

# **Joy in Suffering** **Is that possible?!**

James 1: 2-4, 12

1 Peter 1: 3-6

# Living in Eternity's Light

■ Colossians 3: 1-4

# Only 2 mindsets

- above / below
- heaven / earth
- Above: Christ is seated at God's right hand
- Below: Satan's territory
- Above: eternal
- Below: temporary

# Heavenly or Earthly focus determines our ...

- Attitude toward God
- Attitude toward Wealth & Possessions
- Perception of People & Relationships
- **Attitude toward Pleasure & Pain**
- Commitment to a Lifestyle of Purity

# Joy in our suffering – possible?

- Many believers struggle with questions of God's goodness, faithfulness, and love when facing problems and painful experiences

# Consider this Scriptural passage

Dear brothers and sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

(James 1: 2-4; NLT)

# The specifics of James' letter

- James - Jesus' earthly brother; leader of Jerusalem church
- written ~ AD 49 to the "twelve tribes" scattered among the nations
- Jewish believers scattered in Gentile communities outside Palestine

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## Consider this passage ...

All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, <sup>4</sup> and we have a priceless inheritance ... <sup>5</sup> And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.



So be truly glad. [*or, So you are truly glad.*] There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. 7 These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.

(1 Peter 1: 3-7; NLT)

- So be truly glad (NLT) = [In all this you greatly rejoice (NIV)]

# The specifics of Peter's letter

- Peter wrote this letter ~ AD 62-64 to Jewish Christians driven out of Jerusalem and scattered throughout Asia Minor
- Written from Rome when Emperor Nero was persecuting the Christians
- Peter was executed during this great persecution (~ AD 64-68)

So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. 7 These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold ...

(1 Peter 1: 6-7; NLT)

## Consider this passage ...

12 And I want you to know, my dear brothers and sisters, that everything that has happened to me here has helped to spread the Good News. 13 For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. 14 And because of my imprisonment, most of the believers here have gained confidence and boldly speak God's message without fear. 15 It's true that some are preaching out of jealousy and rivalry. But others preach about Christ with pure motives. ... 18 But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.

(Philippians 1: 12-15, 18; NLT)

<sup>4</sup> Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! <sup>5</sup> Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. Remember, the Lord is coming soon.

(Philippians 4: 4-5; NLT)

<sup>6</sup> Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. <sup>7</sup> Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

(Philippians 4: 6-7; NLT)

# The specifics of Paul's letter

- Paul wrote this letter ~ AD 61 to the Christians at Philippi from Rome, where he was in prison
- a personal “Thank You” letter for a gift the Philippian church sent to him
- also to encourage and strengthen believers by reminding them that true joy comes from Jesus Christ

# Joy in the midst of suffering!

- Persecuted / scattered from homeland (James' audience)
- Persecuted by wicked Emperor (Peter's audience)
- In prison, but Gospel being preached (Paul's situation when he wrote Philippians)

# What is this “joy”?

- certainly not arising from outward circumstances
- inner attitude
- no matter what happens, Jesus Christ is with me
- He will never abandon me, never stop loving me
- never go back on His promises
- He’s always in control of everything that’s happening
- His plans and purposes for me are being accomplished
- one of the “fruit” of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5: 22-23)

# The Holy Spirit produces joy & peace ... and a lot more

But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Gal 5: 22-23; NLT)



# What is this “joy”?

- Inner certainty that no matter what happens, Jesus Christ is with me
  - continuing His redemptive work in me
  - transforming me to become more like Him
- Joy in the midst of suffering is possible for God's children!

