

## “The joy and glory of a Christian” (4)

In our sermon series so far Peter has reminded us that this world is not our home, we are mere pilgrims passing through until we get to our eternal home in heaven. Peter has also reminded us that as Christians we are privileged to be chosen by God but with those privileges comes great responsibility. Privileged because of the many blessings we have in Christ but responsible for obeying and following the will of God. We saw last time that Peter reminded us that one of those blessings is a living hope. But the blessings don't stop there; another blessing available to the chosen of God is a special kind of joy.

Years ago, my grandfather was talking to an old friend, our honorary uncle John, who at the age of eighty-nine was still a bachelor. My Grandfather jokingly asked, "John, you old codger, can you remember the first girl you ever kissed?" John gave a hollow laugh. "Mike," he said dryly, "I can't even remember the last one."

And that's what I want to do today with this sermon, just in case you ever forget some of the many blessings God gives us, I want to remind you of the ones we've looked at so far in **1 Peter** as well as looking at the effects they should have in our lives.

Peter says in **1 Peter 1:6** “**In this you greatly rejoice.**” Well in what do we greatly rejoice Peter? And Peter says **can't you even remember what I've already written?** He says there are **past things** which are worth rejoicing in. In **1 Peter 1:2**, he says we have been "**set apart**" by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. Also in **1 Peter 1:2**, he says we have been "**sprinkled**" with the blood of Jesus Christ. In **1 Peter 1:3**, he says we have been "**born again**" to a living hope.

But hey, not only are there **past things** worth rejoicing in there are also **present things** which are worth rejoicing in. In **1 Peter 1:2** he says we are God's "**elect**" people. He says in **1 Peter 1:5** that we are "**kept**" by the power of God through faith.

But hey, not only are there **past things** worth rejoicing in and **present things** which are worth rejoicing in but there are also **future things** which are worth rejoicing in. In **1 Peter 1:4** he says, we have an "**inheritance**" reserved for us in heaven. In **1 Peter 1:5** and **1 Peter 1:9** he says we look forward to the "**salvation**" which will be revealed in the last time.

Now loved ones all these blessings **past, present and future** should serve us well as the basis for the inexpressible joy we should have as Christians. And because of those blessings that we can "**greatly rejoice**" in any situation we may find ourselves in. **But have you ever wondered just exactly how great this joy is which we have?** Well it's so great that Peter says even when times are tough you can still rejoice.

**1 Peter 1:6** “**In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.**” You see no matter what degree of suffering we may experience in our lives, in Christ there is joy to match it. And when the time of trials and testing come our way, we shouldn't be asking ourselves **what on earth is going on?** We should know that being a Christian means you're going to get it tougher than most other people.

**1 Peter 4:12+13** “**My dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful test you are suffering, as though something unusual were happening to you. Rather be glad that you are sharing Christ's sufferings, so that you may be full of joy when his glory is revealed.**”

Now everyone in life suffers to some degree or another but if you're suffering because of your faith in Christ, it's then you should rejoice in Christ. **Why?** Well not only because you're sharing in Christ's sufferings but because God is doing a work on you. God is working on you to make you look more like His Son Jesus, but for that to happen you need to allow Him to do that. Trials are good for us because they help get rid of all the ungodly things in our lives.

**1 Peter 1:7** “**Their purpose is to prove that your faith is genuine. Even gold, which can be destroyed, is tested by fire; and so your faith, which is much more precious than gold, must also be tested, so that it may endure. Then you will receive praise and glory and honour on the Day when Jesus Christ is revealed**”.

**Don't you want to know if your faith is genuine or not? Are you happy with a wishy washy faith?** And remember that any trial or sufferings we go through in life when looked at through the lens of eternity is but a moment. The apostle Paul reminds of the nature of our troubles in **2 Corinthians 4:17** “**And this small and temporary trouble we suffer will bring us a tremendous and eternal glory, much greater than the trouble. For we fix our attention, not on things that are seen, but on things that are unseen. What can be seen lasts only for a time, but what cannot be seen lasts forever.**”

Paul says our troubles compared to the glory we shall receive in the future are small and temporary. What matters most are the things we can't see, the things which last forever.

When God was speaking to Jeremiah He said in **Jeremiah 18:2-4** "Go down to the potter's house, where I will give you my message." So I went there and saw the potter working at his wheel. Whenever a piece of pottery turned out imperfect, he would take the clay and make it into something else."

Have you ever seen the potter working on their wheel? They create this beautiful masterpiece and all of a sudden they put pressure on it and crush it all down and we think "wow what are you doing they've wrecked it! That was beautiful!" and they say 'there were some imperfections which only I can see' and then they start again and create something even more beautiful.

Now remember, our Potter is a perfect Creator. Any mistakes or flaws in the moulding process of our Christian lives is of our own doing. These "flaws" occur when we refuse to allow Christ to mould us into the image He has designed for us, the image of Christ-likeness. You see loved ones, that's what God does in our lives. We say hey 'God I'm looking a little more like Jesus than I did yesterday' then all of a sudden sufferings and trials come our way and we say, 'hey God why are you allowing this to happen?' Well bless your soul Christian, God is trying to make you look even more beautiful today than you were yesterday, just like His Son.

