Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The book of the Bible that comes before 1 Peter is James. And commentators have noted lots of similarities between the books. One example is verse 6 of our text and James 1:2; both verses link rejoicing and enduring various trials. The more well-known of the two is James 1:2, which says, “*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds*.”

Now, I want to suggest to you that when you next meet someone from church who has just broken their leg, or had their house robbed, that you don’t say to them, at that moment, “*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds*.” Because if you do, there is a good chance that you will get a punch on the nose!

But that is just a timing thing because what James 1:2 and verse 6 of our text say is quite correct – we *do* have every reason to rejoice when we meet various trials. But we will only be able to do so if we have the right perspective of trials and the right understanding of their purpose. And that is exactly what Peter spells out in our text.

You will remember that the people that Peter originally wrote were exiles who had been forced to flee their homeland because of persecution. And they were very discouraged. But we have seen that every Christian in every age is a spiritual exile. Our true home is heaven, but we must live on earth where there is all sorts of hardship and opposition, which can leave us discouraged. So, Peter wrote his letter to encourage discouraged believers.

And those of you present last week will recall that this part of Peter’s letter, verses 3-12, is his **salvation song**. In it, he blesses Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, for our magnificent salvation. And last Sunday, we looked at verses 5-8, the first stanza, which is where the Father is blessed for securing our salvation. Well, the focus of the second stanza is the Lord Jesus. And here we see that **we believers rejoice,** **even when we suffer, as we look to Jesus Christ**. And we will see why this is so as Peter explains the **purpose** ***of*** **suffering**, and as he provides us with the right **perspective *about* suffering**. So, our two main headings will be **purpose** and **perspective**.

And it is very fitting that we get to think about all of this in connection with the Lord’s Supper. May the Spirit of God be pleased to use this sermon to deepen our love of and our belief in the Lord Jesus!

1. So, we begin with Peter’s words about the **purpose** of suffering.
   1. **Verse 6** begins with “*in this you rejoice,*” and in **verse 8** we read, “*You believe in Him and rejoice* *with joy inexpressible*.” Notice, though, that these are **not commands**, as in you must rejoice, but descriptions of what believers do – they rejoice. So, Peter assumes that believers rejoice. Why?
      1. Well, if you look back at **verse 5**, Peter blessed the Father who caused each believer “*to be born again*.” And we saw that being born again is when the Holy Spirit enters a person’s heart and gives them a new spiritual nature. And in **Galatians 5** we are told that the Holy Spirit produces fruit in every believer, right? So, can one of you boys and girls tell us what the second fruit of the Spirit is? Joy! The Holy Spirit produces joy in every believer. So, Peter is right to assume that believers rejoice!
   2. But what we need to consider next is ***why*** we rejoice. **Verse 6** says, “*In this you rejoice*.” And what the “*in this*” is referring to is everything in **verses 5-8**. So, because our Father “*has caused us to be born again to a living hope*” and a heavenly “*inheritance*,” and because, by His power, He is guarding us “*for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*,” we rejoice!
   3. But while that is true, I want you to try and **put yourselves in the sandals of the Christians that Peter was writing to**. They had been forced to leave their homeland. They had surely lost loved ones to persecution – perhaps a spouse or a parent or a child. They had lost their homes and their possessions and their jobs. And this is the situation of many Christians today, such as our brothers and sisters of the **Early Rain Covenant Church** in China, who face daily persecution and imprisonment. And it may not be persecution that you are suffering from today, but in one way or another, **we all suffer**. Perhaps it is a spiritual suffering – a heavy burden of guilt or a lack of assurance that you are a child of God. Or maybe it is a physical suffering – an illness or a disability or some type of dysfunction in you or a loved one. Or maybe it is a suffering related to relationships or finances or conflict. And the hurt is powerful and real. Well, Peter acknowledges this reality; he says, “*In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, as was necessary, you* *have been grieved by various trials*.” So, even though we are children of God, whose salvation is secure, we still encounter trials that cause a very real grief.
      1. But you know, we can take our grief to someone who knows exactly what we are experiencing – the Lord Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 2:17** says, “*He was made like His brothers [meaning you and me] in every respect*.” And so, “*because He Himself has suffered when tempted, He is able to help those who are being tempted*.” So, in your suffering and grief, you can turn to Jesus, because He knows what you are going through, and He is able to help you!
   4. But not only can and does the Lord Jesus help us when we are suffering, **there is also a good purpose for the trials that we face**. And this is spelled out in **verse 7,** where we read: “*So that the tested genuineness of your faith- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ*.” And brothers and sisters, this is a remarkable truth! Let me explain why:
      1. When we read the word “***tested***,” we think, pass or fail. Right? You take a math test, and you might pass or fail. You take a driving test, and you might pass or fail. But the possibility of failure is not in view here.
         1. And Peter explains this with the illustration of **gold refined by fire**. You see, when you find a hunk of gold in the ground, it will contain impurities. So, what you have to do is to put it in a very hot fire. And the fire burns away all the impurities so that what is left is pure gold.
         2. And that is how it is with the chosen children of God – when they go through the fire of trials and suffering, they always come out the other side with a deeper and stronger faith. So, when their faith is put to the test, it always proves to be genuine – the real deal!
      2. Now, if you are in the midst of a trial, right now, you might be hearing this and screaming out in your heart, Pastor, are you kidding me? I feel so far away from God. Or, it feels like God has abandoned me. I feel like my faith has shriveled up and died! What are you talking about? Well, dear brother or sister, I want to encourage you to **read the Psalms**. For you will find Psalm after Psalm where the psalmist describes exactly those feelings – abandoned, faithless, guilty, and far from God. Every believer experiences those feelings. But where does the Psalmist always end up? Well, listen to **Psalm 13** as one example:

