

A Paradox of Abounding Joy and Crushing Grief

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Now let us turn together to the first letter of Peter, to those scattered saints of Asia Minor, 1 Peter 1. And I shall read in your hearing verses 3 through 7:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Now let us again look to God in prayer that the Spirit who moved the Apostle to pen these words will be present to give us both understanding to rightly receive them and then grace to believe and to obey them. Let us pray.

Our Father, we again give you praise for Your holy Word. When we think that at this moment while we have opened our Bibles and read them in our own language, that there are yet multitudes who have never seen one verse of holy Scripture, O God, we thank You, we thank You, that in Your sovereign purpose, You caused us either to be born or brought into this land where Bibles are abundantly available. O Lord, knowing that to whom much is given, of him shall much be required, help us, we pray, that as we take Your Word in our hands and set it before our eyes, we may be given understanding by the Spirit and grace to believe and obey all that the Spirit will say through the written Word. Hear us and meet with us we plead. In Jesus name, amen.

Now, in the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta entitled "The Pirates of Penzance," the subtitle "A Child of Duty," there is a choral number in which the words are repeated again and again: "A paradox, a paradox, a most amazing paradox." Now, you children, do you know what paradox is? When the chorus is singing, "A paradox, a paradox, a most amazing paradox," why are they singing that? Well, they were confronting a paradox. A paradox is a statement that seems to be self-contradictory. This is said to be true and that's said to be true, but the pieces don't fit. But in a paradox, the contradiction is only apparent. And the thing that makes the chorus sing, "A paradox, a paradox, a most amazing paradox," is that Frederick, one of the central personages in "The Pirates of Penzance," is 21 years old, but he's only had 5 birthdays. Now, how in the world, kids, can a man be 21 years old and have only 5 birthdays? So when they're talking about Frederick being 21 years old but only having 5 birthdays, they sing, "A paradox, a paradox, a most amazing paradox." It

seems contradictory. How can you be 21 years old and only have had 5 birthdays? Well, it's only a seeming contradiction because poor Frederick was born on February 29 in leap year. So his first birthday was when he was 4 years old, his second when he was 8, his third when he was 12, his fourth when he was 16, and his fifth when he was 20. So though he's 21 years old, he's only had 5 birthdays.

You say, "Pastor, I wonder, if with your 64th birthday coming, you've lost a screw or two. Why do you begin a sermon with a little reference to the paradox in 'The Pirates of Penzance'?" Well, I want you to think about what a paradox is because here is our passage this morning, 1 Peter 1:6-7, we encounter one of the most fundamental paradoxes of the Christian life, a paradox, not of innocent fantasy spun out of the mind of Gilbert and Sullivan to spoof Elizabethan morality and society. But here is a paradox that is wrung out of the inescapable and observable reality of the experience of the people of God in all ages, including those elect sojourners who lived there in Asia Minor around 65 AD. Having drawn the attention of his readers to the great salvation that is in the Lord Jesus, beginning in verse 6, Peter now begins to focus on the experience of these Christians in relationship to that great salvation. And the first thing he highlights is that that salvation is going to be lived out in the real world of trials and afflictions in the lives of the people of God. And he does so in this paradox of abounding joy and of crushing grief. He no sooner finishes this marvelous statement of this great and glorious salvation but that he writes, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief." Well, are they grieving or are they rejoicing? How, if they are greatly rejoicing can they be grieving? Are not great joy and crushing grief mutually exclusive? This is a paradox, an apparent contradiction, but only an apparent contradiction, for there is a marvelous synthesis of reality when Peter says, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief." The Apostle Paul brings these two things together in the well-known statement of 2 Corinthians 6:10, where he has a whole string of paradoxes. And he says, "as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing." Well, is he rejoicing or is he sorrowful. He says it's not either, or; it's both, and. And so with our Bibles opened this morning, I want you to consider the truths of this passage under two very evident headings. First of all, their experience of abounding joy, and secondly, their experience of crushing grief.