## This side of forever ...

- what we bring into our suffering will either enhance or prevent us from experiencing joy
- “What you think about yourself, life, God, and others will profoundly affect the way you think about, interact with, and respond to the difficulty that comes your way.” (Paul D. Tripp, *Suffering – Gospel Hope When Life Doesn’t Make Sense*; Crossway, 2018; p. 27)

# 3 things that prevent us from experiencing joy when we face difficulties

- Distorted or wrong theology
- Unrealistic expectations of Life
- Pride of self-reliance (not arrogance)

# Distorted or wrong theology

- we all think and live “theologically”
- we interpret reality with our personal “worldview”

# Personal worldview answers ...

- Who is God?
  - Who am I?
  - What is the reason for my life?
  - What is right and wrong?
  - Why do certain things happen?
- 
- Thoughts/attitudes/perspective always precede our actions
  - Thoughts/attitudes/perspective determine our actions

# Wrong/distorted theology makes suffering worse

- I am suffering because God is punishing me for my sin
- E.g., someone dealing with sickness, and also with guilt and shame
- believes sickness is God's punishment for bad choices and wrong decisions (wrong theology)
- must endure punishment since deserve it (wrong conclusion)
- avoid God and God's people (wrong action)

# Right theology: no place for guilt & shame

- Every piece of guilt, shame, and punishment for our sin was completely and once for all carried by Christ on the cross
- Therefore, there is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

# Record of our sins – nailed to the cross

■ And you, who were dead in your trespasses ..., God made alive together with [Christ], having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This [God] set aside, nailing it to the cross.

(Colossians 2: 13-14; ESV)



# Christ died for us; now no condemnation for those who belong to Him

■ So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. ... 3 The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. 4 He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.

(Romans 8: 1-4; NLT)

# Christ's sacrifice – good for all time

■ Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. <sup>12</sup> But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand. . . . <sup>14</sup> For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.

(Hebrews 10: 11-12, 14; NLT)

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# Right theology during suffering ...

- Our trials, difficulties and suffering are opportunities God uses to test us, to produce endurance/perseverance in us (James 1: 2-4; cf. 1 Pt. 1: 6-7)
- God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation; afterward they will receive the “crown of life” (James 1: 12)
- Trials are connected to the “good things” God wants to give us
- they make us run to God for help and experience His joy

# Unrealistic Expectations of Life

- Expect that “what is” will always remain the same
- Reality: nothing remains the same; decay is an ever-present reality
- We like to believe that the “good things” we have today will remain with us indefinitely
- Reality: bodies age; friendships may break up; government slips into corruption; marriages grow distant
- The entire creation (people included) is subject to “the bondage of decay” or “death and decay”  
(Romans 8: 21; NIV / NLT)

# 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of Thermodynamics

- The entropy of any isolated system always increases
- “A room, if not cleaned and tidied, will invariably become more messy and disorderly with time – regardless of how careful one is to keep it clean. When the room is cleaned, its entropy decreases, but the effort to clean it has resulted in an increase in entropy outside the room that exceeds the entropy lost.”

# Unrealistic Expectations of Life

- We don't take seriously the dramatic brokenness of our world
- Reality: our world is so broken that we are constantly "groaning"
- Groan when we feel weak, discouraged, are in pain, or when something precious has been damaged

For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.

(Rom. 8: 22; NLT)

# What happens when we don't take seriously the brokenness of our world ?

- Live with unrealistic expectations of what life is and will be
- unprepared for trouble; vulnerable to temptations



# Pride of self-reliance

- Take pride in ...
  - physical strength and health
  - sharp minds
  - social abilities
  - former successes
  - ability to lead and control
- Take credit for God's gifts & grace to us
- Mistake self-confidence for faith in Christ

# When the “unexpected” comes to the self-reliant ...

- PANIC
- feel unprepared and unable to respond
- can't make sense of what's happening
- don't know what to do next

# We panic because ...

- We are not designed by God to be self-reliant
- Designed to live in humble dependence on God and on others
- True of Adam & Eve in the Garden before sin entered the world
- Suffering exposes the danger of self-reliance
- Suffering exposes what we had been trusting

# Which of these do I bring into my suffering?

- Distorted or wrong theology ?
- Unrealistic expectations of Life ?
- Pride of self-reliance (not arrogance) ?

Willing to do something about it ?