

“The Genuine Article”

I Peter 1:6-7

⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,⁷ 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. (ESV)

HOPE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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We start our services with a prayer of adoration; we often pull from the mighty acts the LORD did for the people of Israel knowing that they are our own, seeing in Christ the fulfillment of all those millennia of divine engagements with a people of his choosing. The Psalms, in particular, are full of the recounting God’s covenant faithfulness for what he HAS DONE. In our passage, most commentators, and I think the grammar agrees, looks backwards grammatically but forwards historically. We rejoice in a coming salvation that will be revealed in the last time, something that the LORD WILL DO – we get the benefit of perspective in our act of rejoicing in God of being able to look backwards and forwards. The imperative to rejoice is a common command in the New Testament, (think of Philippians 4:4, “Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice”). One could even say that knowing Christ means worship: Mary’s joyous song, sometimes called the *Magnificat* (for those that stumble on Latin, it is simply the word used in the Vulgate for my soul *magnifies*, [technically just the magnifies part] meaning “to make known with praise”)¹. Here, the first person to encounter the incarnate, but as yet unborn, God says these words:

“My soul magnifies the Lord,
 and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
 for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.
 For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;
 for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
 and holy is his name.
 And his mercy is for those who fear him
 from generation to generation.

And, as mentioned in last week’s sermon, it is praise that will be on the lips of those in heaven in eternity. Worship is the present action of the Christian, whether looking forward or back at the works of God.

However, this isn’t just pie-in-the-sky rejoicing divorced from the situation on the ground, it is fully aware that we aren’t in the last time quiet yet, however our duty to rejoice

¹**Μεγαλύνω**, *megaluno*, “to cause to be held in greater esteem through praise or deeds, exalt, glorify, magnify, speak highly of.” Bauer, Walter; Danker, Frederick; Arndt, William; Gingrich, F. Wilbur. 2000. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd edition. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press. (BDAG)

doesn't change. We must acknowledge that the situation is bleak, both the sender and the recipients know people who have died for declaring these reasons for rejoicing.

The German pastor-martyr, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, famously wrote, "cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate."² In short, it wasn't Christianity.

I want to make it clear: there is no such thing as painless joy when following Christ in this present age. I remember a runner- friend of mine who had a ratty old t-shirt that said, "The Pain Tells Me I'm Alive." Well, I think he's right, both in running and in the Christian Life: *Rejoicing in the midst of pain and suffering tells the Christian they are alive in Christ.*

Let's unpack that by looking at today's text.

SOVEREIGN SUFFERINGS

⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,

We get some perspective, at least time-wise, on struggling – this little period, just now, this present time (being different from both creation and eternity) will be a place of trials. I think Peter is making clear, in just this little parenthetical aside, just how he views the present period, he has a proper perspective, and knows that it will only be the shortest of times compared with the period of time when there will be no trials. Trials test, to be sure, but they are a trait of this age, not of all ages, so bear with them.

Next there is another clarification, "if necessary," what does this mean? Is he implying that some have struggles and trials while others don't? I don't think so. I think he is making known to his audience that their sufferings are part of something bigger. Who or what is making this necessary? Is it them? No. Peter is intending his audience to know that the ultimate contingent factor in their sufferings is not any earthly matter, but the will of God alone. If the LORD deems it necessary, there will be suffering for his people.

Why might this be useful to know? Well, it takes away the excuse that the trials might be the cause of simply earthly agents – or Satan. He's introducing here a major theme that will weave its way throughout this little letter, later we will read:

It is a gracious thing to be mindful of God by doing good while undergoing suffering as we do so following in Christ's footsteps (1 Peter 2:19-21) [Paraphrase, mine]

We are not to fear suffering, because we will be blessed (1 Peter 3): Those verses that started pastor Chris' Sunday school series from just a short while ago:

² *Cost of Discipleship*, p.44-45.

¹³ Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, ¹⁵ but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶ having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

You could suffer for doing good and if you do, it will be God's will – and that it certainly better than suffering for evil (which would be the result of sin).

