

Peter's Paradox—Joy in Sorrow

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. (1Peter 1:6-9)

Paradox is defined as “a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true” (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). Peter presents a paradox—something that on the surface sounds absurd but is ultimately true. Christians rejoice in their hope while distressed; Christians are tested by fire and greatly rejoice (1Peter 1:6-9). He continues these thoughts throughout his letter. In the fourth chapter, he reminds Christians of what Christ has done and gives the reason for their distress: “Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousing, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. In all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excesses of dissipation, and they malign you; but they will give account to Him who is ready to judge the living and the dead” (1Peter 4:1-5). He then gives the reason why this results in rejoicing: “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation” (1Peter 4:12-13).

Christians are to rejoice with great joy. This is exemplified by the eunuch from Ethiopia. “And he ordered the chariot to stop; and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing” (Acts 8:38-39). Paul also instructed Christians to rejoice (Philippians 3:1) even as he himself rejoiced (Philippians 4:1).

Peter explained why Christians ought to rejoice—they are chosen (1Peter 1:1). They are chosen because they have responded to plan of God, being obedient to Jesus Christ, sprinkled with His blood (1Peter 1:2)— Christ died for them. This call comes through the gospel (2Thessalonians 2:14). They have been sanctified by the Spirit (1Peter 1:2). This has been done by the word which He brought just as the Lord had promised (John 17:17). All of this is to redeem the responder. “Knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ” (1Peter 1:18,19). Christians can rejoice because of their hope (1Peter 1:3). Christians can rejoice because of their inheritance (1Peter 1:4).

The other side of this paradox is that while Christians are rejoicing, they are not in “a bed of roses.” As previously noted, Peter reminds Christians that there will be trials, testings, and sorrows (1Peter 1:6; 4:1-4; 4:12,13). These trials may come from different sources—he says they are varied (1Peter 1:6). Sometimes trials come from something physical as with a sickness or an

injury. Some trials may come as emotional distress, perhaps resulting from some type of personal rejection or even the death of a loved one. James reminds Christians that this is a good thing: *“Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing”* (**James 1:2-4**). Peter says goes on to say that is is necessary (**1Peter 1:6**). Christians know that joy is forever but sorrow is but for a season. The “payday” comes at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ (**1Peter 1:7**). Christians know that the outcome is worth the effort. That is why they can rejoice in sorrow. They know that they will obtain *“as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls”* (**1Peter 1:9**).

This paradox should encourage each one to become a Christian. There is no other way to have that joyful hope. This paradox also serves to motivate Christians to keep on. Christians understand what Peter is writing about. Christians can truly say with Paul, *“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus”* (**Philippians 3:14**).