

**FACING HARD TIMES WITH JOY**

1 Peter 1:1-9

**INTRODUCTION**

Regardless of your political persuasion, I imagine that you, like me, feel a lot of compassion for the people who have been journeying through Mexico with the hope of entering into the U.S. Even if they get in to the U.S., they will feel like strangers in a new country, initially and perhaps for most of the rest of their lives. And that will be very hard. For those who do get in, I wonder whether they will find any joy for themselves.

While probably most all of us will never face a similar situation of being foreigners in a different country, I think, at the same time, our own country is becoming more and more unfriendly, unreceptive and even hostile to us as Christians. And, as I read the Bible, I see that scenario expanding to more and more countries, including the U.S., the closer the time comes to when Jesus returns.

Living as exiles and foreigners was the reality for some early Christians living in what is today, Turkey. They may have been forcibly relocated from parts of the Roman empire that were hostile toward this new faith in Jesus, or it was just the fact that when they became followers of Jesus, they no longer fit in with society. In either case, they found themselves as foreigners, not fitting in.

This morning we begin a new series on 1 Peter. Peter is writing from Rome to encourage and help these Christians who are facing more than just the feeling of not fitting in to society, they were experiencing prejudice and persecution. And some of the Christians were struggling with why it was happening and whether they should continue to try to live as good Christians instead of just compromising.

Peter is telling these Christians that following Jesus is not merely **enduring** life until we get to heaven, but living a life of joy even in the midst of suffering and persecution. And that is a message for us today, and for the future.

Here's my **main point** to remember:

**We can rejoice in the face of any suffering because the best is yet to come!**

How can we find joy in a world that is increasingly hostile to Christians?

Four sources of joy. The first is that:

**I. God has chosen us to be in his family**

Peter begins his letter by saying:

*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,*

*To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, <sup>2</sup> who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: 1 Peter 1:1-2 <sup>NIV</sup>*

Peter acknowledges that they are exiles. The word describes a person who did not hold citizenship where they resided, and was classed as a foreigner. But he also tells them that they are God's elect, that God chose them to be in his family.

This dual status—as citizens of heaven and residents of a foreign land—sets up a tension that we will all live with. “Foreigners dwell respectfully in their host nation but participate in its culture only to the extent that its values and customs coincide with their own that they wish to preserve.” Jobe, 62.

Notice how this tension is inherent in the purpose for which God chose us: *<sup>2</sup> who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ.*

God's purpose is to set us apart to be obedient to Jesus Christ. That means that God has called us to live his way, with his values and his truths, and to obey his commands, even when they conflict with the values and commands of society around us.

But is it worth it to live God's way even if he means we face persecution? That's an important question, isn't it. When God chose you to become part of his family, he chose you to follow Jesus, not the world. Is it worth it?

I definitely think so. The alternative would be to be outside of God's family. And that means separated from all that God has for us. Paul reminds the Christians in Ephesus of their status before becoming part of God's family:

*Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. Ephesians 2:12*

Not being in God's family means we would be excluded from all that God is going to do for his children, without any hope and without God himself!

Talk about a bleak life!

Being in God's family brings a second source of joy, and that is because:

## **II. God has brought us into a new life with a living hope (3)**

*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. 1 Peter 1:3 <sup>NIV</sup>*

The common phrase for becoming a Christian is to be born again. Stop to think about how incredibly transforming and radical is the birth of a baby. I love holding a new baby and looking at the little fingers, touching the soft skin, and seeing a fully human, miniature person. All of this coming in nine months' time from a microscopic egg and sperm. I never get over this wondrous miracle.

It is not without reason that God describes the changes and transformations that

happen as a new birth when a person becomes a Christian. When a person becomes a Christian it is just as radical in the way of transformations that begin to take place as the birth of a baby.

We have a new birth into a living hope. This new birth brings a new spiritual life that is recreating us into the image of Jesus, replacing our present sin-filled values, thinking, longings, and desires with those that reflect God's. It's a life that is not only what God originally intended for us before sin entered into the world, but a life that is energized and infused with the divine life of Jesus himself.

