

Prayers

To God

Weekly theme: Thankfulness

Go somewhere different for your prayers today, and explore what it means to praise God in different surroundings

For myself

Lord God Almighty; when trouble is near and I am are hard pressed, come to my rescue. When I fail before others and before You, forgive me and help me. When I sense evil around me and cry out for help, deliver me from my enemy. When I yield to temptation, remove the root of sin from my heart. Lord God Almighty, purify my soul, and by Your grace and the blood of Jesus, bring me to Your eternal Kingdom: AMEN

For others

Pray for people who are lost in poverty and pray for the manner in which your own government deals with poverty. There are many debates about how best to deal with poverty and no one as yet has workable answers for capitalist based societies. But the Christian knows that Jesus is to be found amongst the poor, and the rest of us are judged by whether we show them the same respect as God shows them in Jesus.

Meditation

The things of God are immeasurable and inestimable:

His salvation is more certain than the morning light;
His love is more precious than any gift we may receive;
His support is more secure than the foundations of a house;
His grace is more awesome than any experience we may have;
His faithfulness is more consistent than the seasons of the year;
His promises are more assured than the due processes of law;
His future is more certain than the science of atomic clocks;
His healing is more complete than the circle of the globe;
His compassion is more caring than the touch of lover;

The blessings of God will change our lives, if received!

Bible Passage

1 Peter 1:6-9

⁶ Rejoice in this, even if for a little while you must experience the pain of various trials, ⁷ so that the authenticity of your faith (of greater value than gold, which is perishable even when refined by fire) may be found in praise, glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁸ You love Him though you have not known Him, and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an indescribable and glorious joy ⁹ in receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Review

Here is a famous Biblical text in which God's people are called to persist through trials and suffering (1:6) so that faith will be refined, and lead to praise and worship (1:7). Peter then speaks as someone who knew Jesus personally and was aware that other Christians could not claim the same. Nevertheless, he insists that those who '*love Him though you have not known Him*' (1:8) have a remarkable faith which is no less a means of salvation (1:9), and which is just as much a source of '*indescribable and glorious joy*' (1:8). So the benefits of faith outweigh all earthly trials! This is a strong and encouraging message, and a word for the building up of the church.

We may think it easy for scripture to give such assurances, but wonder how this can help us with our own difficulties? When faced with troubles ourselves, we can too often feel isolated and overcome by them. The challenges of life such as disaster, persecution, death and personal tragedy, occur when we least expect them and we struggle to understand why God should allow us to be tested in this way. Yet scripture such as our passage today reminds us of the deeper truths of faith, to point us away from despair to the source of our hope.

Peter begins his letter by speaking glowingly of the privileges of faith; '*an imperishable, pure and unfading inheritance, which is kept in heaven ... a salvation waiting to be revealed ...*' (1:4,5). So when he goes on to speak about rejoicing in the midst of life's trials, the word 'rejoice' does not mean merely, 'to be happy'; it is about worship and praise, trust and faith, and it indicates that God is our inspiration and joy even when we are in difficulty. In addition, the trials Peter refers to here are not just the general troubles of life. Peter is speaking here about the persecution of the early Christians by various people, from Jewish Zealots (such as Saul [Paul] in his early days) to Roman Emperors (such as Nero in 64 AD), who all did their utmost to wipe out the infant Christian church.

Peter's message is not just about holding up our heads when life is tough. It is about the pathway of discipleship by which all Christians maintain their faith in the midst of trials and persecution. As Jesus Himself said so clearly, these will always come to those who proclaim faith in Jesus Christ and practice it (Matthew 5:11,12).

Going Deeper

Notes on the text and translation

V6 '*rejoice in this*'

Other translations:

'In this you greatly rejoice ...' (NIV)

'You now rejoice in this ...' (CEB)

The traditional rendering of this is *'in this you rejoice'*, but the Greek verb can be either a grammatical indicative or imperative, so my version which translates this as a command is as valid as other translations, and it is in keeping with the sense of the passage.

