

The Stabilizing Power of Thankfulness Part 4

Our Identity in Christ

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Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter 1. 1 Peter 1 We are continuing a series of messages we began a few weeks ago on verses 3 to 9 of this first chapter of Peter's first letter. We've titled the series on these seven verses, 1 Peter 1:3 to 9, "The Stabilizing Power of Thankfulness," the stabilizing power of thankfulness, and this is today's title too so it's actually Part 4. The stabilizing power of thankfulness. Peter is writing with a pastoral concern for believers in the first century who are about to experience persecution who really are already suffering, who know what it's like to be Christians and live in a world that is hostile to your faith, and the hostility is escalating, the opposition is growing. And so within a year or two after the writing of this letter, there's going to be widespread persecution, and in the providence of God, God gives this letter to strengthen the faith of believers throughout Asia Minor for the upcoming trials that they're to experience. And so this letter is especially relevant to Christians in America who live today in a time of increasing hostility to the things of God, growing spiritual opposition, antipathy to those who claim to speak for God, to share that there's only one way to heaven, it's through Jesus Christ. That's very offensive to this culture, a pluralistic society that wants to affirm that all roads lead to God, that there is no such thing as absolute truth. We as those who have come to know the living God, know that there is such a thing as absolute truth; God has made it known to us by his Spirit through his word. And so we must proclaim that and it's the most loving thing we can do is to speak the truth of the gospel. And so as we do that, though, this love and this loving witness is perceived by the world as hate speech because they are deceived and they need to be delivered from that deception, and it can only come through the gospel.

So this book is especially relevant to us in this day and so Peter writes and encourages us to be strong and to know that to be strong, we need to be thankful. That's the stabilizing power of thankfulness. His pastoral concern in this whole letter is to strengthen the faith of the believers to endure hardship, to go through difficult times with a faith that is resilient and strong. And it's interesting to note where he begins, and we've we said this in previous weeks, that right after the salutation in verses 1 and 2, the first thing Peter wants to talk to these believers about is their need to be thankful, that you start with thankfulness, that gratitude itself undergirds and strengthens your soul, strengthens your resolve, your commitment to God. And so the stabilizing power of thankfulness. They're going to be stable and strong as they are thankful and so in these first verses of the first chapter, particularly verses 3 to 9, Peter enumerates seven things for which we should

actively thank God, seven blessings which we should be intentional about celebrating and delighting in, and that as we are intentional in celebrating and delighting in thanking God for these things, we will be strengthened for our present circumstances. He says we should focus on God's great goodness to us already that we've experienced in the past and now in the present so that we can face uncertain times ahead.

We said there's seven things in this passage. We've looked at the first six already. We'll read it in a moment and you'll see them as we read if you haven't been with us before. He encourages a believer, every believer to thank God for the great mercy that we've received, that's the first blessing. We've received a new birth, that's the second blessing. A new birth unto a living hope, the third blessing. For a future inheritance, that's the fourth blessing. Present ongoing protection, that's the fifth blessing. And last week we looked at the providence of God, that's the sixth blessing, the fact that God's governing all things including our painful trials for his ultimate purposes. This morning, we come to the seventh and final blessing in Peter's list here in this passage, that is, the presence of Christ. We not only have the providence of God but we have the presence of Christ, and if we understand that reality it will strengthen us in the moment, and the focus of verses 8 and 9 is this central reality upon which Peter wants us to delight, in which he wants us to give thanks. The presence of Christ, we're going to see it. He's going to talk about "though you have not seen Him, you love Him, though you are not presently seeing Him but you're believing in Him, you are rejoicing with great joy." The idea is it's about the presence of Jesus in the midst of suffering.

Let's read the passage together. 1 Peter 1 beginning at verse 3.

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 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; 8 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, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we praise You for the great gift of Your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as we've sung about this morning, the reality that You gave Him to us, for us. And Lord Jesus, we praise You for being willing to leave the glory of heaven to come into this world to die in our place to make us Your own. We pray now that You would grant us the ministry of the

Holy Spirit to illumine Your word, make it alive and clear in our hearts, draw out more faith, more repentance, more love for such a glorious Savior. We pray this in His name. Amen.