First of all, as Peter writes to these believers in Asia Minor, having set before them this glorious salvation which drew from his heart and his pen this eulogy, this speaking well of God for His great salvation, he sets out their experience of abounding joy in these words: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice." Two things under this heading of abounding joy: the nature of their joy and the source of their joy. What's the nature of their joy. Most of our versions read: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice." And the two English words are an attempt to translate one word from the original, which is not the standard word for rejoice. There is a word used frequently in the New Testament, and Peter could have used that word with a modifier to show it was standard joy intensified with a modifier. But he uses a word that is not found at all in the secular writers of the first century. The standard word for joy is, but not this word. It is only found here in the New Testament. It is also found in that Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew Scripture called the Septuagint. But it is a word that focuses upon a unique kind of joy. It refers without exception in all of its usages in the New Testament to a deep, intense spiritual joy, a heightened rejoicing either in God Himself or in what God has done. For example, in the well-known words of the beatitudes, Matthew 5:11-12, the final beatitude, Jesus said, "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you

falsely, for My sake. Rejoice [there's our standard word], and be exceeding glad [and here's our word translated with two English words]." It is not enough, the Lord says, simply to rejoice. But let your rejoicing be escalated to exceeding gladness. It's the word used in Luke 10:21, one of the few passages in which our Lord is described in what we might call a sanctified paroxysm of holy joy. In Luke 10:21, we read of our Lord's inner experience: "In that same hour He rejoiced in the Holy Spirit, and said, I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father; or so it was well-pleasing in Thy sight." As we look into the context and realize that our Lord has just spoken to the 70 who have returned, having gone out at His commission. And His authority conferred upon them has been operative in the casting out of demons and in doing mighty works. And they come back exuberant and full of thanksgiving and praise and spiritual exhilaration. And He says, "Nevertheless in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rejoice that your names are written in heaven. In that same hour He rejoiced...." As the Lord Jesus sees the fruit of the work He Himself will accomplish as He makes His way steadfastly to the cross, who can measure the exuberant joy in the holy heart of the Son of God when He knows that before Him are some whose names are written in heaven, whose redemption will be secured by His almighty and unique work as the only one who fully knows the Father and is fully known by the Father. As you read on in the context, it is that kind of exuberant, exhilarating, heightened rejoicing that our Lord experiences in this context. And then it's used in Revelation 19:7 in that marvelous picture of the consummation of redemption at what is called the marriage supper of the Lamb. And there in that passage when all of the redeemed of all the ages are together brought into the full realization of their salvation in Christ. And there under the imagery of a wedding feast, the bridegroom takes His bride to Himself in the consummate intimacy of the eternal state. We read: "Let us rejoice and [here's our word] be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come." Who can begin even to measure the joy that will be ours when the summons goes forth: "The marriage has come. Let us be exceeding glad." One writer has tried to define it with these words: "It is a jubilant and a thankful exaltation." That's the nature of this joy. So when Peter writes to these elect sojourners of the dispersion, having opened up this marvelous panorama of God's salvation, he says, "wherein ye greatly rejoice," underscoring the nature of that joy is an abundant joy, a jubilant and an exalting joy.

And what is the cause and the source of this joy? Look at the text again. It begins with the words, "wherein ye greatly rejoice." And the "wherein" of the 1901 translation is an attempt to translate two words from the original. We might render it, "in which" or "in which thing," or some would suggest, "in whom." Rightly interpreting the Bible is sometimes is not a simple thing. When you open up your Greek text and say, "Now Lord, give me light; give me wisdom as I try to understand what You said," you face a pronoun, and a pronoun has gender. And you say, "Now, what noun does it match in gender?" And you say, "Well, it can't be the word "salvation," which is in the immediate context, because the gender doesn't match. Well then, to what does it refer? If it's a neuter or masculine gender, does it go all the way back, as some suggest, to God Himself? ("Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.") And after opening up that salvation, is Peter assuming that the hearts of his readers will be so taken up with fresh devotion to God the Father that he now writes, "in whom ye greatly rejoice"? That's a possibility, but it's not very convincing. Most likely, and most who study the Word of God with reverent and with submissive hearts

have come to the conclusion that what Peter is doing is saying, "wherein," that is, in that whole glorious description of this amazing salvation that Peter has laid out, "in which ye greatly rejoice." In other words, Peter writes and says,

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ [He is the author of this great salvation. His great mercy is its source. The new birth is our initiation into it ('He has begotten us again'). A living hope rooted in the resurrection is one of its great benefits. An inheritance secured for us, undefiled, imperishable, unfading reserved in heaven. And we, the heirs, are preserved for it. 'Wherein,' that is, as you contemplate and believingly appropriate to yourself afresh all of the wonders of this great salvation, this is the basis, the cause, the source of your exuberant joy.]"