V6 ***'you must experience the pain of many trials'***

Other translations:

'you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials' (NIV)

'you have had to suffer various trials' (NRSV)

In the middle of this phrase there is a little word in Greek 'deov' which normally means *'it is necessary that ...'* and it is placed alongside the phrase, *'the pain of many trials'*. My translation therefore conveys the idea that suffering is an unavoidable consequence of faith.

V7 ***'the authenticity of your faith'***

Other translations:

'the tested authenticity of your faith' (ESV)

'the trial of your faith' (KJV)

Again, the traditional rendering of this is *'the genuineness of your faith'*, but the Greek word means 'the results of testing' and in today's English, 'authenticity' seems to me to be a better word.

V8 ***'You love Him though you have not known Him'***

Other translations:

'though you have not seen Him, yet you love Him' (NIV)

'whom having not seen, you love' (KJV)

Instead of 'known Him', many translations have 'seen Him'. The Greek word means 'to see or perceive or know' in the sense of firsthand knowledge or sight. The point is that the people Peter wrote to did not have the privilege of having known Jesus personally or seen Him in the flesh

Further Comments

Mortality and Eternity

Verse 6 and 7 depend upon an understanding of the difference between what is earthly and mortal, and what is heavenly and immortal. People in Jesus' day were far more acutely aware of the fragility of life and unlike ourselves today, they were surrounded daily by the evidence of both life and death; for example, the death of children was no less tragic then, but much more of a fact of life. Consequently, people were more aware of their vulnerability in this life and also their possible connection with what lies beyond death.

Against this background, Peter could appeal to Christians to take hold of a powerfully new 'life-perspective', saying that faith which assures our future in heaven has more value to a

Christian than any persecution or trial. Now Peter probably wrote this just after the famous occasion when Nero persecuted the Christians in Rome and threw them to the lions (around 64AD), blaming them for starting the great fire of Rome. As the Roman historian Tacitus dryly records, the episode created much public sympathy for the Christians; *'for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they (the Christians) were being destroyed.'* (Tacitus; Annals XV.44.2-8).

The awfulness of this persecution astounds us, but it was not uncommon in those days, and the church saw such episodes of persecution as something of a passing phase, and only in the second century AD was there a sustained State persecution against Christians which struck at the heart of the Church, long after 1 Peter was written. So Peter was able to call on the Christians of his day to find a godly perspective for the horrors of Nero's persecution and other trials which Christians undoubtedly experienced in different parts of the world.

Perishable gold?

Peter's confidence is of course a resurrection confidence. It looks far beyond this life to echo the teaching of Jesus about worldly wealth; *'do not store up for yourself treasures on earth'* (Matt 6:19). Peter values faith and its eternal consequences as greater than *'gold which is perishable even when refined by fire.'* (1:7); we may think we understand the illustration, but what does Peter mean by describing gold as 'perishable'? He certainly did not have our scientific understanding of earthly elements and metals, He believed that everything in this world was mortal and temporary and the only true permanence in life was to be found in heavenly things. This is why he thought gold was *'perishable'*, where such an idea sounds silly to a modern reader.

Peter's vision of heaven shines through this passage. In comparison to this world, everything promised to us by God and accessed by faith is beyond compare, and is worthy of our thanks and praise. More than that, our perseverance through the temporary trials and testing in this world are proof of the integrity of our faith (1:7). Now, it is not easy to see what verse 7 means when it speaks of what is *'found in praise, glory and honour'*, and there are two possibilities. Firstly that our faith is made stronger by our worship, that is, the *'praise, glory and honour'* we give to God because of Jesus. Secondly, it is possible that Peter is suggesting that when God sees our faith at the End of time, it is He who will bless us with *'praise glory and honour'* because we have sustained our faith in the midst of trials! Certainly, different translations appear to say one thing or the other, according to the opinion of the translators!