So the stabilizing power of thankfulness. We need to be thankful for the real presence of Christ in the midst of our everyday lives, and particularly we're going to see in the midst of suffering. He wants you, as a believer, if you have placed your faith in Christ, if you have repented of your sins and you are trusting in Jesus alone today for your salvation, you're not trusting in your righteousness, you are trusting in the finished work of Christ, you're resting in his righteousness, in his atoning sacrifice, in his resurrection, the power of his resurrection, if you are resting in Christ then you can know that you have his presence right now with you and will forever. It's the promise of God. In fact, the reality of that is something the Scripture goes to great lengths to make us know, that we have confidence in the presence of Christ. You know, but this particular passage, though, is speaking not just about the spiritual reality of the presence of Christ which is real, not just about the theological certainty of the presence of Christ, not just about the biblical fact of the presence of Christ in the believer, this passage is calling us to experience, to practically experience the presence of Christ in our suffering, that the theological biblical reality becomes tangible to you when you suffer. That's what Peter is describing here and that's what he's inviting us to celebrate and to reflect on.

The Bible makes clear that when you become a believer, you are united to Jesus Christ in an indissoluble union. Nothing can snatch you out of his hand. Nothing can take you away from his saving grace and work. Nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Matthew 28:20, Jesus, after he issues the Great Commission, he says, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." He promises to be with his people to the end of time. He's not somewhere else. He is with believers. In fact, Isaiah 7:14, the wonderful prophecy of the virgin birth, "You shall call His name Immanuel," which means God with us. Jesus has come into the world to bring God to us, and he indwells the believer and nothing can change that. We're talking about the spiritual reality of the presence of Christ.

Hebrews 13:5, a tremendous promise of the abiding presence of Christ, "I will never leave you nor will I ever forsake you. I will never leave you, nor will I ever forsake you." The passage could not be more emphatic. The author of Hebrews in those two sentences uses five negative particles. Five times, he says "not," actually piling negative upon negative. You can't read it in the English, it doesn't come through. But it basically has the force of, "I will certainly not leave you and I will certainly never forsake you." That's the word of promise of Jesus. A believer has been sealed by the Spirit. You cannot be separated from the love of Christ. You cannot go from his presence. That's a spiritual reality of biblical certainty, but this passage is talking about something more tangible. This is not just talking about the unseen spiritual reality, this is talking about the practical experience of the Christian of the presence of God, the presence of Jesus himself. He wants us to understand how we come to actual first-hand experience of the presence of Christ, how we come to apprehend, to grasp, to truly perceive his presence in our lives. How is it that with the invisible Jesus that we cannot see, that we've never seen, that we

cannot see with our eyes now, becomes real to us. Peter is telling the believers in this first century letter and saying to us today the way Jesus becomes real to you, more real to you than ever before, is through the dark path of suffering. This is the beautiful, glorious, transforming blessing that suffering can bring. It comes through trials. It comes through sufferings.

So I want us to look at this reality of the presence of Christ in the life of the believer. It becomes more tangible, more experiential as we suffer. Three points I want to gather our thoughts around this morning concerning the presence of Christ and what it brings to us, and really what suffering brings to us. These are like three benefits of suffering, three benefits of the presence of Christ in suffering that we see marked out for us in what Peter describes in this passage. And the first is: we come to deeper joy in his presence. We come to deeper joy in his presence through suffering. He's basically telling believers, "Listen, you have joy already because of what God has done for you in Christ, but you can have even greater and deeper joy if you suffer."