I encourage you to follow the verb “to suffer” and the noun “suffering,” they run throughout this briefest of books. In 1 Peter 4:19, the audience is exhorted to trust God: “¹⁹ Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.” Again: DO GOOD is coupled with SUFFERING.

Are we to give up the task given to us, namely to do good, proclaiming the cross and Christ crucified, loving God and neighbor just because things get tough? Certainly not! The expression, “When things get tough, the tough get going” gets it partly right, for the Christian it might be better said: “When things get tough, the tough keep going on doing good.”

Near the closing verses of chapter 5, in Peter's closing encouragement, we read that God is sovereign over everything – it may appear bad now, but he will set it aright, he will give you the strength to persevere, and there will be eternal glory in Christ!

There is a purpose to following this thread, you see, in our passage, as with the rest of the letter, suffering is not outside the sovereignty of God, but rather firmly inside of it! It is gloriously and purposefully in the plan of God whenever suffering occurs. It may seem like it is purposelessly coming from the evil one, or a bad boss, or a cranky customer, or a bill-collector, but it is not: God is sovereign over suffering.

So, the “if necessary” of our passage implies, from the light of the rest of the letter, “if [God deems it] necessary.” But, SO WHAT? Well, just before I get to the “so what” take a moment to regard the trials.

TRIALS TEST

⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—

The testing for genuineness, that is the trials in which are persevered all while doing the good things we are called to do, serves to prove the faith of the believer. Though two words in the ESV translation, *tested genuineness*, it is actually one word. A single noun. One could translate it as something unalloyed, something proven to possess no impurities, that is to say, the proven purity of your faith. This purity is brought into clarity of vision by the process of trials. Peter highlights this relationship with another precious item that must often be tested, gold. The

expression, “all that glitters is not gold” has made its way into common usage because for much of history currency couldn’t be trusted at face value. It might look like gold, but it must be tested in order to be proven to be so. As it is with faith, for as trials come they are, in a believer, not challenging their believe as though to destroy it, but proving it – that is to say testing demonstrates the genuine character already present in the believer. God gives the believer the gift of faith, since it comes from God it will test positive. We could, briefly, discuss those that seem to fail this test, but our passage does not, so we will not. Just as Peter presumes his audience can look elsewhere to discuss that, we too must do the same. Trust this: those whom God calls he will save, they will be made holy! That is to say, God-given faith is always the genuine article.

So, the end result of trials is to be proof-positive that the believer is the real-deal, the genuine article – and what does this result in? What is the “so what” regarding the trials that come? The answer is a *SO THAT*...

***So that* GLORY IS GIVEN.**

Faith that is proven to be the genuine article results in glory to God:

⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith [...] may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

You might be noting that there are some words here that often get used in the closing doxologies of the letters in the bible. Here they are occurring in the early on in the middle of a discussion of trials, why? Well, looking back to last week – Christians are a worshipping people – and again, back to the beginning of this passage “In this you rejoice.” Though our passage talks a lot about suffering, it is about giving voice to our joy now in light of the fact that our faith, being tested genuine in trial, results in praise, glory and honor when Christ appears again! Who is getting the glory? Christ, in our faith, receives glory. We participate not as the cause or the climax, but as the conduit for God’s glorification. In that we, being proven genuine, are meant for this purpose. We are a people meant for eternal worship of our God. The purpose of our testing is not so that we’ll get a pat on the back, receive congratulations for doing such a good job, and get a 5% bonus in our blessings! NO. Our testing, in the end, isn’t even about getting anything for us, but about us doing what we were created to do, glorify God.

[ADDRESSING CONFUSION AND DOUBTS]

You might be saying to yourself: “Well if it is all about God, why bother? I mean, God seems awfully selfish here. Are you saying God causes my sufferings out of some sick self-centered demand for worship?” Haiti, Darfur, slavery, the Holocaust, Cancer, AIDS, divorce, abortion, starvation, plagues or any of the innumerable other personal hells that bring such suffering to this world. Am I saying that these are the result of God??? So he can be glorified?

