

1 Peter 1:6-9

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Introduction:

May I ask you why you are a Christian? Why do you bother to have faith in Jesus Christ? Does it really make a difference to your life, or is it just an insurance policy in case the Scriptures happen to be true and there is an afterlife and hell doesn't appeal to you? Do you live a life of faith? What would your answer be to those questions?

Context:

Verse 6 sets the context of the following verses for us: *In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.* As verse 1 tells us, Peter was writing to a group of Christians scattered throughout what is now modern day Turkey. These Christians were undergoing various forms of social ostracism, from being insulted (4^{4,14}) and having accusations raised against them of wrong doing (2¹², 3¹⁶) through to even occasionally being beaten (2²⁰). This was over and above the normal trials we all face from the mere fact of living. Peter also tells that they recognised what God had done for them and it was in these things that they greatly rejoiced. We looked at these things in the last sermon. This included the being chosen by God, his giving of us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, our eternal inheritance and the fact that we are shielded by God's power unto the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. So we have a people of God, undergoing unofficial persecution, who are yet joyful. I think it is fair to ask though why God would want them to undergo persecution. What good could come of it? Why should they continue to trust in God when being faced with such problems? Although for many of us our problems are not as great as these people were facing, yet it is still something we need to ask ourselves. Why should we continue to trust in God when things go wrong and things don't go our way? Put very bluntly, what's the point of being a Christian?

Doctrine:

Faith is the key grace of a Christian and is of greater worth than anything else we can think of and has results that are greater than anything else we can think of.

Explanation:

- **The worth of faith.** *These have come to that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes though refined by fire - may be proved genuine.* Here we have the reasons why God sends trials our way - to prove that our faith is genuine. Maybe at this point we need to take a step backwards and first ask - what is faith?
- **What is faith?** Many people today if you ask them what is faith will reply that it is belief in something. But that is not faith. It is part of it, but there is much more to faith than mere belief. James makes that clear in his epistle. In **James 2¹⁹** he writes "*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder.*" The book of Hebrews defines faith as "*being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*" (**Hebrews 11¹**). It then lists the resulting **actions** of all the great heroes of faith. Faith is acting on what you



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believe. It is the complete trust in that which you believe is true resulting in actions in align with what you believe. A Christian is someone who has complete trust in Christ and his word and acts on that belief. Now it is quite possible to believe in the things that are not true and even to have faith in them. We see this everyday. Some people read the horoscopes and plan their day around what they have read. Others have faith that money and status will get them liked and make them happy. As you can see, in most cases we would say that they believe rather than that they have faith, but their actions show that in fact their belief is more than just something they agree with. As we saw, the Christian definition of faith is *being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see*. In this passage it is expressed more experientially - *though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him*.

- **But how do we know our faith is real?** Are we only pretending we have faith. Is our faith genuine? This is why God sends us trials and even persecution. It forces us to put our trust in what we really believe in. And our faith is of far greater worth than gold so it is good that it is refined. No one would buy unrefined gold. It's of no use. Faith that is not tested is like unrefined gold. It's of no use to us or God. How can he use us if we go our own way every time things get difficult? Without faith there would be no pastors and no missionaries. Without faith there would not even be any Christians. It is interesting to see how in the gospels Jesus slowly calls his disciples to exercise more and more faith. Initially he calls them to follow him but at that point they did not understand what was really involved. He didn't mislead them. He just met them where they were at to use an expression. But by the end of the three years he was telling them that they must take up their cross daily and follow him. God does that in our lives to. As you look back in your spiritual walk you can see how God has called you to greater and greater exercises of faith. As some one once said, when you are a young Christian it seems as if God shows you every step of the way. As you mature, he shows you less and less and it almost seems as if he leaves you to fight it out by yourself. Our faith is refined. Many of the fruits of the Spirit come as a result of walking by faith.
- **The future result of faith.** *And may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.* Peter first mentions the future result of faith. This has two aspects to it. The first is that when Christ is revealed it will result in praise, glory and honour to our Lord. His word will have proven to be true - we will have been *shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time*. God's plan of salvation will have run its course. Those chosen according to the foreknowledge of God will take their place in heaven. It will be clear to all on that day that those whom the Father has given to Christ, not one of them will have been lost. (John 10²⁹). The plan that has stretched from the beginning of creation up until that great and glorious time will be clear to us. The tapestry will be turned over and we will see the beautiful picture that it makes. The bride will be ready for the bridegroom. But it will also result in praise, glory and honour to us when Christ is revealed. We will hear the words, "*Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!*" (Matthew 25^{21,23}). Our work will be tested to see whether we have built on the foundation of Jesus Christ with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw. If we have built wisely then we will receive our reward (1 Corinthians 3¹⁰⁻¹⁵).
- **The present result of faith.** *For you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.* I want us now to skip over verse 8 and go onto verse 9 and look at the present result of faith. Here Peter states the goal of our faith - the salvation of our souls. Note though that he also uses the present tense - we are receiving the goal of our faith. Faith now has a