Now as I said before when we talked about this, Peter's going to talk a lot about suffering in his letter. This really gives us something of a theology of suffering, and a true biblical picture of suffering, we have to balance it with what all of Scripture teaches, which is suffering in itself, in its essence, is bad. Suffering is part of the fall. God did not create us to suffer originally. He did not create us to experience pain and death, disease, decay. That's a part of a fallen world. But in this fallen world now, the redeeming work of Christ, there's a paradox that the more that this world is broken down, the more that you see the decay of things around you, the true believer who's come to know God, there's something about that that peels away that which hinders our vision of what really is true. As the outer man decays, the inner man is renewed. As that which is temporal becomes less and less dominant because it's breaking down in front of us, we see that which is eternal. This is what he's describing here and this is the tremendous blessing that can come to us when we suffer.

Now I said, the right balance of Christian theology in biblical Christianity is you don't seek out suffering. That's ungodly. You don't seek out suffering. You don't make yourself suffer to try to experience God. That is sin. But the good news is, the Lord's going to take care of that for us. We don't have to go looking for it. He's going to bring it, but when he brings it, we can rejoice in it because he brings it because it's necessary. I love that, said that last week, if it is necessary. He only brings suffering to the believer when it is necessary and what he's going to do is he's going to use it to help you and me see more clearly the reality of the glory of Christ and know him in an experiential way that will swallow up our sorrow with deeper joy.

There is a deeper joy in his presence. I want you to see this. There's some contrast going on in the text and one of the contrasts in the text is the contrast between joy and sorrow. Now the word sorrow doesn't appear in the actual verse that I'm reading from, the New American Standard. It's the word distress in verse 6, "In this you greatly rejoice even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed." That verb "been distressed" means "been made sorrowful, been grieved." So you had this great rejoicing,

that verb, "In this you greatly rejoice," means "to be exuberant." It's speaking of a tremendous joy, to be overjoyed. "In this you are overjoyed." Now in verse 6, he's talking about your eternal inheritance, God's present protection of you. The fact that you have an inheritance in heaven, that you have experienced the new birth, that you have a living hope, all the things that went before that he says, "In this you greatly rejoice," verse 6, "though now you are distressed, if necessary, by various trials."

Now you are grieved, now you are made sorrowful by real painful afflictions, but what happens is as you walk through the passage you come back to joy. After we read about the proof of our faith being more precious than gold which perishes, the refiner's fire being found to result in praise, glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ, verse 7, "though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice," same verb, that is, you are overjoyed. But he adds to that, "with joy inexpressible and full of glory." You are overjoyed now with even greater joy, a joy that you cannot utter, you cannot put into words.

So the path, look at the path, the path is from great rejoicing, to deep sorrow, to even more amazing joy. This is the path of the Christian life. You are surprised by joy when you come to faith. When you come to understand the wonder of forgiveness, when you come to understand that, "O how happy." Remember, blessed are, the Beatitudes, the word that's used for blessed in Matthew 5 verses 3 and following, Jesus' statements of the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God." The word "blessed" means, "O how happy are." O how happy are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God. O how happy are those who have been brokenhearted. O how happy are those who mourn for they shall be comforted. O how happy are the meek who know they own nothing, who have no possessions in this sense, in this world, they've learned to let go of everything. O how happy are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. The paradox of the Christian life. When you are poor in spirit, when you come to see yourself before God as he sees you without any hope, without any righteousness, when you see yourself hopeless before God with no claim to his love, no claim to his forgiveness, deserving only his wrath, when you come to that full assurance and understanding of that, Jesus says, "O how happy you are." That is the moment that you have the kingdom of God. Yours is the kingdom of heaven.

It was the Pharisee and the publican, the publican who came to God and said, "Have mercy on me, the sinner. Be propitiated," literally, "toward me, the sinner. Look at the sacrifice, Lord. I have nothing when I come into the temple." The Pharisee lists off all of his accomplishments. He fasts twice a week. He prays regularly. He's a faithful man. He's not like, he thanks God he's not like all these sinners, especially like this publican over here. But the Pharisee doesn't really know God. He claims to know God but he doesn't. It's the publican, Jesus said, the tax collector, the most unlikely person to a first century Jew who Jesus says, "He's the one who went home to his house justified because he came to God with nothing on his resume." He said, "Have mercy on me, the sinner." That's salvation.

