the lives of those who are united to Jesus Christ. However, this does not mean that we no longer experience trials in this life. In verses 6-7, Peter tells us four things about the trials that we face as Christians. First, he says that trials are necessary. Suffering is necessary for the people of God. This brings to mind the way in which Jesus spoke about the suffering that he was about to face as his death on the cross drew near. Mark 8:31, “And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things.” And Luke 17:25, “[the Son of Man] must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.” On a similar note, in Acts 14:22, Paul and Barnabas said, “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” And in 1 Thessalonians 3 Paul writes

that Christians are destined for afflictions. This is the terminology that the Bible uses to speak of the sufferings of Jesus and his people: “necessary,” “must,” “destined.” There is a divine purpose in suffering. And for this reason, Christians do not look at suffering in the same way that non-Christians look at it. We need to understand the various trials we face within the context of God’s providence. In his most holy wisdom, the Lord deems it necessary that his children suffer. And he promises to use our sufferings for our ultimate good. Suffering is necessary. That is the first thing that Peter says about our trials.

The second thing is that our trials grieve us. Suffering produces grief. Being a Christian does not require you to pretend that your trials are not really trials. Suffering is not good, and we do not have to pretend that it is. It is a result of the fall. God is able to use suffering for our good, but he does not call us to deny the fact that suffering produces grief, and hardship, and pain.

The third thing that Peter says about our trials is that God uses them to test and purify our faith. This is a key reason why trials are necessary in the lives of God’s people.

Remember what Peter said about faith in verse 5: faith is the means by which God guards us while we wait for the return of Christ. If our faith is going to be able to guard us for an entire lifetime, then it needs to be continually strengthened and purified. God uses trials to do this. He uses trials to purify our faith, just as fire is used to purify gold. Edmund Clowney writes, “Our trials keep us trusting; they burn away our self-confidence

and drive us to our Savior.” (*The Message of 1 Peter*, p. 52) Our trials remind us of our true condition. When things are stable in our lives, we are tempted to think that we are strong. But trials keep us mindful of our sin, our weakness, and our complete dependence upon Jesus Christ. True faith is not destroyed by the fires of adversity.

Rather, it is proven to be genuine faith, the faith that is produced by the working of the Holy Spirit. The testing and purifying of our faith continues all throughout our lives. But this does not mean that the faith that you presently possess is somehow insufficient. Gold is still gold, even when it is unrefined and riddled with impurities. And in the same way, faith is still faith, even when it is weak and impure. If your faith has truly been produced by the working of the Holy Spirit, then you can be certain that God will use that faith to guard and keep you for all your days.

The last thing that Peter says about our trials is that they cause our faith to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Whose praise and glory and honor? On the one hand, this refers to the praise, glory and honor that will be bestowed upon us when we come into our inheritance in the kingdom of God. If you belong to Jesus Christ, then there is glory in your future. Christians will receive a crown of glory when Christ returns. We will reign with Jesus on his throne. Nevertheless, we do not do anything to merit such blessings. God graciously bestows them upon us as his adopted children and as co-heirs with Christ. And for this reason, the praise and glory and honor ultimately

belong to God. The glory that he bestows upon us only serves to further display his own glory.

IV. FAITH IS NOT BY SIGHT

Thus far, we have seen how these verses teach us that faith results in joy, and that this faith is perfected by our trials. Now we turn to our third point: faith is not by sight. Verse 8 reads: “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.” This is something that is very basic to the nature of biblical faith. Faith is not by sight. If it was, then it would not be faith. As the writer of Hebrews says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) If you trust in Jesus Christ, then you have been born again to a living hope. You have already taken hold of the salvation that is in Jesus Christ, because you have been united to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit through faith. However, you are still waiting for your salvation to be fully and finally revealed. And this means that there are going to be times in this life when your circumstances and your feelings are not reflective of the living hope that belongs to you in Jesus Christ. This does not change the fact that you have a living hope. It just means that there are going to be times when your hope may not seem very alive. Do not be surprised when these moments come! You can expect them to come. They are necessary. The Lord uses them to keep you clinging to Christ and to

perfect your faith. Remember: you have not yet taken full possession of the inheritance that is yours as an adopted child of God. That inheritance is being kept for you in heaven. You are waiting for it to be revealed on the day of Christ's return. It is already yours, Christ is already yours, but the last time has not yet come. You have a living hope, but you have this hope by faith, not by sight. At present, it is veiled behind a curtain, a curtain that has not yet been pulled back. Your hope is there, but you cannot see it. This is why Peter says that our present joy is "inexpressible." It is inexpressible because it defies our outward circumstances. It is by faith and not by sight.

V. THE GOAL OF FAITH IS OUR FINAL SALVATION

This brings us to our fourth and final point: the goal of faith is our final salvation. Verse 9 says that, if you are a Christian, you are "obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Faith is the means by which God guards us for the salvation that will be revealed when Christ returns. This faith is being proven and purified as we endure the trials of this present life. And it is through the patient endurance of faith that we are being brought into our eternal inheritance. Salvation is received through faith alone, and this is true from start to finish. By faith we first receive Christ; by faith we keep on laying hold of Christ and all of his graces; and by faith we will be carried home. Faith is the means by which God preserves us as we live as pilgrims in this world. And this faith has a final purpose; it has a clearly defined goal: to bring us into our eternal

Sermon on 1 Peter 1:6-9
OT Reading: Isaiah 61

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inheritance. As we continue to live the life of faith, we are receiving the goal towards which that faith is directed. We are receiving the salvation of our souls. In this, we rejoice. Amen.