And it is a life with a living hope. We can say in the face of any obstacle, any persecution, any suffering—that the best is yet to come.

And that leads us to a third reason why we can rejoice:

### **III. God has given us a heavenly inheritance (4-5)**

*He has given us new birth into a living hope ... <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> 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. 1 Peter 1:3-5*

When I was in college, I had friends who had lots of money. One friend in my fraternity drove a Bentley, complete with steering on the right side. He had money coming out of him from all angles. To further separate his life from mine, he got engaged to a fellow student who also had loads of money. For a birthday present she gave him a new Dino Ferrari. Today, the cost of a new one is around \$200,000-\$300,000.

Well, that's peanuts compared with our inheritance. One of the benefits of being a child of God is that we are heirs of God's kingdom. Not only will we live in God's perfect kingdom, but we will also share in the ownership of it.

To be honest, I can't even begin to imagine what that is going to be like. When God gave Paul a glimpse of this kingdom, Paul wrote of his experience:

*I know a man in Christ who ... <sup>4</sup> was caught up to paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell. 2 Corinthians 12:2,4 <sup>NIV</sup>*

Paul saw things and heard things that he couldn't even describe or express.

And when God gave John visions of heaven, he described the best he could, the visions of seeing God, seeing Jesus, seeing the multitude of angelic beings and people worshiping Jesus, and constantly was overwhelmed with the glorious sight of all of it. This is just a part of heaven, a part of our inheritance.

I don't know if I'm going to have any inheritance from my family. But as a child of God, I know that I have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. And that makes living now and even enduring difficult times, something that doesn't bother me. In fact, I have a joy that undergirds and permeates all of my life. Truly, the best is yet to come, and the thought of sharing in God's inheritance is so overwhelmingly filled with joy, that if I end up poor and destitute on earth, it will be only a brief time in

comparison.

A final source of joy is that:

#### **IV. God has given us a faith more valuable than gold (6-7)**

*In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup> These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:6-7*

Faith is the key to the Christian life. By faith, we enter into the Christian life. By faith, we claim and experience the promises and grace of God in our present life, and by faith we continue to keep hold of our future inheritance.

Paul is encouraging these Christians to keep looking ahead to what God has for them so that they can face the present sufferings and not give up.

Throughout this letter, Paul keeps bringing up the reality of their suffering and persecutions, all because they were seeking to live good Christian lives. He is trying to help them realize that what they are going through is not something that God did not anticipate for them to face. It reflects what Jesus himself said in the Sermon on the Mount:

*Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:10 <sup>NIV</sup>*

We could paraphrase this by saying, “Blessed, or happy, are those who are persecuted for living the way a Christian should live.”

Jesus said this to his disciples:

*Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. John 15:20 <sup>NIV</sup>*

In one sense, the fact that a Christian is persecuted is proof of the genuineness of their faith. It proves you are a Christian. When you live in a society whose values and lifestyles are contrary to God’s, you can expect problems.

But it is your faith that is going to keep you close to God. That doesn’t discount God’s grace in helping us stay close to him, but it points out that we have a part, a choice, as to whether we are going to stay close to God and depend on his grace, or whether we are going to cave in and compromise our faith.

Our faith, Peter says, is more valuable than gold. Gold is eventually going to perish in the sense of not being part of the future Kingdom of God. It will not just be useless, it won’t even exist. But God’s kingdom, and all that is part of it, will endure for all eternity. Which would you rather have: gold for a brief time and no future inheritance for all eternity, or a future inheritance of priceless joy and blessings, even if it means suffering for a brief while here on earth?

Peter ends this section with these words:

*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, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:8-9 <sup>NIV</sup>*

When we keep close to Jesus, when we keep believing in him, we will be filled in an expressible and glorious joy, and with that joy, we can face any suffering or persecution that might come our way.

**We can rejoice in the face of any suffering because the best is yet to come!**

***Next Steps:***

1. Are you willing to live as a Christian and follow Jesus, no matter what the cost?
2. Do you think about your heavenly inheritance more than your earthly possessions?
3. Is your walk with God close so that no matter what comes, you will face it with God's grace and strength?