

Thanksgiving and Trials – 1 Peter 1:6-9

Introduction – It is true that for all of us, Thanksgiving is an opportunity to thank God for countless and many blessings. But for some of us, we have to ask: how do we honestly feast and celebrate when circumstances of our lives or those around us are filled with times of great trials and unanswered prayer? Financial hardships, wayward children, the loss of a loved one, health issues, strained or broken relationships, uncertain times when God seems to leave us in the dark, consequences of sin and hard providences that are not the result of any sin. Some of those trials may even be around the Thanksgiving table.

Great Rejoicing and Heaviness of Soul (v6) – A Christian can experience both a fierce joy in the mercies of God and, at the same time, the turmoil of human grief due to the difficulties and trials of this life. It can seem contradictory, even hypocritical, to think that one can have both at once. There is a superficial view of Christianity which considers this to be impossible or a sign of lack of faith; it is the doctrine of many cults and modern psychology.

Rejoicing in This – The joy and thanksgiving is rooted in what God has done and revealed (vv3-5) rather in something we whip up.

Real Grief – The AV translates “grieved” as “in heaviness,” and it is due to “manifold trials.” They can be numerous and of such a variety we are tempted to think God has forgotten us (Is 49:14). Temptations of the flesh, the hard thorns of this fallen world, hatred (John 15:18-20), and persecutions for your faith (2 Tim 3:12) – Peter has all of these in mind.

“for a little while” – Lloyd-Jones says, *“these things come and go as God deems fit.”* Luther says, *“lay aside temporal consolations, and over against them place the eternal consolation we have in God.”* Sometimes “a little while” is just that in this temporal time frame. But all trials are just for a little while when measured in light of eternity (2 Cor 4:16-18). And this is what drives the ongoing joy, hope, and faith.

Thanksgiving in the Tests (v7) – Faith is many-sided and so there are a multitude of trials to test our faith and increase its quality.

If you were told that your gold was being made more pure and valuable, would you want to stop the fire? Samuel Rutherford said, *“When I am in the cellar of afflictions, I look for the Lord’s choicest wines.”* And so it is important to note: this is not a denial of the affliction; it is not a disavowal of the trial and all of its pain. Peter was not pretending that everything was going just fine. Paul said, *“we are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed – always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body”* (2 Cor 4:8-11). And so he was *“as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing”* (2 Cor 6:10).

Our Faith – It needs to be tested, it needs to be perfected (James 1:2-4). Lloyd-Jones says, *“these things happen, says the apostle, because they are good for us, because they are part of our discipline in this life and in this world, because – let me put it quite plainly – because God has appointed it.”*

Thanksgiving When You Can’t See (v8) – Peter had seen Jesus, but these believers, like you, most likely had not. What matters, though, is not what you can see, but whom you love.

Joy Inexpressible – There are wonderful joys to be experienced now for wonderful blessings that we receive now – there is so much to be thankful for which we can see. But this joy which Peter is pointing us towards is a joy experienced now for a future glory to be experienced later – a glory which will never ever fade. There is no earthly joy which will not eventually fade (Prov 14:13), but this is not so with the approaching joy in the life beyond the grave and in the final resurrection. This joy makes no sense at all to the natural man (1 Cor 2:14). But to the believer this joy is “full of glory” – it is weighty, full, and all-encompassing. It produces love which is manifest in glad-hearted obedience to the Lord in everything and at whatever the cost.

The Goal – The end of your faith is your salvation in its fullness. It will be the final consummation of all things. Everything we hope for, everything we strive for, finds its end in this. And we are to think of this corporately and covenantally, not simply individually.

Thanksgiving and Trials - I need a Thanksgiving which does not deny my sorrows, my heavinesses, my grievings – which doesn’t call on me to pretend to be “happy, happy all the day,” and which doesn’t require me to get so drunk that I cannot remember my sorrows. I need a reality check – a real reality check, where my soul can honestly know sorrow and at the same time know constant rejoicing – practiced rejoicing – a rejoicing that is rooted in Reality because it is rooted in Christ because I am rooted in Christ. And being in Christ, faith comes forth – faith in the resurrection, faith in the vindication, faith in the perfect work of the One who puts me in the fire, removing dross, to make the glory more pure.

Thanksgiving with Those in Trials – We live in a world of hard providences, and there are times of real grief. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. We are not to take our doctrine of absolute sovereignty and smack it in the face of the one who is hurting. At the same time, we are called to rejoice in the trials because of what we have been promised. Our inheritance is untouchable (vv4-5) and our trials are ultimately producing glory. Bear the heavinesses of others with words of heavy glory to come.