And loved ones just knowing what trials in our lives can produce, makes it possible for us to rejoice in those trials. **James 1:2-4** "My friends, consider yourselves fortunate when all kinds of trials come your way, for you know that when your faith succeeds in facing such trials, the result is the ability to endure. Make sure that your endurance carries you all the way without failing, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing."

You want to look more like Jesus today than you did yesterday? Allow God to work on you, He's trying to help you look more perfect than you were yesterday. He's trying to help you look more complete than you were yesterday. He's trying to help you get to the stage where your faith lacks nothing. The **English Standard Version** says, in **James 1:2** "Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds."

In other words James and Peter are both telling us it's all about choice. You know people say to me 'oh I've had a really bad week' really! Your telling me that every single minute of every single day has been bad? Listen loved ones I have times when I think I've had a 'bad day' but when I get home and see my wife and children I realise that my day hasn't been that bad after all. There have been some good parts of the day too. What you choose to remember about your day is your choice, so remember and choose wisely.

Let me share with you a short poem which will help get my point across.

Count your blessings instead of your crosses. Count your gains instead of your losses. Count your joys instead of your woes; Count your friends instead of your foes. Count your smiles instead of your tears; Count your courage instead of your fears. Count your full years instead of your lean; Count your kind deeds instead of your mean. Count your health instead of your wealth; Count on God instead of yourself.

**Romans 5:1-3** "Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He has brought us by faith into this experience of God's grace, in which we now live. And so we boast of the hope we have of sharing God's glory! We also boast of our troubles, because we know that trouble produces endurance, endurance brings God's approval, and his approval creates hope". In other words suffering, trials and troubles all have a purpose loved ones, they are there to help us grow in our faith and to help us look more like Jesus.

Now it's interesting when Peter says in **1 Peter 1:6** "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials." The word "various" includes all kinds; it includes those trials which come as a result of living for Christ.

**Matthew 5:10-12** "Happy are those who are persecuted because they do what God requires; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!" Happy are you when people insult you and persecute you and tell all kinds of evil lies against you because you are my followers. Be happy and glad, for a great reward is kept for you in heaven. This is how the prophets who lived before you were persecuted".

So we are to expect some sort of trials because we're Christians but you need to know that because he uses the word **various**, this means we can also rejoice in the everyday afflictions of life. Peter says listen Christian if you're sick you can still rejoice. If you're suffering from a broken heart you can still rejoice. Even if you're facing death you can still rejoice.

**Why can we still rejoice in all these areas?** Well simply because all of these things can also provide an opportunity to test our faith, hope, love, longsuffering and patience. If you as a Christian can still rejoice even in the midst of such trials, then surely you have a joy which is **"inexpressible and full of glory."** Now I don't know about you but is still find it difficult to rejoice at times when my life is falling apart.

**Someone once asked an elderly woman. "What is your favourite Scripture?" to which she replied, "My favourite Scripture is, 'and it came to pass.'" When asked why she chose this one she said, "Because it does not say, 'it came to stay.'"**

You see loved ones she knows that everything is temporary. What will not be changed by the passing of time will be changed by the end of time. The biblical principle is that we are to look beyond any problem, suffering, and confusion of this time and look to the future reward. Paul said in **Romans 8:18 "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us"** We can live with present problems because of their temporal nature.

**Why bother to fuss, be angry and stew over something that will be gone sooner or later?** You see loved ones one of the reasons as to why we struggle to rejoice during difficult times is because we forget that our trials and sufferings are only temporary.

Another reason as to why we fail to rejoice in times of trials and sufferings is because we haven't understood Peter's words in **1 Peter 1:8 "You love him, although you have not seen him, and you believe in him, although you do not now see him."** **Do you love Jesus?** Peter asks. He says if we want to truly rejoice in our sufferings we first must love Jesus even though we haven't ever seen Him.

You see loves ones, we are not to rejoice in our new suit. We're not to rejoice in our new home. We're not even to rejoice in our new job. No loved ones if we are to rejoice anywhere we are to rejoice in Jesus our Lord. Because it's Jesus who is our ultimate source for being able to rejoice in all things. **Philippians 4:4 "Rejoice in the Lord always, I say it again rejoice."**

**Why do we to think that whenever things get a bit tough in our lives that God leaves us?** We think that because we stop listening to God and start listening to the devil. But God Himself has promised us loved ones that we can rejoice no matter what life throws at us because Jesus has promised to be with us. **John 14:23 "Those who love me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and my Father and I will come to them and live with them".**

**Do you believe that Jesus is not just for Christmas but for life? Do you believe that He is with us through good times and bad?** I pray you do because it all comes down to faith. You see you and I have never seen Jesus, we've never had the privilege of sitting as His feet or touching His scared hands.

