

It Is Written

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THE JOY OF THE BELIEVER

By Steven Harper

The apostle Peter wrote to the disciples of the first century as an encouragement to be faithful in the midst of trials. He noted “you have been grieved by various trials” (1st Pet. 1:6), and would later exhort them to “not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you” (1st Pet. 4:12). But even as they had already faced trials and would face more, Peter also wrote that they would “greatly rejoice” with the knowledge of what God had done for them (1st Pet. 1:3-6), and even in the midst of those trials would “rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (v. 8).

I know the world cannot comprehend how someone in the midst of severe trials could rejoice, but maybe we need to be reminded, too, of how that is possible! Why and how could they rejoice in such a situation? How can we do the same?

Past Reasons. For this, we have to back up to see what it was that God had done for them, and does for all those who are His.

Sanctified by the Spirit. (1st Pet. 1:2) Just as the priests of the OT were separated for service to God, so were they separated for His service. As Christians, we are to “Come out from among” those of the world (2nd Cor. 6:17) and no longer follow worldliness. But that “setting apart” did not come by our own power or will, but through the means God established. Jesus, in His prayer, noted that it would be by the word that His disciples would be sanctified (John 17:17-19); without God’s word, we would not know the way of God and we would have no other choice but to follow the ways of the world. It is when we hear and heed the word of God that we “turn...from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God” (Acts 26:18), and it is because Jesus Christ willingly died for our sins that we can be made holy (Heb. 10:7-10). But it is reason enough to have joy!

Sprinkled with Christ’s blood. (1st Pet. 1:2) Just as the instruments of worship were dedicated under the OT, so they were by Jesus’ blood [sanctified, as noted previously]. It was His blood that established the New Covenant (Matt. 26:28) and, thus, their entry into the Kingdom, and it was His blood that had purified them just as the sprinkling of blood under the OT purified the tabernacle and the vessels (Heb. 9:19-23). As long as they walked in the light with the Lord, the blood of Christ would cleanse them (1st John 1:7), and it would be because His blood made possible their forgiveness (Eph. 1:7).

Begotten to a living hope. (1st Pet. 1:3) Furthermore, they could rejoice because they had been begotten to a living hope [as Peter noted earlier in this letter]. Their hope was not in the temporary things of this world, but in the blessings and promises of God, laid up in heaven (Col. 1:5) and would not fade away.

Present Reasons. As Christians, we also have reasons for joy even as we now live, as did they. Joy is not a matter of wishful thinking, but a realization of what was real. They could rejoice (even in trials) because...

They were the “elect.” (1st Pet. 1:2) The disciples to whom Peter wrote could, even in the midst of persecutions, rejoice because they were now considered the “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” The ‘elect’ have always been understood as those who were identified by God as the saved, and that by His grace (Rom. 11:5-7); though they had done nothing worthy of being saved [as none of us have], God still looked on them in grace and called them and chose them to “be

conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:28-30) and He called them to salvation by the preaching of the gospel (2nd Thess. 2:13-14). Being called ‘the elect’ does not mean God did so without conditions, however, for anyone ‘elected’ must first meet the qualifications of the office. Ex. President must be 35 years old, native-born, not convicted of any felonies. Christians must obey Jesus’ commands. God did not, nor does He, save without conditions and qualification. It was no different with these brethren, and it was reason to rejoice!

Kept by the power of God through faith. (1st Pet. 1:5) The disciples to whom Peter wrote could also rejoice as ones who were promised God’s care and protection —— not as the Calvinistic picture paints a disciple as one who can never fall away, but as one who will never be ignored and one who will never be neglected by God. As those of old [the Jews] were “kept under guard” (Gal. 3:23-25), but not by the law; now by faith. As Paul wrote, they “were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession” (Eph. 1:13, 14). Please understand the word “sealed” does not mean they were closed up and kept from the possibility of falling, but sealed as in ‘marked’ by God as His. As long as they held to their faith — because one may have a heart of unbelief even after obedience (cf. Heb. 3:12) — they would be protected under God’s care.

Future Reasons. And, finally, as Christians, we also have reasons for joy as we look forward to what still lies ahead for us, as God’s people. This might also be identified as our hope, and would include...

An inheritance. The disciples of the first century could rejoice as they did, too, because they could look forward to the promises of God — one being “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven” (1st Pet. 1:4). This promise was not to all men, but only “those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32) — them! It is not to all, but “those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15). As we have seen by Peter’s introductory words to these brethren, these are the very words he used to describe the recipients!

Salvation to be revealed. (1st Pet. 1:5) As these brethren looked forward, they could also rejoice because of the salvation that was yet to be revealed. As Peter writes, it was through their faith they looked for that “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” That salvation was more than just salvation from sin, but also salvation from the toils and weariness of this fleshly world, where we will receive “rest...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels” (2nd Thess. 1:7). They could rejoice knowing that when He comes, they will “be like Him” (1st John 3:2) and know they would receive a crown of life for having lived a life of faithfulness to God and Christ (2nd Tim. 4:8). Though many are ignorant of these promises, God’s people should rejoice in knowing these things!

Even in the midst of trials, we can and should rejoice; not for the trials, but for what God has done, what God continues to do for us as His people, and for what God has promised to those who are His. Let us not forget, however, that these blessings and promises are exclusively for those in Christ, for God “has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). There are no spiritual blessings outside of Christ.

Do we have that “joy inexpressible” [literally, incapable of being put into words]? We can have such joy if we remember what God has done for us, what He continues to do for us, and what He has promised. We can rejoice because He has promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5), and He will always keep His word!

“Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, rejoice!” (Phlp. 4:4)