So salvation and grace and joy come to those in paradoxical ways. O how happy we are when we see our poverty of spirit, and so in the same way it continues in the Christian life; joy comes through the most surprising means. Joy like this comes through things like a cancer diagnosis, sudden death of a loved one, the rejection and loss of a relationship, broken marriage. We would never choose those things, but God uses those things to bring deeper joy. You go through the distress and you come out on the other side with this joy inexpressible, full of glory.

This idea of inexpressible, it's translated in different translations with that same idea, inexpressible in most of the major translations. "Joy inexpressible" in the New American Standard. "An inexpressible joy" in the NIV. ESV, "with joy that is inexpressible." Clearly, that's a good word for it. It literally means unutterable. It means not able to speak it. It's a joy that is too great for words to begin to convey the experience of joy. This is the joy that is available to believers through the presence of Christ, and then he adds that it's full of glory. It's a joy that has been made glorious. It's actually a participle here that's used adjectively as an adjective to speak of the kind of joy he's talking about. It's an inexpressible joy, and it's a joy that has been made glorious, that has been infused with glory.

This is what the Christian life is for us when we hold onto God by faith in the midst of trials, deeper joy in his presence. But secondly, not just deeper joy in his presence, but the second point this morning is: clearer vision of his glory. Clearer vision of his glory, because the joy comes from seeing his glory. You see it again, another contrast in verse 8, "though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now." Contrast between what we see and what we experience. We cannot see Jesus and he says to these believers, he's writing to people who never saw Jesus, "You have not seen Him, though you have not seen Him you love Him." Interesting the tenses here, "You have not seen Him," past tense, "but you are presently loving Him." It's the Greek present actually, so it means continuing, ongoing you are loving him. And then he says, "though you are not seeing Him now," as though you do not see him now in the translation, but it literally it's the present tense also, "you are not seeing Him now." You're in an ongoing state of not seeing Jesus but you are believing, an ongoing state of believing, though not seeing. It's faith and sight. You can't see but you believe. You're not able to visually see Jesus but you by faith are seeing him.

This clearer vision of his glory happens in suffering. This is an amazing reality. I want you to look with me at another passage that I think helps us unpack this a little bit. 2 Corinthians 4. You know, the Christian life is essentially, it is a call to see that which is unseen. The biblical worldview that the Scripture presents to us is that God has made everything that exists out of nothing, and God has made, we read this in our Bible study this morning, Sunday morning Bible study that met in here on Colossians, Jesus has created all things visible and invisible, the text says, "whether thrones or dominions, rulers or authorities, all things have been created by Him and for Him." Now what Paul is saying there in Colossians 1 is everything that has been created God has made, and what he's describing is that we see a visible world but there is every bit as real as that an invisible world of spiritual principalities and powers, angels, things in the heavenly

places, and these things are real but you and I cannot see them, and our salvation is of that same spiritual world. When Charles read from John 3, he said you have eternal life. If you believe on the Son, you have eternal life right now. You have it. You possess it. It is a spiritual reality that is true of you right now but you and I cannot see that.

We can't lay eyes on that. We can't even grasp it within ourselves fully. I mean, we ascertain it by faith. Spiritually we lay hold of it, but you can't touch it. You can't see it but it is real. And what God is doing in the Christian life is he's teaching us to look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen, because the things which are seen are temporary or temporal and the things which are unseen are eternal. That is, the things which are unseen are the things which really matter and our problem is we look at the things which are seen and forget about the things which are unseen and so Peter is saying suffering is how God gets you to stop focusing, holding onto, being enamored with the things which are seen, and he loosens your hold on those things so that you can lay hold of and see and truly grasp the things which are unseen.

And Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 4 the beauty of this. Look what he says in verse 6. 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." He's describing salvation. Salvation is not a small thing. When someone is saved, it's not simply just going forward in a meeting or hearing a gospel presentation and responding. I mean, that's what we see, but it's not something so small as that. When someone is truly saved, what has happened is the God who made the heavens and the earth out of nothing looks into the darkness of your human soul, into the darkness of your sin, the death, the spiritual death that is there, the blindness, and he says, "Let light shine out of darkness," and he does a creative miracle and he brings you to life. That's what happens. That's the new birth. Suddenly you see. You're like the man who was born blind, "I was born blind but now I see." You can see things differently. You understand now your sinfulness. You understand the glory of Christ.