present result in our lives. But what does he mean by the salvation of our souls? Does this mean that our bodies are unimportant? No, by no means. Paul clearly teaches us in 1 Corinthians 15 that at the resurrection we will receive a new body - a glorified body. This is what gives us the clue to what Peter means here. Our present body will be destroyed and at the resurrection we will receive a new body. The one thing that remains constant though is our souls, our inner self, who we really are. We will recognise each other in heaven. We will have the same personalities that we have now. If you have truly given your life to the Lord, then even now you are daily been made into the likeness of Christ if you are walking by faith and not by sight. You are receiving the salvation of your souls. It is both an end and a goal. It is not wrong for us to make the goal of our lives the salvation of our soul. By doing so we bring God praise, for trusting in the finished work of Christ is the only way we can be sure of our eternal happiness.

- **The experiential result of faith.** *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.* I have come to verse 8 last because this is in many respects the high point of the passage. Here Peter is describing how these people felt about Christ and this should be true of us too. If it is not then we need to ask ourselves why not. But we also need to understand the passage aright that we do not put on a false front and pretend to be something we are not. We will split the passage up into two parts and look at each part separately Before you decide whether you agree or disagree with me I would ask that you hear me through both parts of this verse as I think Peter is telling us something very important in these two sections and it is only together that we can understand more fully what Peter is saying to us here. Let us take the first part - *“Though you have not seen him, you love him”*. Peter had seen the Lord, so he could make the distinction. But these people to whom he was writing, like ourselves, had not seen the Lord Jesus Christ. They had had the word preached to them and they believed in him. Even more than that, they loved him. Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? That is a loaded question and your response should always be “What do you mean by love?” Remember, these people to whom Peter was writing were being unofficially persecuted. Love in the Scriptures is much more than just a feeling. Most people today take it as either a feeling or sex. Both are wrong and explains why so many marriages fail. If love is only a feeling then a marriage has no chance of surviving. If your wife is ill and needs a drink at four o'clock in the morning, I think I can safely say that few people if asked would say, I really feel as if I love my wife! Love there is an action and this is what the Scriptures primarily defines it as. John says *“This is love for God: to obey his commands”* (1 John 5³). As Hebrews 11 shows us that faith is primarily something which results in action, love is also something which primarily results in action. You show love for you wife by getting what she wants at four o'clock in the morning. In the midst of their persecutions these people still obeyed God and kept his commands, even though by doing so they were being persecuted. We can show this also from the rest of this epistle. Verse 13 -16 and from 2¹³ following show what we should do if we have faith. So from the first part we can say that we show faith in action when we obey Christ even when things are difficult and it is the last thing we feel like. Now let us take the second part - *“Even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.”* The first thing you may say to me is surely this contradicts what I have just said about love. But again we must ask ourselves, what does Peter mean here by an inexpressible and glorious joy. I venture to say that this is what makes us different from the Stoics or the “stiff-upper lip” crowd. Why? Because we are not alone. We have the Holy Spirit with us. We have fellowship with Christ. God is our

Father. There **will be** times, even in the midst of persecution, when we will know the Spirit witnessing to us about the Father's love for us. If we have never experienced this then I think we can safely say that we do not yet know Christ or it may be that we have not recognised the experience for what it is. Paul prays for the Ephesians that they "*being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to **know this love** that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God*" (**Ephesians 3¹⁷⁻¹⁹**).