Peter asserts that these elect sojourners were continually exulting with abounding joy, a joy derived from an intelligent, believing appreciation of their great salvation in Jesus Christ.

Now by application, what does this tell us about these Christians? There we are in Asia Minor surrounded by pagans in 65 AD living under Roman rule in the midst of people that are pressuring them from every side, some mocking them out because they've left their former lifestyle, others oppressing them. As you read through the epistle, it's evident that they were not sailing to the clouds without opposition. And yet Peter can say to them, "wherein ye greatly rejoice." He uses a present tense: "You are greatly and constantly and continually filled with exuberant joy." And he says, "wherein in the intelligent believing comprehension and laying hold of this great salvation." Well, it tells us that these believers had been instructed in the great foundational doctrines of the Christian faith. Peter does not write what he writes in verses 3 to 5 and then give an imperative, though the word in the original had the same form as an imperative. There are no imperatives until verse 13. Peter is assuming that when he writes about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, laying bare the fact that there was an understanding of the basic doctrine of the Trinity. And when he writes, "according to His great mercy begat us again [the new birth]," when he speaks of living hope, the resurrection of Jesus, an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, fades not away, reserved in heaven, kept by the power of God (all of these rich, fundamental, theological concepts), he does not say, "Now that I've introduced these concepts, you ought to begin to rejoice in them." He can say, "wherein you are already rejoicing," indicating that he was confident that in the minds and hearts of these believers, there was an intelligent, believing apprehension of these realities. He was not the first one to use such terms as he uses in his greeting. Imagine what it would be like in many a professing Christian congregation to stand up and begin to use words like these: foreknowledge of God, sanctification of the Spirit, obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Christ. You would be talking in tongues. And then to go on and speak of God's divine begetting, of God's great mercy, living hope, resurrection of Jesus, inheritance incorruptible, undefiled. You see, in many an evangelical church today, the whole ministry is relational. If you're going to have a hearing, you've got to talk about people's felt hurts and felt needs. You can't do anything that makes them strain their brains. They're a visually oriented society. You can't make them think on such issues as sanctification. I mean that's as musty as a Puritan's wig. You can't make them think about blood of sprinkling. That's an antiquated concept. You've got to have a ministry that is relational and makes no demands on their minds. Not so with Peter. He can assume that these first century Christians have been nourished on these vigorous, blessed, central truths of the Christian faith, that meat and potatoes of the ministry which had brought them into

the faith as he describes it in verse 12 of this very chapter and later on in verse 22 through verse 25. They had not been brought into the Christian faith by a frothy, shallow, relational, humorous, antidotal pattern of sermonizing. They had had the Gospel preached unto them with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, a Gospel that trafficked stuff of these great and saving realities. And as they had been brought into the Christian faith by such a ministry, they had been nourished upon it so that when Peter writes unto them, he is fully cognizant of their struggles. As the letter unfolds, we shall see that he is not insensitive of their struggles. He knows the struggling life with an unconverted husband. He knows the struggling slave with an unreasonable master. He knows the struggling saints with unreasonable colleagues who are beating upon them with their words. He's not insensitive to that. But he knows that what saints need in their pilgrimage is not the froth of anecdotal, touchy, feely, man-centered ministry. He knows they need to have the tap roots of their Christian life sunk into the subsoil of the great doctrines of the Christian faith. That's what makes strong, mature, good soldiers of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that alone will produce solid, substantial, exuberant joy. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice...." In what? In this glorious salvation, which when laid out in words which the Holy Spirit teaches, is not talking in tongues to this congregation of ordinary make up of the full spectrum of diversity of ethnic and religious and sociological and intellectual backgrounds. Peter can assume that their abounding joy is a joy that has its source their intelligent, believing apprehension of the great realities of the Christian faith as laid out in verses 3 to 5.