The things that you formerly had no knowledge of now you see, and Paul is saying that is a miracle but now then after that happens, the initial euphoria that so often in the Christian life as time goes on, we begin not to have the feelings that we had early on and we struggle and we wonder, "Did that really happen? I can't see it. I can't. I can't peel back something in my heart and look at it. They can't do an X-ray or a CAT scan to show this." But Paul says the reality is that God has given you the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ, he's planted in it. Look what he says in verse 7, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels." You have this spiritual unseen treasure in an earthen vessel, that is, a clay pot that is our physical bodies. "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that there's surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves; we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed." Paul's talking about all the suffering that he's gone through in the Christian life and that many Christians are going through in his day. We're afflicted but not crushed, perplexed but not despairing, persecuted not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that," that's so important, "so that the life of Jesus

also may be manifested in our body." He's saying that the more that you experience the death of the body, the death of the hold of the things of this world, the more that you can experience the manifestation of the life of Christ. These things go together.

Look what he says next. Verse 11, "For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh." He's talking about the fight with sin, why do you have to fight with sin on a daily basis. Don't you get tired of it? Don't you get tired of battling, dealing with conflicts? Part of what God is doing is he's using those conflicts, he's using the battle with sin to break down the body, to break down our trust in these things, to destroy our confidence in the flesh so that we can see the glory of Christ, so that we trust in him by faith and his powerful life becomes manifested.

Verse 12, "So death works in us, but life in you." Skip on down to verse 16, "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look," verse 18, "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Paul's saying, "Listen, I've learned through the affliction I've gone through. God is slowly, little by little day by day, helping me to see the things which are unseen. He's giving me the eyes of faith." That is what faith is. In fact, in chapter 5, verse 7, he continues this discussion, talks about our bodies when they die, but in verse 7 he says, "for we walk by faith, not by sight," 2 Corinthians 5:7. We walk by faith not by sight.

The Christian life is a life of faith and what is faith? Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen, Hebrews 11:1. It's being sure of what you hope for and being certain of what you do not see. Do you see that? Faith grows through affliction. That's why it purifies our faith when we suffer and that's what Peter is talking about back in in chapter 1. He's saying, listen, as you're going through trials what happens is you've never seen Jesus before, he all of his believers, that he had seen Jesus but he was not able to see Jesus anymore with his eyes because Jesus had gone to prepare a place for him. After the ascension, the apostles did not see Jesus anymore except for Paul who had one post-resurrection experience with Christ. And so now you don't see him but you are loving him. And though you're not seeing him now, but the more that you believe in him when you're not seeing him, the more you are going to rejoice. What he's describing is, listen, when you're going through affliction, when you're going through the pain that Paul was talking about in 2 Corinthians 4, when you're being struck down by circumstances, when your life is being racked by suffering, and you're being rejected and hurt, despised by others, when you're experiencing the pain of living in a fallen world, just the aches and pains and the decay of the body, these are opportunities to remember that this world is passing away and that all that matters is the world to come. And this is what he's describing, though you haven't seen him, you are loving him, though you do not see him now, but you believe in him, you are greatly rejoicing with joy inexpressible, full of glory. Your eyes are seeing Jesus spiritually. You're not seeing them visibly with your physical eyes. He's saying that there's something about going through profound pain,

profound perplexity that opens the heart for the presence of Christ to fill it and we begin to see him in all of his glory.