Faith unseen

In the last two verses Peter continues to express great joy, encouraging the churches to keep before them the hope of their glory in heaven (1:9). It is interesting however that verse 8 is the first verse within 1 Peter which mentions *'love'*. We know that when Jesus was alive, he spoke a great deal about love, urging his disciples, including Peter, to *'love one another'* (John 13:34f. etc.). It is not surprising therefore that Peter should talk about the relationship between Christians and Jesus as one of *'love'*, using the Greek word *'agape'*. This unique New Testament word means a relationship of intent and purpose, and contains all the elements of God's faithful and undeserved Covenant love exemplified in the Old Testament. Christian faith is a response to this quality of love as shown to us by Jesus, and in verse 7, Peter uses the word *'love'* almost interchangeably with the word *'faith'*. All in all, this passage holds *'faith'*, *'love'* and *'joy'* together as words that describe and express the salvation we find in Christ Jesus.

We saw above how these verses echo the story of Thomas in John's Gospel, but more importantly, they apply very directly to us, centuries later. Peter spoke as an apostle, admiring the extraordinary quality of faith which believes in Jesus without 'seeing' or 'knowing' Him personally. Still, he knew from his own life's experience that the assurance of

salvation was something that could fill a person with '*indescribable and glorious joy*' (1:8) and he wanted his readers to know this experience.

Indescribable joy

Towards the end of this text, it is uncertain whether Peter is talking about this life or the next as he says, '*you believe in Him and are filled with an indescribable and glorious joy in receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*' (1:8,9), but that may be the point. There are times in this life when by the inspiration of the Spirit, the faith and love we experience on earth becomes entwined in our spirits with a sure and confident hope of what we will one day find in heaven, and this indeed is pure joy. Whilst we are all different people, all of God's people should expect that in Christ, heaven and earth are brought together in our praise of God and as we give Him glory. Although we may do this and experience it differently, we should be able to glory in the joy that Peter speaks about; it comes to us as a valuable and heart-warming gift of God which raises our spirits. What a blessing!

Discipleship

Application

Dealing with testing

The difficult tests we experience in this life often reflect the fact that our lives are not perfect and neither is the world in which we live. We must all endure the death of a loved ones, loss of trust in a friend, chronic illness, or friction within the church. All of us experience them in different measure, and we come through them either with our faith in Christ upheld, or we find the test too severe and end up questioning our faith. Whether or not we can express joy in such circumstances is not something we should expect of each other as we fight our way through the mortal consequences of our life and faith.

True joy in the Lord

Nevertheless, this passage reminds us that true faith in Jesus is a deeper thing, capable of standing firm in all manner of circumstances. When we can hold on to faith despite life's trials then our joy is deeper and unconfined. This is perhaps a mystery that can only be grasped when we are faced with life's most exacting circumstances, and we find that God is our only hope, and that He is the only source of strength we possess. Someone like Peter must have experienced a great deal of stress in his life, and a brief read of the Gospel will show that Peter is not exactly described as someone who was able to grasp Jesus' teaching very easily. It seems that Peter was a slow learner and difficult to teach. Nevertheless, Peter persisted to become one of the foremost leaders of God's people, the church, and his optimism is that of someone who overcame fear and stress and grew much closer to the man Jesus wanted him to be. We need to believe that the same can be true for us.

Ideas for what to do

- Write down a list of the different things that are troubling you at the moment. With each one, bring them before the Lord in prayer, if possible with someone else, and see what the Lord will do to guide you
- Make sure that you listen carefully when talking to someone at church on Sunday, and try to hear through what they say whether they have trials and difficulties. Do your best to help bless and encourage the person you have spoken to.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What kinds of trials are most common amongst the people of faith that you know?
2. What kinds of trials are the ones that cause people to lose their faith, in your opinion?
3. What does God do to help us in our trials, and how can we explain this to others?

Final Prayer

Glorious Lord Jesus. We do not know what will happen to us next, and we never know when trouble or stress will hit us or for how long. We place our trust and our faith in You, Lord Jesus, for everything. You will lead us through our trials to heavenly joy! AMEN