

SALVATION AND SUFFERING

1 Peter 1:6-12

Introduction

[From Illy]... POW!

In a Peanuts cartoon, Charlie Brown winds up on the pitcher's mound and with self-confidence quotes Scripture: "Thou shalt not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the pestilence that walketh in darkness..."

In the next frame, WHAM! the ball comes zooming back from the batter, catapulting Charlie head over heels. Then in the last frame we see him lying face down on the ground with stars dancing around his head. He concludes, "But those live drives will kill you!"

[Windows of Truth, Jan-Mar 1991. Page 2a.]

Most people at one time or another in their life will be knocked off their feet by a line drive like that. But the line drives don't have to destroy you.

We have been talking about suffering. Peter was writing to people who were facing intense suffering because of their faith in Jesus Christ. Peter wanted his readers to be prepared for suffering, and the intent of his epistle was to help to prepare them by encouraging them to keep focussed on what really matters.

Over the past couple of weeks, I have spoken to you about the foundation that is laid by the Apostle Peter. As he begins to prepare his readers for the inevitable suffering which they are going to face, they need to understand the essentials of their salvation. It is no different for us.

Review: Conclusion from last week:

Peter's opening words in this letter give us a great deal of assurance. They are the kind of words that can keep us strong in the face of trials and suffering. We can perhaps summarize with three statements.

1. Our salvation is secure because, from beginning to end, it is the work of God. The Father chose us to be the recipients of His mercy; the Spirit drew us to Himself and brought us to faith, and we are sprinkled with the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ the Son.

2. Our salvation has secured for us an inheritance that is not subject to deterioration or fading. It is secured for us by the guarantee of Christ's own resurrection. We have a living hope because we have a living Saviour.
3. Our salvation is secure because we are shielded by God's power. Not only is our inheritance certain, "reserved in heaven for us", but we are being kept securely for it. We are "protected [shielded] by the power of God through faith".

Notice the very next words Peter says: "In this you greatly rejoice..." In what? – In the security and the assurance of your eternal salvation. Why? I would like you to see 4 reasons this morning why we can rejoice.

Because we know that our trials are temporary – v. 6

"for a little while..." – the translation of the NIV (... you may have had to suffer...), as well as the ESV, is somewhat poor on this phrase. It seems to suggest that suffering is only a possibility, whereas in the original it is quite clear that Peter saw suffering in the life of a believer to be inevitable. But he also saw it to be temporary.

→ Illust. - 967: "WE'RE NOT IN A SACK"

Many years ago a dear saint of God told this interesting story: "In the days before passenger trains were equipped with lights, I was travelling to a distant city. Our route was through several tunnels; consequently, at times the cars would be enveloped in deep darkness. Beside me sat a sympathetic Englishman. We were enjoying a pleasant conversation when we started into a long underground mountain pass, and it became pitch black in our coach. My companion, a Christian, had travelled that way many times before. He said reassuringly, 'Cheer up, my friend, we're not in a sack--there's a 'ole at the other end!' I never forgot his words. They cheered me later in many of the dark passages of life."

We do go through tunnels – times of darkness and fear and suffering. But it doesn't last forever. Peter knew that. And he wanted his readers to understand that as well.

When we are in the midst of suffering, it often seems that it will go on forever. Yet in the light of eternity, our trials are so temporary.

An anonymous poet put it like this:

One little hour of watching for the Master,

Eternal years to walk with Him in white;
One little hour to bravely meet life's duties,
Eternal years to reign with Him in light.
One little hour for weary toils and trials,
Eternal years for calm and peaceful rest;
One little hour for patient self-denials,
Eternal years of life where life is best.

We rejoice in suffering because we know that suffering is temporary, but our salvation is eternal.

Secondly, we rejoice ...