He uses this idea of joy unspeakable, full of glory. I'm going to come back to that phrase because I think that is speaking about this vision, in a sense, that we have, spiritual vision. You greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and a glory that has been infused. It's the glory of heaven comes into the present. The glory of God, the glory of Christ in heaven somehow invades your present experience and you actually experience the glory of heaven in the here and now in those moments when you are doubting, when you are struggling and you are wrestling but you keep trusting. You sometimes like hanging by your fingernails, you're trusting in the word of God and the promises of Jesus. You're looking to Christ, you're trusting in him that he's good, that he's doing this for his purposes, that his purposes are good. You submit to him and you hold onto him. It doesn't happen immediately. He doesn't promise it's going to happen immediately. In fact, a lot of times it comes after prolonged suffering, prolonged periods of difficulty, but you will experience it as a believer and your faith will, in a sense, become sight spiritually.

This idea of full of glory, I think he's intentionally using language that his readers, as they became familiar with the Old Testament, would recognize. The presence of Christ, the glory of Christ, in fact, glory itself means the impact of the presence of God. The glory is not an attribute of God, attribute or characteristic of God, character quality of God. There are many attributes of God. He's holy. He's a God of love and goodness, and wrath and justice. He's omnipotent, he has all power. He's omniscient, he has all knowledge. He's omnipresent, he's everywhere. We could go on and list all the attributes of God but glory is not an attribute of God as much as it is the manifestation of the attributes of God. Glory is what happened when God's attributes are experienced and made known. When God's presence is there, that's glory and the Hebrew word for glory, which is so important to understand the biblical concept of glory, is the idea of weight and heaviness, *kavod*. It's the weightiness of God, and so what happens is when God makes himself known, the people experience the awesome weight of that. They're impressed and overwhelmed by the unveiling of some attribute of God or some manifestation of his presence. That's glory.

So glory is what happens to you when you encounter God and so when he's saying this, this joy, this full of glory, it means that you're having joy because you're in the presence of the Lord. That's why it's full of glory. Your circumstance has taken it so that it's as if. Now realize you always have Jesus with you every moment, but you can't feel him. He's saying there's something about suffering that it's like it transports you from your circumstance, your doubt, your confusion, your frustration, your anger, your rage, whatever it is you're struggling with but you trust in Jesus. It transports you from that and takes you into the very throne room of God. Now the reality is it doesn't move you anywhere. What it does is helps you experience what's already there in the first place which you cannot see. Jesus never left you, you just didn't know he was there. But there's something about these kinds of moments that makes it so that it's like that. He's describing this kind of a euphoria where your present misery is swallowed up in a joy that is so great it not only brings you back to normal, it not only takes you to great joy, it takes

you to a level of joy that you cannot utter, you cannot describe, and it comes to those who hold on in faith in the midst of suffering.

When you believe that God is good, you believe that Jesus is truly who he says he is, that he is a loving shepherd, that he would only lead you in paths of righteousness for his name's sake and for your good, and so you find yourself in a circumstance that you never wanted to be in and you feel the agony, the weight of that, you're distressed by various trials, you're weighed down, you're overwhelmed by that, you keep believing. Though you don't see him, you keep believing. You keep trusting, believing into him. The idea, in fact, the Greek actually has that, you're believing into Christ. It's not just a believing about him, it's a believing into him. It's a trusting in him personally. "Lord Jesus, I'm believing You that You are with me. I'm believing You that You are good, that You're doing something wonderful. I'm believing You. I need You. I want You. I love You. Help me!" That kind of faith will receive that kind of joy in his time.

Now he has a way of delaying and waiting, his ways are not our ways. We would always like, you know, pray and it happens, right? Ask and you receive. He says ask and you will receive but it doesn't work on our timetable. Sometimes you ask, and you ask, and you ask, and you ask, and you ask, and you ask, and you ask, and then you start asking again, you ask, and you ask, and you ask, and you ask, and eventually you receive, and in all of that asking when you receive at that time that you finally get it, you're like, "I now understand why all that asking was necessary." And that, even that deepens the joy that wells up in you because you see he does all things well. He does all things perfectly. He knows the surgery that needs to be done on your heart and my heart and he does whatever is required to bless you to the fullest measure that you're able to receive.

