

Reasons for Rejoicing!

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Introduction.

- A. In the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson wrote that people have three inalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Now, there are an awful lot of Americans who wouldn't know the Declaration of Independence if it bit them on the nose, but just about everybody in this country is a firm believer in the pursuit of happiness. In fact, a lot of the time, we go one up on Thomas Jefferson and say that our happiness itself is a right.
- B. People do all sorts of things because they think they deserve to be happy. They max out their credit cards buying stuff, they get interest-only mortgages on houses they can't afford, they thoughtlessly marry, get divorced, and remarry, and they destroy their health with everything from Jack Daniel's to McDonald's. Then, when the consequences of their bad decisions emerge, they put the blame on someone else, because they were only trying to be happy.
- C. The Bible doesn't have a whole lot to say about being happy. The word "happy" appears only once in most modern translations of the New Testament. What the Bible does talk about all the time, though, is joy. Indeed, it presents joy as one of the key parts of the Christian character.
- D. The difference between worldly happiness and Christian joy is something that we need to understand because it tells us a lot about how we need to be. Here's the key difference: happiness is based on circumstance, but joy isn't. 500 years ago, "happy" used to mean the same thing as "lucky." This idea still appears in our speech sometimes, when we talk about "a happy coincidence" or someone who suffers some misfortune being "hapless." Strictly speaking, we can only be happy when good things are happening to us.
- E. Joy is very different. It has nothing to do with the passage of events in our lives. Instead, it is based on some understanding that is beyond the reach of circumstance. In the case of Biblical joy, this is our understanding of our relationship with God and all that it implies.
- F. As Christians, we cannot always be happy. All of us are going to have unpleasant things happen to us. However, we can always be joyful because God is always with us and always at work in our lives. Paul and Silas didn't sing hymns in the jail in Philippi because they were happy; they sang because they were joyful. This is the joy that we need to emulate.
- G. One of the most important passages in the Bible on joy is 1 Peter 1:3-9. Here, Peter describes the joy that fills the heart of the believer even in the midst of persecution and suffering. Let's look at this passage this morning, to learn what reasons we have for rejoicing.

I. What God Has Done.

- A. Peter begins his discussion of joy by describing the origin of our joy in what God has done, and we find the first part of this description in 1 Peter 1:3. This one verse really contains the heart of what it means to be a Christian. Let's take it apart together:
 1. Once we strip away all the extra information, this verse is about one thing: God causing us to be born again. This is language that has been beaten into the ground by our denominational neighbors, who love to talk about being "born-again Christians," but it's really saying something profound.
 - a. One of the most common human emotions is regret, and one of the dearest of human longings is the longing for the do-over. Sometimes we do get do-overs. That's why we do crosswords in pencil—so we can go back, erase the word that doesn't fit, and write another word in its place. Sometimes, though, we want do-overs and don't get them.
 - b. But what if we could get do-overs for the things that really mattered? Not for the times when we did things that weren't so smart, but for the times when we actually did evil? What if we could get a do-over for the times when we betrayed people, when we said hateful things to those we loved, when we lied, when we behaved immorally, when we

- trapped ourselves in some self-destructive death spiral? What if we could take our lives that are such wrecks in the sight of man and God, and make our mistakes go away?
- c. That's exactly what it means to be born again! When we rise from the waters of baptism, we're not just starting the first day of the rest of our life, we're starting the first day of our second life. We may still have to deal with the consequences of our sin, but the guilt that stained us is gone. We have become new people. We've gotten a cosmic do-over. How can we not rejoice?
2. This verse also describes the joyful circumstances that surround us being born again.
 - a. First it tells us why. God caused us to be born again according to His abundant mercy. God saved us not because of anything that we had done, but because it is His nature to love us and want to do good for us. The Creator and King of the universe wants what's best for our lives, and He cares about each one of us with a commitment and devotion that puts our own mothers to shame. When we understand that, we have to rejoice.
 - b. Second, the verse tells us how God did this: the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and this is cause for rejoicing too. In the resurrection of Jesus, we see both an assurance of God's love and of His power. We see God's love because He cared enough for us to send us His Son to die for us in the first place, and we see God's power because He was able to raise His Son from the dead, and we know that if He could do that for Jesus, He can do it for us too.
 - c. And that takes us to our last reason to rejoice in 1 Peter 1:3: the so-what of our being born again. We have been born again to a living hope. This is a hope that can dwell in us and sustain us, but most importantly, it is a hope of life. How much is that worth? How much do you think people would pay today for a pill that would make them live forever? Every penny they have, and every penny they could borrow, and they'd do it because everybody in the world is scared to death of death. But because of what God has done for us, when we think of death, we don't have to be afraid. We have a hope.
 - B. Peter goes on to elaborate on the value of this living hope in 1 Peter 1:4. When we recognize that we have something so precious as hope of eternal life, we naturally start wondering what's in the fine print. Can someone take this hope away from us? Does it have an expiration date? Peter gives us the good news in this verse. When it comes to God's promise, there is no fine print. This is an inheritance that we have been given. It is guaranteed. Nothing can destroy the life that we have been promised; nothing can take away from its beauty and purity. Our new life isn't going to be a limited-time offer, either. It will NEVER fade away. Nobody's going to take it away from us, for it is reserved for each one of us specifically. Best of all is where this inheritance is going to be. As great as many think eternal life on earth would be, we've got a better hope than that. Our hope is in heaven, a home of glory better than we can imagine.
 - C. Now, we might not be sure about this hope yet. We might worry, "Well, God's end of the bargain seems pretty solid, but what if somebody comes and grabs me before I can get to heaven?" Peter answers that one too, in 1 Peter 1:5. The one protecting every one of us is our Father Himself, and if the devil wants to carry us off, he has to go through God first. We are protected through our faith. As long as we keep on believing in God and His promises, and as long as we keep working toward heaven, we are headed for salvation. Absolutely nothing can touch us, because even if we die, we're going to live. When we think about these things, when we think about all that God has done and continues to do for us, we can't help but rejoice.