But now we come to the other side of the picture which fills in the dimensions of the paradox. He no sooner speaks of their abounding joy but that he focuses upon their experience of crushing grief. "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Now again, notice the nature of their grief and then the cause of their grief. The nature of this grief: the word used refers not to the pain or anguish that one feels in the nerve endings. You kids catch your finger in the door and you feel real pain, but it is physical pain. It is registered in your brain by the nerve endings in your finger and the pressure of the door on your finger as it's caught between the door and the door jam. But the word used here always refers not to bodily pain, but to the distress of the mind and of the soul. For example, it's used in Matthew 19:22. When Jesus finishes dealing with the rich young ruler, and he doesn't want to come to Christ on Christ's terms, it says that he went away sorrowful. That was a sorrow of the spirit, that sorrow that comes when there was this desire for something more than his money and position could give him. But there was no willingness to part with that which was his god and his idol. And so he went away internally grieved, agitated, disturbed. That's the word used. It's used of our Lord when He goes into Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37). He began to be sorrowful and sore amazed. He had said in John 12, "Now is My soul troubled." Long before anyone bound Him, dragged Him Caiaphas and then off to Pilate and up to Herod and back to Pilate; long before any crowns of thorns were pressed upon His brow, any rods were used to beat Him, any lashes tore the flesh of His back, it says He began to be sorrowful--an internal pain of the soul. And very interesting, this is the word used in Ephesians 4:30: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit." He has no nerve endings. He is pure spirit, and He can be grieved internally with pain by the actions of the people of God. So that's the nature of the grief. When the text says, "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye

have been put to grief," Peter is focusing not upon any external, physical afflictions that they may have endured at the hands of their enemies or even within the providence of God. The focus is not upon anything external, but upon the internal anguish and distress of the mind and the soul. While in the midst of abounding joy, they are experiencing this grief. They are experiencing this internal distress of mind and soul. And the structure in the original is such that most likely it is pointing to a concurrent experience. You have the main verb and then an aorist participle of their grief, which in many instances shows that what is asserted in the main verb and then described in the participial phrase shows concurrent reality. So Peter is not saying, "Though you experience joy most of the time, once in a while sorrow's intermixed." Most likely he is underscoring that concurrent with that abounding joy is a continual experience of heaviness and grief.

And what's the occasion of their grief? Look at the text: "though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold [here's the key word] trials." Trials are the occasion of our grief. Now, this word translated "trials" is that broadly used word in the New Testament. Sometimes it's used to describe temptation, that is, an inducement to sin. Other times it means trials: stressful, pressured situations. It can be persecution, affliction, physical suffering, anything that grinds and grates against our love of comfort and ease, any dark clouds that break in on the blue sky of favorable providence, any thorn that pricks the finger when we're admiring a rose of some manifestation of God's goodness. And in this instance, obviously, Peter is referring to this word in that sense. This is the way it used in James 1:2: "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations [trials, situations of testing]." That's what Peter is referring to. And he says the occasion of their grief are these trials. Notice, he does not focus on any specific manifestation. He just groups them altogether and says trials. And he tells us four things about those trials. The first thing he tells us about them is that they are temporal. Look at the text: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold trials. [You have these trials, but remember, they are for a little while. They are real, and they are with you, but bless God, they won't always be with you.]" What is a little while? Well, it could mean that there is some present pressured situation, and Peter wants his readers to know that each trial will only last so long. But that wouldn't be accurate. Some are entrusted with trials and crucibles of testing that will mark them till they breathe their last and are placed in the cold, dark, damp earth. And Peter would have no way of knowing whether this or that trial was allotted for this or that child of God. And so when he says "for a little while," he is contrasting the temporal nature of the trial with the glorious inheritance of which he had just finished speaking - "that inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, unfading, the already and continuing to be reserved inheritance for which you will be preserved as the heirs of the inheritance in which glorious salvation you rejoice, though for a little while you are put to grief because of these trials." But "remember," Peter says, "they are temporal." Think of Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 4:17: "For our light affliction, which is for the moment...." A moment, a moment! Year after year, Paul underwent tremendous opposition, underwent tremendous suffering, had to reckon with that stake in his flesh that God allowed the devil to place upon him to keep him a humble and dependant man. And he writes over all of that, "light affliction for a moment." So Peter writes and says, "Yes, you've been put to grief, and the cause of the grief is your trials, but I want you to remember, dear struggling sojourners of the dispersion, they are temporal."