That's the joy that comes and this is what Peter's describing. You have a clearer vision of Jesus than you ever had before because you went through the affliction. You think about, you can look this up this week, Exodus 40. I think he was intimating for his readers to think about this, this full of glory, this concept of glory and fullness, glory and filling. Rich and loaded theological terms. In Exodus 40 after the tabernacle is constructed, 10 times in chapter 39 it says, "Moses did just as the Lord commanded him." He's building a tabernacle, he's building a tent according to God's specific detailed instructions. "You're to do it this way. It's to be this precise size. It's to be this. This is to be the framing of it. This is to be the covering. This is how you're to paint. This is what you're to do." Everything about it prescribed down to the smallest detail, and 10 times in chapter 39 it says, "Moses did just as the Lord commanded him." Nine times in chapter 40, "just as the Lord commanded him, Moses did." Finally, it says near the end of chapter 40, "Thus Moses finished the work." So the tabernacle, place of meeting, when everything is done, everything is prepared, what happens? At the moment everything is done, everything is prepared it says this, "Then the cloud of glory filled the tabernacle and the priests and Moses were not able to enter the tabernacle because the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." God's glory, the manifestation of his presence, the overwhelming beauty of all that he is was made visible to them in that moment.

The same thing happens in 1 Kings 8 when they build the permanent temple. When Saul, remembers the tabernacle, which had been a moving temple essentially, a tent. It now becomes permanent. David wanted to do it. God didn't let David do it, he let his son do it. Solomon builds the temple and when the work is finished, end of chapter 7, the priests bring the ark of the covenant into the temple. What happens? All the work has been done according to specifications, the ark is placed in there, the glory of the Lord fills the temple so that the priests have to get back away. The weight of glory is so great they can't take it. They leave the building, the glory of God filling the temple.

Peter is saying that when you and I go through suffering and with eyes of faith, that there comes a moment when everything is done, when all the work of trusting in God, when you have finished everything, you've done just as the Lord commanded, just as the Lord commanded, like I said, feeling like you're not going to be able to hold on but you keep trusting in Jesus, there comes a point where all the work is done and this is what he's describing, joy inexpressible, full of glory. Glory comes in and your earthly tabernacle, think about this, we're told in the 2 Corinthians 5 passage I read a moment ago, or chapter 4 right after it talks about our tent that we live in, we have a tent, 1 Corinthians 6:19 says your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you whom you have from God. Your body is a temple. What Peter's describing in 1 Peter 1 is your physical body, your physical temple will be full of glory when you believe and hold onto Jesus in times of doubt.

The same God who did it in Moses' day and did it in Solomon's day and did it for Peter and Stephen and all of the saints of old, will do it for you if you hold on and keep believing and keep trusting, and then the wonder of it, that's the second blessing and clear vision of his glory leads to the third blessing of Christ's presence a firmer assurance of his favor. You don't just receive deeper joy in his presence and a clear vision of his glory. You also receive firmer assurance of his favor. Verse 9 when he says you have this joy inexpressible full of glory, "obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls." I think what he's saying is, "Listen, when you hold onto God in the midst of suffering and you believe Him until He gives you something of this joy of heaven comes into your heart, then you come to an even greater assurance of your salvation." This is the means by which God gives deeper assurance of salvation. Many of you struggle with assurance, something many Christians struggle with. I struggle with that myself. At times we wonder is there enough fruit in our lives and we're supposed to examine our fruit. Is there love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness. It's not just enough to profess faith. If you possess faith, there should be obedience. There should be a different life.

And we still wrestle because we have a sin nature, and so at times we look at our lives and we don't see the love, we don't see the joy, we don't see the holiness and so we wonder if we belong to the Lord. In general, we're always to keep our focus. The ground of true assurance is always – listen, it's very important – the objective ground of assurance is always the promise of God. It's not your subjective experience. That has a secondary role with assurance. It's secondary. The basis of assurance of the Christian life is that God says that everyone who believes in him will not perish and put all of your trust in God's promise. And in fact, when you doubt, the most important thing you're