*How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death, lest my enemy say, "I have prevailed over him," lest my foes rejoice because I am shaken. But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the LORD, because He has dealt bountifully with me*.

* + - 1. **Psalm 30:5** says, “*Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning*.” There are times when the believer weeps. But if he or she trusts in Jesus, the time for weeping always passes and the time for joy arrives. The time of doubt or despair or guilt passes and the time of assurance, and rejoicing that your faith is genuine, comes.
      2. And this is because **nothing happens to you by chance**. The Lord’s Day of the Heidelberg Catechism that deals with the doctrine of providence says that “all things [including hardships and trials] … come to us not by chance but from the hand of our Father in heaven.” “And He will turn to my good whatever adversity He sends me in this sad world.”
      3. We used similar words earlier in the service; we said, “He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact, all things must work together for my salvation.” And the words just roll off the tongue, so easily, don’t they! But tomorrow, when something ‘bad’ happens, will you remember this and trust in the Lord or will you forget them and fall to pieces? The trials that the Lord permits you to encounter and endure will purify your faith and deepen your trust in Him. That is the *purpose* of suffering.
  1. Now, before we step back to consider the right perspective on suffering, there is one more remarkable truth in **verse 7** that we simply must consider. Look at the last part of the verse – these trials also come so that your faith “*may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ*.” And I hope you have got your seatbelts on because this is mind-blowing! I am sure you have read those words as saying that when Jesus comes, He will receive praise and honour and glory. Yes? But while that is true, that is not what this verse is saying; it is saying that *you*, having had your faith proved genuine through trials, will receive praise and honour and glory, when Christ comes again!
     1. A bit later in **1 Peter 5:4**, we read, “*And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory*.”
     2. So, in the presence of the devil and his demons and all those about to be condemned to an eternity in hell, the Lord will say, Look at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_! Look at how he or she resisted your temptations and trusted in me! Look at how \_\_\_ endured everything that you threw at \_\_\_ and clung to my Son in faith! That is why I am giving \_\_\_ this crown of glory!
     3. Can you imagine that? What an incredible thing to experience – vindication and praise, from the Lord!
     4. So, the **purpose** of the trials that the Father permits you to endure are to purify and prove your faith, and they will **result** in you being praised and honoured and glorified when Christ comes again! Isn’t that amazing?!