**But can we who have never seen Jesus, love Him?** Yes we can. Take a look again at **1 Peter 1:8 "You love him, although you have not seen him, and you believe in him, although you do not now see him."** **How can we come to love Someone we have not seen?** Well simply through studying His word.

When you study the **Old Testament** you will see that there were many prophecies telling us that Jesus was coming. When you read the **Gospels** they will tell you about His life, teachings, compassion, suffering, death, and glorious resurrection. When you read the **book of Acts** you will see that it's action-packed with events concerning Jesus working together with His church. When you read the **letters** you will learn of the many blessings which can be found in Christ, you will read about His ministry as High Priest pleading in our behalf. When you read the **book of Revelation** you will see the glorious victory to be won by the Lamb and His followers.

So not only are we to love Him as we read about Him but we also need to believe in Him. **1 Peter 1:8 "You love him, although you have not seen him, and you believe in him, although you do not now see him."** Now please understand when the Bible uses the word **believe**, it's never used in the passive sense, it's always used in terms of doing something with it. The word **"believe"** involves the key element of faith itself, which is **"trust."**

Many years ago now, when **John G. Paton** first went out as a pioneer missionary to the new Hebrides Islands, he found that the natives among whom he began to work had no way of writing their language. He began to learn it and in time began to work on a translation of the Bible for them. Soon he discovered that they had no word for "faith." This was serious, of course, for a person can hardly translate the Bible without it. One day he went on a hunt with one of the natives. They shot a large deer in the course of the hunt, and tying its legs together and supporting it on a pole, laboriously trekked back down the mountain path to **Paton's** home near the seashore. As they reached the balcony both men threw the deer down, and the native immediately flopped into one of the deck chairs that stood on the porch exclaiming, "My, it is good to stretch yourself out here and rest." **Paton** immediately jumped to his feet and recorded the phrase. In his final translation of the **New Testament** this was the word used to convey the idea of trust, faith, and belief.

**Acts 16:31** "Stretch yourself out on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved". You see loved ones trusting Jesus involves stretching yourself out on the Lord Jesus Christ's commands to be for our ultimate good. It involves stretching yourself out on the Lord Jesus Christ's promises to be fulfilled. It involves stretching yourself out on the Lord Jesus Christ and obeying everything He ever commanded.

And it's then and only then can we truly love Him with our whole being. It's then and only then can we be filled with a joy which is inexpressible and be filled with glory. What a blessing that joy is loved ones and it's a blessing which can stand the test of time if we continue to believe. A blessing that can sustain us till we reach the end goal of our faith which is salvation.

**1 Peter 1:9** "Because you are receiving the salvation of your souls, which is the purpose of your faith in him". Now if you're not a Christian this morning you might be thinking, why on earth are all these people Christians? Why should you become a Christian? Now I can understand you asking that question when you meet some Christians. Some Christians look like they were baptised in lemon juice because they never seem to smile or have a sense of humour about anything.

But it never ceases to amaze me why people ask me why I'm a Christian. Asking me why I'm a Christian is like asking me if I would like to live forever in a place where there is no more pain and sorrow. It's like asking 'hey would you like to live in a place where there are no evil people around and there's nothing but peace and love.'

Yes I'm a Christian because I've done some pretty wicked things in the past which only God will forgive me. Yes I'm a Christian because of the many blessings I receive from being God's child. Yes I'm a Christian because of what God has done in my life in the past, in the present and what He will do in the future. Yes I'm a Christian because God promised I can joyfully strengthen my faith through all kinds of trials in this life. But the bottom line is this, I'm a Christian because I don't want to go to hell, I want to go to heaven.

Someone once asked me, 'do you think there would be more Christians if people believed that heaven was a real place? I answered 'No' 'I think there would be more Christians around if people believed that hell was a real place'. I'm a Christian because I want to go to heaven not hell because I know both are very real places. I'm a Christian because I want to go to heaven because I want to receive the salvation of my soul and I hope and pray that you do too.

In **Holman Hunt's** famous picture of "Christ the Light of the World" there is no latch of the door outside. The Christ stands knocking, waiting to be admitted, but the ivy- adorned door must open from the inside. You see what **Hunt** was trying to tell us was that our Lord Jesus never destroys the will, but sweetly inclines us, makes us willing in the day of His power. It is always "Whosoever will" **Revelation 22:17**, or "You will not" **John 5:40** that secures or loses us salvation.

If you're not a Christian this morning then I plead with you don't be like Jerusalem. In **Matthew 23:37** we find Jesus looking on towards Jerusalem and bitter sorrow in His heart saying, "I would, but you would not." Jesus won't force you to become a Christian but if you're not a Christian this morning then you need to know that Jesus is always willing and He is looking at your heart today and asking, 'are you willing?'

Are you willing to love Jesus and truly believe in Him? If you are then Jesus says in **John 14:15** "If you love me, you will obey my commandments".