To answer that we’ll go back to two verses I’ve already mentioned. 1 Peter 3:17 and 4:19.

^{3:17} For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God’s will, than for doing evil.

4:19 Therefore let those who suffer according to God's will entrust their souls to a faithful Creator while doing good.

There it is. God wills evil, even on God people. However, God does not DO evil. What do I mean? Well, let's turn our eyes to Jesus, let's look at him. Does God will for the Son to die for the sins of the world? YES. Does the Father kill the Son? NO, Roman soldiers, acting under the orders of the Governing, at the cajoling of the priests, by the betrayal of a friend – that kills Jesus. Those involved were fully deserving blame for their actions. They were fully in control of their selfish motives and short-sighted gains, and yet God was sovereign.

God was capacitatively able to stop the farcical trial yet he did not, God was in control of the scourging whip's force and could have restrained the hand that held it, but he did not. God willed for his Son to die for you. God, in his hidden counsel, chose to will for the Son to die. The Son died, and it is to him that the eternal song, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev 5:12) Though it might have seemed veiled at the dark hours of the crucifixion, the ultimate purpose of the suffering was glory being given to God. In our passage, what is the purpose of the suffering? So that God is glorified.

Can we always see all the pieces? Certainly not. Does God hate sin. Yes. Were all those horrible things I mentioned just a minute ago sinful and terrible, yes. We tread on the edge of mystery. The mystery of a God who wills and man who does. Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility... sounds like the title of the book. In short, God does not delight in suffering, but he remains ever sovereign. This is a mystery we proclaim, although the understanding may never come. We could spend more time on this, however I think it best to save it for another day, else we'd all be sitting here for two-helpings of sermon today.

[A SECOND CONCERN]

Before wrapping up, there is a second other danger that might be creeping into your mind. Am I supposed to enjoy suffering? No. The nature of suffering is that it is not enjoyable. Even knowing and freely laying down his life with great suffering, Christ truly and really suffered. It was excruciatingly horrible to die as he did. Who is our model in suffering. Christ. Did Christ really suffer. Yes. Was it torturous and gruesome, painful and wracking? Yes. Christ really suffered. We really suffer. Don't think that you must "whistle a happy tune" when things are horrible, ignoring the horror that surrounds you. Rather, in the midst of trials Peter has, as I've let on from other places in the letter, encouraged his readers to keep on doing good. Does that mean that they aren't bearing great pain in their bodies, or risking death to do so? No. They do good and suffer. They rejoice and suffer. In a way, we return to the beginning.

[Closing]

To be fair, our passage occurs as part of one long sentence contingent though from 1:3-12, and more particularly there's a clear connection between this week's text and the next two verses. So you might think I'm plodding slowly through the text. Let me say that what I'm trying to do is be like a jeweler, I want to take you through this book and look at the clarity, cut, color

and quality of it. Every angle of observation bears reward to those who take the time to notice the beauty of this book.

We rejoice because tested faith will bring glory to God. We do so in the midst of suffering, we keep on doing good, we keep on glorifying God. What does this tell us? Well, our rejoicing in God while enduring suffering and hardships is kind of like a mile marker, it is telling us we are on the right road and we're making progress towards our destination. What is our destination? Eternally glorifying God. What is our road? Christ. What is the proof we're on the road? We're rejoice in God's mighty promises. He is faithful. What he has promised will come to pass.

Are you the genuine article? If you trust in Christ as the all-sufficient source of every good thing, your savior, LORD and God and you can say this even when struggling with great trials and suffering, then the answer is yes. You are being proven to be the genuine article, not by me telling you so, but because God has tested you genuine. I can't say yea or nay, but God alone knows his sheep and his sheep know him. Do you know him?

May we treasure the truth that sufferings and trials are not random acts perpetrated by evil men and women without purpose, but ever within God's sovereignty – to the end that we might glorify him both now and in eternity.

We rejoice because tested faith will bring glory to God.

Closing Benediction: turn this into a prayer:

⁶ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷ casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you. ⁸ Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world. ¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.