Knowledge can take us to far. It makes us understand what God has done for us and is an anchor to fall back onto when things go wrong. There are times when we persevere, not because we feel that what we are doing is right, but because we know, even though it feels like everything is going wrong. But even in the midst of those times, God breaks through by his Spirit and suddenly our hearts are full of joy and we know that God loves us, that our sins are forgiven. There is often a deep emotional understanding that Christ died for us and the knowledge brings tears to our eyes. We understand a little of what Christ went through for us and we deeply regret our sins, we are humbled and despite the tears we know that Christ loves us. This is what I believe Peter means here by an inexpressible and glorious joy. Those of you who know what I am talking about will understand. For those of you who have never experienced such things, I do not know what I can say. As Peter says, it is inexpressible. But I must say here that maybe the Lord works with you differently. Your experience maybe very different, but there should be some overlap in the sense that the Lord Jesus Christ is magnified and that you can describe it as being filled with inexpressible joy and full of glory. Times of revival are when the things of heaven are clearer to the human mind. Those times of joy inexpressible and full of glory are more frequent and may last for days. This is what we should be hoping for and praying for. Those who do not know Christ are often brought under great conviction of sin. Those who do are humble, repentant and joyful. People walk in holiness. The problem we always need to remember though that just because we have the emotions we cannot say we are saved. Height of emotion is also no indicator. This is where the great difficulty comes and why the epistle spend also a lot of time of what we should be like, or as Christ put it - "*By their fruit you will recognise them.*" Neither knowledge nor emotion proves you are saved.

Application:

We come now to how we can apply this passage to our lives.

- We must never think of Christianity as merely knowledge. I may be able to recite the Bible backwards and know every argument for every single doctrine, but be a stranger to Christ. On the other hand though we must not think that just because I feel that God loves me that I am saved. We need to keep the balance. In our own lives we must be striving to know the Scriptures better so that we know who God is and what God requires of us. But we must also be looking to the Holy Spirit to teach us of Christ and apply the truths we have learnt to our lives. We need heart knowledge. There should be, I venture to say, there must be, times in our lives when we know that we have met with God. Daily we should be asking God to fill us with his Spirit. Christianity without emotion is a dead and lifeless thing which is a curse to all who fall into that trap. True faith should always produce a great love for God. We also need to remember that the expression of that love will be mediated by the culture. Many of the epistles end with the injunction to greet one another with a holy kiss. These days, in our culture, kissing someone of the same sex has a completely different meaning.
- Emotions are not wrong in Christianity. This is the other side of the coin. Jonathan Edwards,



the great 18th theologian who wrote much about the revivals in his area, used 1 Peter 1⁸ as his main verse for his book *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, or in more modern English *A Book about Religious Emotions*. Emotion is a vital part of religion. Love is the summing up of the law. We are told to serve the Lord with zeal. Joy, love, hope, etc are all emotions. Many people in more conservative churches have reacted to the Charismatic's by discouraging any sign of emotion. The Charismatic's on the other hand have sometimes reacted in the other direction and made emotion the judge of whether you are a Christian or not. Both are equally wrong. One of the things we have lost in the modern world is the rhythm of the seasons. The Israelites had various festivals throughout the year in which they could come before the Lord and have time to express their love for God. This was the time for singing and dancing and being with the Lord's people. Because Christmas and Easter have become so commercialised, we have lost much of this. It would be a good thing if we were to regain this.

- In this life there will be times when we feel that God is far from us. It may be because of our own sinfulness. It may be because we are of a melancholic disposition or are depressed. It may be because of a death in our family or some other sad providence. Yet, God has promised that never will he leave us nor forsake us and so even in the midst of these we have reason to rejoice, even though we don't feel like it. This is not putting on a false "everything's fine" phoney smile. This is a "I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth" faith of Job. It is our relationship to God which is the source of our joy. We have something about which to rejoice even the midst of the worse circumstances, because as Paul writes "*I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (**Romans 8³⁸⁻³⁹**).
- For those of you who are trusting in how you feel, I give you this warning. The feelings will almost certainly die. This is not to be a pessimist but a realist. Even David, a man after God's own heart, had times when, in his words, he was walking through the valley of the shadow of death. But he knew that God was with him. True faith means we trust God even when we do not see him nor know his presence existentially. Rejoice while you have those feelings, but do not let them become the ground of your assurance of your salvation.
- Maybe there are some here tonight who do not know Christ. May I ask you, is the salvation of your soul, you inner being, a priority for you? What do you believe in and what do you have faith in? Will it last beyond the grave?

Conclusion:

You may say as I conclude this sermon that I have not answered the questions I asked you right at the beginning. Maybe not directly, but I have hopefully shown you that your faith in Jesus Christ is not just something which doesn't really matter. It does matter. It has both present and eternal consequences. It is of far greater worth than anything else the world can offer and has results far greater than anything else the world can offer. Surely that is reason enough to have faith in Jesus Christ.



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