

The Pilgrims' Joy

1 Peter 1:6–9

The Fourth Sermon on 1 Peter

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Joy and sorrow. Think about how these two words bring your minds and hearts two reactions as opposite as life and death. Marriage is a joy; divorce is a sorrow. A baby's birth is a joy; the death of a loved one is a sorrow. As we wander in the wilderness together as pilgrims in this life our lives will be a mixture of joy and sorrow. There is a lot of sorrow; we already know this. Paul described the age before Christ's return as a "present evil age" (Gal. 1:4). Yet Peter's words lift our hearts and assure that even in the midst of the desolate desert, there is the joy of rain. Even in the suffering heat, there is the shade of joy.

Peter's words in verses 6–9 teach us about *the pilgrims' joy*. We learn three things here:

1. *Your Present Joy*
2. *Your Present Sorrow*
3. *Your Future Joy*

May the Lord open our hearts and minds to his truth tonight.

Your Present Joy

So as pilgrims, wandering in this life for a short period of time, sorrow triumphs in our lives. But Peter's words explain *your present joy*. In this life we begin already to experience the joy that we will experience in the eternal presence of God. How?

Remember that the "great mercy" of God the Father in verse 3 has bestowed many blessings upon us through the power of Christ's resurrection: a new life, a living hope, an eternal inheritance, and protection by God's power until the Second Coming of Jesus. Now note in verse 6 that Peter continues this thought when he says **in this you rejoice**. He's speaking in a general way of all that God the Father has blessed us with as if to say "for these reasons you rejoice."

Now, in particular, one of these reasons is this last day of Jesus' return. What makes his return so full of joy? The last day is our joy now because Jesus will bring with him "a salvation ready to be revealed." You should be thinking, "I thought we were already saved?" We are! But you see, in 1 Peter, as Peter writes to us as pilgrims looking forward, he describes salvation as something that is yet to come. Do you know what it is like to look forward? Last spring the Gilliam boys, the Hyde boys, and Michael Spotts all went camping. One of the first things we did was take a hike. I think the trail we took was only like 2 miles, but at some point I had already guzzled my water bottle, was feeling the burn as we went up the

¹ Schreiner, 66

inclined hill, and keep asking Wayde, “Where is the camp?” He kept saying, “We’re almost there.” I was so looking forward to the comfort of my chair!

Our life here on earth is like we are out in the desert looking forward to rest, shade, water, and food. The desert we experience is sorrow, death, suffering, persecution, and sin. But on that great Day we will be completely saved from all these effects of the Fall. We will be saved from the power of our sin natures! We will be saved from the power of this evil world! We will be saved from the power of the Devil and his demons! We will be saved from the power of death! We will be saved from this life of unspeakable sorrow! This is our hope and reason for rejoicing *now*. So I ask you fellow pilgrims in the wilderness, are you rejoicing in the coming last day? Are your eyes and heart firmly set on the land to come and not on this world? Are you longing for the complete and final salvation of both body and soul on that Day? Cry out to the Lord, “maranatha!,” “come quickly, O Lord!” For on that Day we will no longer wander but have rest, we will no longer sorrow but rejoice, and we will no longer feel pain but healing! Take hope in Jesus who is the One coming again to save you.

Your Present Sorrow

But what about *your present sorrow*? Look at verse 6 with me: **though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials** (v. 6). Imagine your life is like a set of train tracks. They are parallel to each other and on

the one hand we live on the track of joy but we also live on the other track of sorrow. Notice a few things about the track of your sorrows.

First, this sorrow is limited. Notice he says **though now for a little while** in comparison to eternity. In fact, this can mean that your entire life may be one of suffering, but even if it is, it is short compared to eternity. The trials in your life that bring you sorrow will not last forever because as 4:7 says, “the end of all things is near.”

Second, this sorrow is the will of God. Notice he says **if necessary**, meaning, if it is the will of God and therefore for your good. Look at 3:17 where he says it is better to suffer “if that should be God’s will” and look at 4:19 where he says “let those who suffer according to God’s will.” This is why John Calvin could say, “Our trials are full of reproach and shame for us but they become glorious in Christ.”²

Third, this sorrow is a good thing. How is our sorrow a good thing, a glorious thing, for us? Look at verse 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.** God brings trials into our lives to refine our faith in their fire just as gold is purified in a furnace. Peter says that although our faith is worth more than gold it must still be purified and be completely holy so that it **may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.** As the

² John Calvin, 12:236.

ancient Proverb says, “the crucible for silver and the furnace for gold; but the Lord tests the hearts” (Prov. 17:3). Our faith is not a tangible element like gold is. So it cannot literally go through fire; but as the Proverb says, the Lord himself will test our hearts; he will refine our faith so that it will be pure and pleasing.

Fourth, this sorrow is pattered after the life of Jesus. He suffered first; then he was glorified. For us this means the wilderness comes first, then the Promised Land; the life of the cross precedes the life of glory; a life of sorrow must precede an eternal life of joy. As Paul said, “for our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor. 4:17).

Let me make one application of this. All too often as Christians we are taught that we need to put on what I call the plastic Jesus smile when things go against us. Because of what Peter says you are free to be authentic, free to be real, free to be honest with each other as brothers and sisters. John Calvin said it like this:

The faithful are not logs of wood, nor have they so divested themselves of human feelings as to be unaffected by sorrow, unafraid of danger, unhurt by feel poverty, and untouched by hard and unbearable persecutions. Hence they experience sorrow because of evils, but it is so mitigated by faith that they never cease at the same time to rejoice. Thus sorrow does not prevent their joy, but rather gives place to it. Again, though joy overcomes sorrow, yet it does not put an end to it, because it does not divest us of humanity.³

Your Future Joy

Now remember with me again those train tracks. Our feet are on both in this life. Have you ever stood on train tracks and looked into the horizon? What

³ John Calvin, 12:234.

did you see? You saw what looked like one track! When we look at our lives on the one hand we see our joy and on the other we see our sorrow. But when we look past where we are in this life and to our future hope, we only see one track of life. The two parallel emotions of joy and sorrow will be merged together in to nothing but rejoicing my fellow Christians. So I want you to see here *your future joy*. Look at verses 8–9: **Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.**

Christ's Second Coming will be a glorious day. It will be a day of perfection. It will be a day of marvel. It will be a day of longed for anticipation. It will be greater than we can ever imagine with our finite minds. Martin Luther said all the joy ever on earth is but child's play to this eternal joy.⁴

Conclusion

Beloved, this pilgrim life is full of moments of joy but also many moments of sorrow. And tonight God says to you that the gospel of joy overcomes the pain of sorrow. As the Psalmist said, “weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning” (Ps. 30:5b). Your sorrow will only endure during this dark life. Cling to this promise, beloved this week, in the weeks to come, and during your entire life here in this wilderness. Amen.

⁴ Luther, 49.