Secondly, he said these trials are divinely ordered. The text says, "though now for a little while, if need be [literally from the original, 'if it is necessary']...." Now, who determines whether trials are necessary. Does God send down a telegram, a blank sheet of paper with blank lines saying, "Would you like some trials this next week? Tick here. Would you like some lighter trials the following week? Tick here. Would you like no trials for three weeks? Tick here." Anyone get such a slip from heaven generated out of God's computer bank? I never have. "If need be"--who determines whether there is a need? Well, there's only one, the God who is described in Romans 8:28 as the One who is working all things together for the good of His people. So Peter, in writing to these saints whom he describes as constantly experiencing exuberant joy as they intelligently, believingly apprehend their glorious salvation (here's the paradox), he says in the midst of that, they have been put to grief. The occasion of that grief is their trials. Though they are temporal, he says, "I want you to understand they are divinely ordered trials." Listen to John Calvin, the pastor preaching to his people in Geneva on this very phrase. And he writes,

"His purpose was to show that God does not thus try His people without reason. For if God afflicted us without a cause, it would be grievous to bear. Hence, Peter takes an argument for consolation from the design of God, not because the purpose always appears to us, but because we ought to be fully persuaded that it ought to be because it is God's will."

What is God's will? In terms of the will of His plan and decree, God's will is what is. I'm not talking about His perceptive will. If I'm guilty of a certain sin and God says stop it, God's will is that I stop it. But if I stand here this morning and I feel something of the signal of the nerves from my left shoulder that I've either developed either arthritis or bursitis in my working arm, it is the will of God that I feel that. Now, does that mean I shouldn't go to a orthopedic and see if we can help it and take a regimen of some pain relief? No, that's the proper use of means. But what is, is the revelation of God's will. So as Peter writes to them, he says, "Yes, you who exalt and rejoice in your glorious inheritance in Christ and your amazing salvation, you have been put to grief by means of trials. But though they are temporal, you must remember and never forget they are divinely ordered." And to put it bluntly, fighting God is losing business. And being irritated with God will cut off all your ability to hold communion with God. You can't fellowship with a God with whom you are irked and peeved. How can you come with tears streaming down your face and say,

"O my Father, I don't have a clue of why You're doing what you're doing, but I know you're God, and I know You're wise, and I know Your purposes are all for my good because I read Your heart, not in my present afflictions that cause me grief, but in the great affliction You put upon Your Son when You sent Him to die for the likes of me, and You bore the agony of hearing the cry come into Your own ears from the lips of Your own beloved Son, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me!' O God, I don't why what has come upon me is upon me, but one thing I know when I read Your heart through the lines of the cross, is that Your love is eternal, unchangeable, and fixed."

"If need be [Peter writes to these grieving saints], even though rejoicing, your trials are temporal; your trials are divinely ordained." Thirdly, he says, "Your trials are manifold." Look at the text again: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief [not just in trials but] in manifold trials." This is a fascinating word. It doesn't point to the number of the trials but to the

different colors of the trials. Peter says, "You're getting the full spectrum of the trials." If you were describing a leopard back in the first century and you wanted to say its skin had several or many colors, this is the word you would use. This is the word you would use, not only to describe a leopard in its many colors, but if you had a piece of marble and you saw the different veins of the colors in the stones of that marble, this is the word you would use. You would say it had manifold shades and hues of color imbedded in it. That's the word you would use. So Peter says, "Your trials are manifold." This is the same word he uses in 4:10 of the grace of God: "the manifold [the full spectrum of] the grace of God." He says, "Yes, your trials are temporal, divinely ordered, but they are manifold."

But then he really parks on the fourth thing he says about these about these trials: that they are purposeful. And here Peter parks. He doesn't just want to use a word or two, but we have a whole verse. Notice what he says: "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold trials, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Here Peter states that the purpose has two focal points. I think you Latin students would tell me, "Pastor Martin, that's two fosi." And do you see what the two focal points are? Peter says, "I want you elect sojourners of the dispersion to understand that these trials are purposeful." They don't come willy nilly. They don't come because of some insensitivity of God in the heart or indifference to you. They have a distinctive purpose. One is immediate, and one is remote. One points to the now in this life, and one to the then at the second coming of our Lord Jesus.

Let's unpack those for a few minutes. What's the immediate purpose of these trials? The text says, "that the proof of your faith [literally, that the genuineness of your faith]..." The word used here is in that general family of words that means to put something to the test, to prove or disprove its genuineness. But it's a little bit of a different wrinkle on this particular word, and the most respected lexicographers state that it should be rendered "the genuineness of your faith." So what's Peter saying? He's saying, "The immediate purpose of these trials is that your faith may be put to the test and be validated that it's real." And that's why he can use the imagery of gold and fire. You see how he immediately goes into it. He says, "Now look, you know what gold is, this most precious metal. And though it will ultimately perish at the second coming of Christ." The world and all the elements will be dissolved in that conflagration at the return of our Lord (2 Peter 3:10). He says, "Nonetheless, when you have a lump of something that looks like gold, what do you do? You will put it into the fire, not to destroy it, but to see what in it is real gold and what is dross. Now he says, "These trials are calculated by God to be a furnace in which to validate the reality of your faith in the now." The immediate purpose of the trials is that your faith may be put to the test and validated that it is real. Faith, that queen of all graces, is worthless until it is tested.