Because we know that our suffering has a purpose – v. 7

There is a reason why God brings suffering and trials into our lives. The very meaning of the word trial gives us a clue about the purpose. A trial is the term we use of a court case – it is a proving ground. The intent of a trial is to prove the guilt or innocence of a person. It is meant to prove the genuineness or authenticity of a person's statements or belief.

And in the same way, the trials God allows in our life are intended to sweep away the impurities and to refine and purify our faith to prove it to be genuine and perfect. *Discuss the purification process of gold.*

[From Illy]... CONGRATULATIONS--YOU'RE SPECIAL!

A Christian businessman, who had learned that trials can accomplish God's gracious purposes, remained cheerful even though he suffered one catastrophe after another. First his son was in a serious auto accident, then his daughter married a man of questionable character, and finally the lease on his store building was not renewed. But he was not perturbed. He told his friends that his difficulties were signs of God's confidence in him. When he was asked to explain his positive attitude, he said that while he was in the Armed Forces, the sergeant always chose him for the dangerous missions. At first he complained, but a buddy said to him, "He picks you because he trusts you. He wouldn't stake the lives of the whole outfit on a coward!" This statement opened the eyes of the young Christian, and he realized that God operates the same way with His children. He said, "From that moment on, I have viewed my hardships as a sort of pat on the back from the Lord."

Consider Job. His trials and suffering came in order to prove the depth and integrity of his faith in God.

Of course, the ultimate purpose of our trials is that through our faith and integrity in them, Jesus Christ will receive glory, honor and praise when he appears – see v. 7b

We can rejoice in suffering because we know that our suffering has a purpose. It is not the random attack of a capricious god – it is the purifying, refining process of a loving God.

Third, we rejoice ...

Because our eyes are being focused on Christ – v. 8

Sometimes we need to go through difficult times in order get our eyes back where they belong. Suffering tends to take our eyes away from the things of this world and refocus them on the invisible eternal things.

➔ Illust. – "The Inward Glow – 1 Peter 1:3-8

Henry Drummond told of a young lady whose grace and charm marked her as a beautiful person. She usually wore a dainty locket about her neck. Friends had repeatedly asked to see what was inside, but she never opened it for anyone. One day when she became quite ill, she gave permission to a dear friend to look in the locket. It contained a small slip of paper, which bore these words, evidently written by her own hand, "Whom having not seen, I love." Someone commenting on this incident said, "Undoubtedly that's the secret of her poise and loveliness!" Having given her heart to the Lord Jesus, she made Him the primary object of her devotion.

We can rejoice in suffering because our eyes are being drawn away from earthly things to focus on Christ. Even though we cannot see him, yet we love him.

Finally, fourth, we rejoice ...

Because our goal is in sight – v. 9

One of these days it will all be over and we will receive the prize that we are striving for – eternal salvation. Discuss briefly the stages of salvation – past present and future.

Past - Justification – “For by grace you **have been saved** through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,” (Eph. 2:8)

Present – Sanctification – “Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which **you are being saved**, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.” (1 Cor. 15:1-2)

Future – Glorification – 1 Peter 1:5, 9

Conclusion

In vv. 10-12 Peter gives us a bit of a glimpse of just how precious and glorious our salvation really is. The prophets who spoke about it did not understand. Even the angels cannot comprehend the reality of our salvation. *Expand briefly.*

Review: Because of the security of our eternal salvation, we can rejoice in suffering, knowing that:

- our trials are temporary
- our faith is being refined
- our eyes are on Christ
- our goal is in sight

Peter spoke from experience. He knew what it was to suffer. But he also knew the glories of his eternal salvation. And he knew the relationship between the two.

The Apostle Paul also knew this. I would like to conclude this morning with these words from Paul in 2 Cor. 4:16-18 – *“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this **slight momentary affliction** is preparing for us **an eternal weight of glory** beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For **the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.**”* (ESV)

What trials are you facing today? How are you responding to those trials? Are your eyes focussed on the suffering, or are you fixing your eyes on the unseen – Jesus Christ and eternity?

Remember, “...what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.”