II. What We Are Doing.

- A. We have cause to rejoice, though, not just in what God has done, but in what we are doing. This might not seem to follow naturally from what Peter brings up in 1 Peter 1:6. He tells us that we can rejoice even while we are being distressed by various trials.
- B. This is where Christianity stops making sense to the world. How can we be joyful when bad things happen to us? How can we be glad when we're unhappy? It's all about perspective. As this verse makes clear, Christians are allowed to mourn sometimes. There's nothing ungodly about grieving the death of a loved one or weeping at some tragedy. What God tells us to do,

though, is remember that the things that look like mountains to us here are really just speed bumps on the road to eternity. Nothing that happens to us here can change who we are, and nothing that happens to us can change where we're going. We can rejoice even in the midst of pain because everything that matters is still perfect.

- C. Indeed, we can even find cause to rejoice in the trial itself. As 1 Peter 1:7 emphasizes, there is great spiritual good in even the worst trial. This is true in two ways:
1. First, the trials that we encounter refine us. Just as steel mills will run iron ore through immensely hot blast furnaces to burn away impurities, so too God will put us through trials to burn away everything in our hearts that is not devoted to Him. Also, as we deal with our suffering, as we learn to lean on Him even more, we strengthen our connection with Him.
 2. Beyond even this refining process, though, something incredibly precious comes out of the tests we encounter: the proof of our faith to ourselves and to God. After all, if we saw nothing but blessings from God in this life, wouldn't that make EVERYBODY want to be a Christian? When Jesus was on earth, some followed Him not because they loved his teachings, but because they wanted a free lunch. The same thing would happen today. If God gave His people everything they wanted and never let anything bad happen to them, there would be many at church who had no interest in spiritual things at all.
 3. By contrast, when we remain true to God even when times are tough, it proves that we care about more than this life. When we don't see the physical blessings we might like, but we keep trusting in the spiritual blessings, we show that we really are exiles. It proves our faith. It's like God said to Abraham when He saw that Abraham would sacrifice Isaac for Him: "Now I know." When we keep serving God, even through trial, now God knows. What God knows, God will remember. What are heartaches and sorrows and tears now will be praise and glory and honor when the Lord returns. Even in them, we can rejoice.

III. What We Will Have.

- A. Finally, though, we have reason to rejoice in what we will have. This is the point that Peter makes in 1 Peter 1:8. In some ways, the Christian attitude must appear nonsensical to outsiders. None of us have ever seen Jesus, and Jesus hasn't come back yet, so we can't see Him now. Despite that, though, we read about what Jesus did for us when He was here, and we love Him because we recognize that such goodness is worthy of our love. There are no signs that Jesus is going to come back soon; indeed, the Bible teaches that the Lord will return like a thief in the night. Despite this lack of evidence anywhere outside of the Bible, though, we still believe, so what do we do? We rejoice!
- B. 1 Peter 1:8 also paints a beautiful picture of Christian joy. Peter describes Christians as rejoicing greatly with joy inexpressible and full of glory. Isn't that amazing! You know how sometimes, you're going along, not watching where you're going, and you stub your toe real, real good on a chair leg or something? There's a second or two there where you make faces and hop around, but you don't start saying "Ouch!" because it hurts so much. Friends, if we understand what we have, that's what our joy will be like. We practically won't be able to get a word out because we are so filled with gladness and because our Father has blessed us so much. If we understand where we are spiritually, that's what our hearts will be like.
- C. 1 Peter 1:9 gets us to the point. The really neat thing about all this Christian faith and Christian joy is that it helps us achieve our goal. Because we believe in God and rejoice in His goodness, we get what we want. We obtain the salvation of our souls.

Conclusion. If you want to know the joy and salvation that is in Jesus, He will receive you today.