According to verse 12 in the latter part of the chapter, these people were brought to the Christian faith through the preaching of the Gospel. We don't know who the preachers were. We went into that in the background of the book. We don't know under what circumstances, but Peter does tell us these things have been announced to them by those that preached the Gospel to them with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven. And so they come to faith, and they say yes.

"A proclamation of free and full pardon, acceptance before the God of the universe based upon the doing and the dying of another--that's good news. I venture upon Christ. I lay the full weight of my soul upon Christ alone as He's offered in the Gospel. I believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. I turn away from my worldly companions and my worldly standards and all of the pressure of this present world. I cast in my lot with pilgrims. I'm here to declare that no longer is this world my commonwealth. There is the Jerusalem above. And on my way to that great city, I believe in the Lord Jesus."

Now Peter says, "You've been made heavy. In the midst of that joy in the possession of your salvation, you've been put to grief through trials, and you must understand there's a divine purpose in those trials. And here is purpose number one: to test and prove the genuineness of your faith." When clinging to Christ brings you something more than joy of sins forgiven, the exhilaration of knowing I need no longer fear death and the grave and judgment; my hell has been born by another. But clinging to Christ now means that you may lose your job. Clinging to Christ now means that you may verbally and even physically be abused by your colleagues. Clinging to Christ now means that you've got to stay on in the place of God's appointment and demonstrate submission to God's institutions when there's unrighteous rulers, and He says you've got to honor the king. You've got to be submissive to every divinely instituted authority. What happens? The faith by which I profess my attachment to Christ begins to gather to it implications that are very unpleasant to the flesh. Now faith is tested. Is it real faith? If it is, it will lose nothing in the crucible of the fire. It will be proven to be real gold. Throw a lump of something in the fire that looks like gold and in a half an hour, if nothing's there, it was fool's gold. Remember the parable of the sower? They believed for a while, but when the sun of persecution and tribulation arises because of the Word, what happens? They wither, and they die. My professing Christian friend, untried faith is worthless faith. And God, in His mercy, is so committed that we not stumble through self-delusion, that He will bring upon every one of His true children a crucible of fire in order to validate the genuineness of faith, validate it to their own consciousness, validate it to an on-looking world so that in the midst of the fire, they see us yet walking with one like unto the Son of man. And they say, "There ain't no explanation for that character, but he knows Jesus. And Jesus is identified with him." Peter wants them to know that. He says, "Yes, you've been put to grief through your manifold trials, but you must understand the purpose is that the proof, the genuineness of your faith like gold that is purified in the fire, so it too is validated."

But then there's an ultimate purpose of trials. Look at it. And what is the ultimate purpose? "That the [genuineness] of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." What's the ultimate purpose of the trial? That your faith may be purified and vindicated in the last day. The immediate purpose: that your faith may be put to the test and validated now that it is real. But Peter says there's even an ultimate purpose: that your faith may be purified and vindicated in the last day, that that faith tested and proved now "may be found unto praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." This is one of the most amazing statements. My faith will be found unto praise, unto glory, unto honor at the second coming of the Lord Jesus. And at face value, it seems to say that my faith will result in my receiving praise and glory and honor. But that seems so antithetical to the Biblical truth that all that God does in nature and grace has His glory as its ultimate end. But there's no compelling reason to take any other position on this text. But at the return of the Lord Jesus, the faith of the true people of God validated in the crucible of the fires now

and continually purified, at that day will be found unto praise and glory and honor. Unto praise: commendation ("Well done thou good and faithful servant"). Glory: Romans 8:21 speaks of Christ who at His second coming will be glorified in His people. He comes to be glorified in His saints. And honor: that's to be given a place of influence, a place of distinction ("I will make him ruler over five cities...over ten cities"). Look at all the promises in Revelation 2 and 3: "To him that overcometh, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God...I will give to him to sit down with Me in My throne." Dear people, it's an amazing thing that he wants the elect sojourners of the dispersion to understand that in the midst of the trials that caused them grief, they must be assured that that tried and tested and purified faith will in the last day receive the commendation and share in the glory of and share in the distinctions of the very Savior who imparted and nurtured that faith in them. And what will we do with any honor we get? We'll throw it all back at His feet. But you see, God is so secure that in heaven there will be no selfish desire to take any glory that belongs to Him. He can give all the glory He wants to His people knowing they'll give it back to Him. That's the amazing thing.