supposed to do is look at Jesus. The Puritans used to say this, they would talk a lot about the practical experience of looking at your own fruit because they wanted to caution people, many people think they're Christians and they're not. They haven't experienced life change. They don't want to be holy. They just want to say, "I believe in Jesus and so I've taken care of that but I don't really care about God now but I'm okay." The New Testament doesn't see a faith like that. That's not real faith. But for the Christian who experience, as many of us do at times, doubts because we just don't see the growth that we should, the Puritans understood, listen, you do look at yourself but for every look at yourself take 10 looks at Christ. Look at Jesus. Look at Jesus. Look at Jesus. Trust in Jesus, his work. It's his finished work, not your performance. It's him that you trust in, rest completely in him. You bring nothing. Don't be like the Pharisee and tout your resume when you go to God. Be like the publican and say, "Be propitiated toward me." Look at the sacrifice. Look at the sacrifice. Look at the sacrifice, and then look at me on the basis of that, only that.

So you look at Christ. You look at Christ. You look at Christ. But he's saying that what happens is the supporting grace of God in giving deeper assurance is, listen, God's work in your heart. Now you keep looking at Jesus and he works in your heart so you stop looking at yourself so much, stop looking at how am I doing, how am I doing? Look at Jesus. Look at Jesus. Look at Jesus. He works in your heart and what this is saying, then suddenly it dawns on you, "I've just been in the presence of Christ. In my doubt and perplexity I doubted my salvation, but now I'm in the presence of Christ, He's made His glory known to me. He's made me know I'm receiving the outcome of my faith, the salvation of my soul." It's the work of God in you that supports that objective trust in the finished work of Christ. You keep looking at Jesus, that's how he does the work, but when he does the work, praise him for it. He's saying that's how you grow in assurance.

So suffering is an opportunity to grow in assurance. Even though suffering is never something we should want for itself, but it's something that we can face with living hope because we know his promises are true. He will be with us. This is actually the ground of assurance you find in Romans 8:13. It's very similar. It's not exactly the same. That's where you have a verse that says, "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." How do you know if you're son of God? According to Romans 8 you're led by the Spirit of God. If you look at that in context, it's not talking about leadings like, "I feel God led me to buy that car. I feel God led me to marry that woman. I feel God led me to eat that food." Whatever. Sometimes people talk like that. A lot of evangelicals are confused about this. You read the passage in context and it's talking about this: when you see God killing sin in you, when you are able to put to death by the power of the Holy Spirit sin, then you are being led by the Spirit of God out of sin progressively into more and more holiness, you know you're a son of God.

So you see the strength and support of assurance is not your, it's not in you itself in your energy, it's God's work in you, but how does God work in you? Not if you sit there and keep looking at yourself, "Is God working in me? Is God working in me?" Like I said, one look at yourself, 10 looks at Christ. You keep looking at Jesus. Keep trusting in Jesus. And when you come into, you find yourself heading into a storm that you didn't

see, buttress yourself with the truths that you know in God's word, "The Lord is my shepherd. He leads me in paths of righteousness. He's going to help me. He's before me. He's ahead of me. He saw this storm coming and not only He saw it coming, He's prescribed it so that I can know him more and love him more and see His glory." If we do that we're going to be joyful and we're going to be stable and strong, and we have to help each other. We constantly need to help one another with these things, "Keep remembering. Keep our eyes on Jesus. Keep looking for his glory."

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Our Father, we praise and honor You for so great a salvation that You have made known to us in Jesus. We confess, Lord, our small faith, our weak faith. As we prayed earlier in our confession, "We believe. Help our unbelief." Thank You that You know how to deepen our faith and You will bring necessary trials. We thank You that You are such a loving and good Father. Lord Jesus, we thank You that You are such a loving and kind shepherd. We praise You, Holy Spirit, that You indwell us and sustain us and apply all of the blessings of Christ to us. Lord, make us holy, give us eyes to see that which is unseen, make our hearts long for heaven and make our hearts joyful in the midst of a world that is dark and miserable, and may the light of Christ in us bring many unbelievers to faith so there may be more praising You and walking joyfully in these days. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.