1. So, this is why we rejoice, even when we suffer! But we have even more reason to rejoice when we have the right **perspective** ***about* suffering**, our second point.
   1. And Peter gives us this perspective with a couple of phrases and one person. So, let’s begin with the phrases:
      1. In relation to suffering, verse 6 says, “***Now for a little while***.”
         1. Some of you will know the story of Joni Eareckson-Tada. Because of a diving accident, she became a quadriplegic as a young teenager. She has had many bouts of depression. She suffers from chronic pain and fatigue. In 2010 she was diagnosed with stage III Breast cancer. It went into remission. In 2018 her cancer came back. She is in remission again. And then, in December last year, she asked for prayer because she had Covid!!! Talk about a life-time of suffering! But, listen to what she said on her website, “Physical affliction and emotional pain are, frankly, part of my daily routine. But these hardships are God’s way of helping me to get my mind on the hereafter.” Do you see her perspective? Next to eternity with Jesus, this life is just a little while! And it is the same for all who know Jesus Christ as their saviour and Lord, your suffering is real but it is just for a little while.
      2. But note the next phrase: “***If necessary***…” So, whatever trials you have to endure are necessary for you. And this refers to back to what we said in the first point; they are what your Father must do to purify *your* faith.
         1. Perhaps you need to be humbled; perhaps you need to learn patience; perhaps you need to be weaned away from wordly things; perhaps you need to focus less on yourself and more on others; perhaps you are clinging to secret sins; perhaps you need to be weakened so that God’s power can be magnified, or perhaps you need to learn to count your blessings. Well, **Hebrews 12:6-11** says, “*The Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom He receives … He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness*.” So, whatever the case, your Father in heaven, who loves you, will do what is necessary to purify your faith.
   2. But in addition to how these phrases provide us with the right perspective on suffering, most importantly of all, Peter points us to a **particular person** to give us the right perspective. And that person is the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, in **verse 8**, we read, “*Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with a joy inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls*.”
      1. And Peter would have written these words with **John 20:29** on his mind. In John 20, we read about the risen Jesus appearing to the disciples in the upper room. But one of the disciples, Thomas, was not there. And when the disciples later told him they had seen Jesus, you will remember that Thomas refused to believe unless he saw Jesus’ wounded hands and side. Well, one week later, he got his wish. He was with the disciples when Jesus appeared again. And Jesus invited Thomas to touch His scarred hands and side. But Thomas immediately said, “*My Lord and my God!*” And do you remember what Jesus said next? He said, “*Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*.”
      2. And Jesus’ words didn’t reflect too well on Thomas. But do you know how would have been absolutely cut to the heart by those words? Peter! Peter was one of the first disciples that Jesus called. He had witnessed the whole of Jesus’ ministry. He saw all His miracles, he heard all His teaching, and he promised never to abandon Jesus, even if everyone else did. But when it came down to it, he publicly denied knowing Jesus, three times! And even when Mary and the two on the road to Emmaus came and told Peter that Jesus had risen, he didn’t believe it; it took Peter seeing the risen Jesus himself to believe.
      3. And so, every time Peter preached the gospel and saw someone believe in Jesus, without ever having seen Jesus, it would have reminded him of his own denials and lack of faith. But it also led him to honour and celebrate unseeing love and belief, as he does here!
   3. So, believer, Peter honours and celebrates you, here! You cannot see heaven. You cannot see the heavenly inheritance that awaits you. You cannot see God’s guarding power that preserves your faith. But more than that, you have never seen Jesus. And yet, “*Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him*.”
      1. And this is the absolute heart and essence of Christianity, isn’t it; love of and belief in Jesus Christ. God is so gracious – He has given us the Bible which proclaims and reveals Jesus Christ. He gives us sermons where Jesus Christ is set before us as our Saviour and King. He gives us sacraments where we can see and touch and taste symbols of the Lord Jesus, like the bread and wine that symbolize His broken body and poured out blood. And in these many ways He tells us and shows us that He sent His Son to die on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.
      2. But it all comes down to one word, doesn’t it – **believe**. You have to believe, which means to be convinced that Jesus is the Son of God and that He died for the forgiveness of your sins, and that He will come again to take you to be with Him in heaven. It is an act of your will; a choice you make; a decision. Have you believed? Will you believe, today?
      3. And let’s not ignore that word ‘**love**,’ either. We are talking here about a sweet relationship! Do you know what a **love letter** is? It is a letter that lovers write to each other. Well, when you read someone else’s love letter, it might be cute or interesting, but that’s as far as it goes. But when you read a love letter written to you from your sweetheart, sheesh! Well, if you believe in Jesus, then the Bible is His love letter to you! Every promise is personal!

And this is why believers “*rejoice with joy that is inexpressible*.” Jesus Christ is real. He loves us! He died on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. He pleads our cause, in heaven, every day. And He has promised to come again to take us to be with Him in the joy and glory of heaven!!!

So, we are going to sing, Rejoice, the Lord is King! And I expect every window to be blown out and the roof to lift up at least 20 cm as we sing! But in all seriousness, we do have every reason to rejoice. Christ is ours and we are His, and even our suffering has a glorious purpose! Amen.