Now, what will that do for people whose tears are flowing under the real relationship to real trials? Well, you see, that will cause the tears to glisten with the gleam of hope and expectation. God is purifying my faith. To what end? That at the revelation of the Lord Jesus, at the coming of my Savior, I will receive from Him these three things Peter speaks about. I will receive from my very Savior in that context praise and glory and honor that I might then say, "But O Lord Jesus, it was all of Your doing and all of Your grace." One commentator has beautifully summarized it this way:

"He thus reminds Christians that God's purposes in present grief may not be fully known in a week, in a year, or even in this lifetime. Indeed, some of God's purposes may not be known when believers die and go to be with the Lord. Some will only be discovered at the day of final judgment when the Lord reveals the secrets of all hearts and commends with special honor those who trusted Him in hardship, even though they could not see the reason for it. They trusted in Him simply because He was their God, and they knew Him to be worthy of trust. It is in times when the reason for hardship cannot be seen that trust in God alone seems to become most pure and precious in His sight."

"Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." Those were the words of Job. Imagine, stand before a God and say, "Kill me. If You do what seems to be the ultimate expression of Your will, I'll still trust You." Mr. Grudom says, "This is the highest expression of faith. Such faith He will not forget, but will store up as a jewel of great value and beauty to be displayed and delighted in in the day of judgment."

Well, I sought to open up those texts under those two heads: their abounding joy, their crushing grief; the nature, the source, the cause of both. Now, what does all of this say to us? I was tempted with the thought of just preaching a separate message on the many principles, but I reduced them to just several this morning.

Number one--and I pray, dear children of God, you'll grasp this: joy mingled with grief and grief tempered by joy will be the concurrent experience of every true Christian in this life. The Christian's joy is derived from the believing contemplation of what he now possesses in Christ, what he shall possess when he comes to that inviolable inheritance for which he is infallibly kept and preserved. His joy with its taproots in these realities cannot be taken from him no matter what his external circumstances

may be. But the Christian's grief is derived from the many colored trials to which all of the people of God are subject in varying degrees without any power to control them. That's why Paul could say to the young churches in Acts 14:22--his follow-up message was this: "confirming the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God." He knew one thing was for sure no matter what providences would unfold: if you're on your way to heaven, you're going to go through the crucible of fire.

Not only is the gate narrow and always will be narrow, but the way is always compressed that leads to life. And no one can widen it and strip it of its hazards and extinguish its fires. It cannot be done. And a Christianity that has no fire to test the reality of faith and to purify faith, awaiting the reward of faith, is no Christianity. It's a heretical aberration. As under the old covenant, the great promise was prosperity, under the new, it's adversity. If You have a new covenant Savior, a new covenant privilege, you'll new covenant affliction to test and to purify your faith. Listen to old Matthew Poole:

"If their heaviness did in any way abate their joy, yet it did not wholly hinder it. And though their joy did overcome their heaviness, yet it did not wholly exclude it. So you have joy that, though it may be tempered with grief, is never swallowed up by grief. And you have a grief that is tempered by the joy. 'We sorrow not as those who have no hope.'"

The same word is used there for sorrow in 1 Thessalonians 4:13. You see, God doesn't tell us to be stoics. "There is no hurt; there is no pain. I'm only happy, happy, happy all the time, time, time." That's not Biblical. I can know a joy that enables me to feel and to be assured of certain purposes of God amidst the bitter tears of grief and of pain. That was true of our Lord Jesus. He's called a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, yet He says, "My joy I give unto you." Well, is He a man of sorrows or a man of joy. He is both. And we're called to follow is His steps.

The Second great principle: true saving faith will always become a tried and tested faith in order that it may be a praise-worthy faith in the day of Jesus Christ. That faith that is the result of the new birth, John says, is a faith that overcomes the world. Paul describes it in Galatians 2:20 as the very principle of life: "That life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself up for me." 2 Corinthians 5: "We walk by faith and not by sight." Now who would want to be deluded with an untested, untried faith and wonder when I come to the last day, will it be exposed as spurious? I don't want that. I want to know that my professed faith is real. And God says "Yes. And anyone in their right mind would want to know it." It's too late to do something when He comes. He'll then say to those who are quite confident in their faith, "Lord, Lord, did we not, did we not...?" And He says, "Depart!" I don't want that, do you? Don't you want to have certain well-grounded confidence that your professed faith is the real thing now? Then expect God to throw you in the fire. Gold loses nothing but its dross and shows itself to be gold in the fire. So count on it. And you young people wrestling with the whole question, "Shall Mom and Dad's God become my God? And is He my God?" Why don't you pray, "Lord, as best I know, I'm trusting in Your Son. I'm resting only in Him. But I don't know what has come from Mom and Dad's head into my head, and what's come by the Spirit of God into my heart. O Lord, put me in circumstances that will test the reality of my faith." True saving faith will always become a tried and tested faith in order that it may be a praise-worthy faith. Remember, David speaks of the Word of

God being like precious metal purified in the fire seven times. I was thinking about this and asking the question, Why does the fire get hotter the closer you get to the end of the journey? That's a question I've wrestled with in the last couple of years--I've had to. I'd have to be in la la land not to wrestle with that question. I've known a concentration of physical, emotional, psychological, ministerial fires the likes of which I've never known in 45 years as a Christian and 40 as a preacher. It's just like God said, "You dummy, isn't it plain?" When you take that original lump of what seems to be gold--and maybe there's twenty percent dross--throw it in the fire, and in half an hour most of the dross comes to the surface. Now, if you want to get the remaining bit out of it--maybe there's another five percent left--you've got to throw it in the fire again. David said God's Word's been thrown in the fire seven times. Why? The more heat, the more pressure, the more the last bit of dross is going to be burned away. Some of us wonder why the fire gets hotter the closer we get to the end of the journey. Because God's burning away dross. And hopefully, there isn't quite as much dross left. So God says, "I've got to turn up the heat to get the rest out." To what end? That there might be more praise and more glory and more honor when I stand before Him. He loves me enough to turn up the heat that He might increase the praise. Who would not want to serve God like that? Who would not want love and follow a Savior like that?

Then my third application--and I close with this: if you're not a child of God, whatever joys or grief you now experience, you'll know nothing but grief in the day of Christ. Peter can say to these afflicted, tried, and tested saints, "Look forward to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Then all the grief and all the testing is over and past, and there will be nothing but the honor and the glory and the praise." Are you sitting here as an unconverted man, woman, boy, or girl? You may be like the person in Psalm 73. Your life may be a witness to the fact that God insulates some unconverted people from the ordinary trials of life. Life is nothing but one piece of cake for you. You have no physical afflictions, no economic pressures. The kids are well; the wife is well. You've got no debilitating disease taking one of you down to an early grave. Read Psalm 73--and my friend, whatever present joys you presently have created by these favorable circumstances of a patient and loving God, in the day of Christ, they're over, and over for good. There will be the weeping and the wailing and the gnashing of teeth, and that forever. You may be an unconverted person, and in you the text is fulfilled: "Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward." And your life has been marked by grief and disappointment and trials. O my friend, don't say, "My life's a living hell." You take your worst day and multiply it by ten thousand and that will not equal one moment in hell. You see, God sets before us the choice: sanctifying grief now that prepare us for heaven to come or grief unsupported by God or a mesmerizing life of ease without God, both of which go to the lake of fire.

O my friend, I hope we've made you jealous to become a Christian. Tell me dear children and young people, when did you ever find an old man, an old woman who's been in the fire; who's faith has been tested and tried and proven that ever put his hand upon your shoulder and said to you, "You know, upon reflection, I really wish I could go back and do it all over again and never live a life for Christ. It's really been a bummer." Find that person. He or she doesn't exist. Our only regret is we haven't adhered to Him more faithfully, loved Him more fervently, borne witness more aggressively to His wonderful grace.

Well, the chorus sings, "A paradox, a paradox, a most amazing paradox." Frederick's paradox of age is nothing compared to the paradox of the true child of God in which thing you rejoice, though for a while if need be, you are in grief.

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