

Greatly Rejoice!

Text: 1 Peter 1:3-9

By Pastor Trent Boedicker

Introduction –

As we approach the Thanksgiving holiday, people often make a list of the reasons they have to give thanks. That's a wonderful exercise. Maybe you have done that with your family in the past, or you're planning to spend time doing it this week. To inspire us, I'm going to read a list of blessings that someone has put together. I'll tell you upfront that I appreciate how this person gives thanks for the kinds of things we might not necessarily recognize as a blessing. But she offers a unique perspective. She writes,

“I am thankful for my automatic dishwasher. It makes it possible for me to escape from the kitchen before the family comes in for after-dinner snacks.”

“I am thankful for gardening, because it is a relief to deal with dirt outside the house for a change.”

“I am thankful for children who put away their toys and clean up after themselves. They're such a joy, and I always hate to see them go home to their own parents.”

She says, “I am thankful for my husband who is willing to tackle small repair jobs around the house. He has a way of making those repair jobs bigger, which allows us to call in the professionals.”

“I am thankful for smoke alarms. They let you know when the turkey is done.”ⁱ

Isn't that a great list? I bet you've never thought about including any of those on your list of blessings. If you want to impress your family, on Thursday, when you sit around the dinner table taking turns giving thanks, you can use of those.

On a serious note, we realize that we have many reasons to give thanks, not just when Thanksgiving Day rolls around once a year. Every day, God pours out his love toward us in so many ways. Truly, we have been blessed beyond measure.

And yet there are moments when we can lose sight of this. We all difficult seasons in life, and find ourselves facing trials and tribulations that can cause us to lose focus. Instead of recognizing the blessings the Lord has given, we may begin to dwell on our struggles, and the problems that seem insurmountable. In those times, we may not feel like praising God. It's easy to give thanks in the good times, but during the tough times, that's not always the case. But maybe that's exactly what we need, to help us regain our focus. As we remember the blessings of salvation, our hearts are filled with gratitude instead of despair.

This may have been the reason Peter began his letter with praise. He sets the tone in the opening verses reminding his readers that they could rejoice, even though their faith was being

tested by fire. Peter was no stranger to adversity. The book of Acts describes his ministry as an apostle. He had left his life as a fisherman in Galilee to follow Christ as a fisher of men. But from the outset, he discovered that it would not be easy. He was threatened, thrown in prison, beaten, and persecuted for his faith. But instead of hanging their heads in sorrow, the apostles rejoiced because they had been counted worthy to suffer shame for the sake of the gospel (Acts 5:41).

Now, years later, Peter wrote to a group of Christians scattered across the Roman Empire who were also suffering for their faith. The letter was probably written some time between 62-64 AD, after persecution of Christians broke out under Emperor Nero. Most commentators think Peter was writing from Rome, where the persecution was most intense. Eventually, this was where he would be martyred. But Christians living in other parts of the empire were also feeling the pressure of persecution. They were harassed by local authorities, and viewed with suspicion by their neighbors. They were slandered and ridiculed, even imprisoned, for following Christ. As Peter writes his letter, the theme of suffering comes up in nearly every chapter. We might expect that there would be a very somber tone to these verses, but that wasn't the case. He tells believers that they shouldn't be surprised, by the various struggles they encountered, as if some strange thing were happening to them, because following Jesus means sharing in his suffering. Instead of focusing on their afflictions, he encouraged them to focus on the salvation we have in Christ, and rejoice.

Although we don't typically face the kind of persecution early Christians experienced, we too suffer various trials that can take our attention away from the Lord. We need the encouragement that Peter offers.

Christians can rejoice, even though we may suffer in this world, because the blessings of salvation have been poured out to us in Christ

We can praise God for what he has done.

Look at verse 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...”*

Peter tells his readers to look back and consider what the Lord has done for us. There are countless ways he has expressed his faithfulness and love in our lives. The most obvious is the work of salvation accomplished for us in Christ. God has loved us so much he sent his one and only Son into the world to become our Savior. Jesus was willing to suffer and die for us our sins on the cross.

It is though his great mercy that we are born again. That's a common phrase we hear in church, but this incredible when we stop to consider what it means.

Everyone that's alive had a physical birth. For nine months, your mother carried you in her womb. And then one special day, she started feeling contractions, and your parents rushed the hospital. The nurses wheeled her back to the delivery room, where she spent several hours in

labor, and then you made your grand entrance into the world.

But Scripture tells us that if we are going to enter a relationship with God we must be born again. This is what Jesus taught, during his earthly ministry, when a man named Nicodemus came to him with questions. Nicodemus was a Pharisee, a religious leader of the people, but he didn't really know God. And so Jesus told him, in John 3:3, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Nicodemus didn't understand what Jesus was talking about. It sounded crazy. How can a grown man go through the process of birth a second time? But Jesus wasn't talking about physical things, he was describing something spiritual. Just as we enter the world through physical birth, we must enter a relationship with God through spiritual birth.

This marks the beginning of our relationship with God. It is our spiritual birthday. One day you heard the gospel, and the Holy Spirit began stirring in your heart, opening your eyes, drawing you to God, and you came to believe. At that moment you passed from death to life. Apart from the Lord human beings are dead in sin, but the Lord awakens our soul and fills us with new life. It's not something we can take credit for. None of us delivered ourselves when we were born in the hospital, and neither can we produce spiritual life in our hearts. It is a work of God.

From that moment on, things will never be the same. We are given a new identity in Christ, no longer defined by our failures, but we are now defined by his grace. We become a new creation, as God transforms us into the people we were meant to be. We are given a new heart, no longer stained with sin and disinterested in the things of God, but a heart that is filled with love yearning for God. We are brought into a new relationship, no longer strangers or outsiders but we are brought into God's family and become his children.

That is a pretty amazing reason to give thanks. God has done great things in our life. The more we learn about salvation, the more wonderful it is.

Most of us celebrate birthdays. We may not be honest about how old we are, but we acknowledge that we have been here for another year. You may have a party, with cake. Friends and family sing happy birthday and you blow out candles. It is a joyful occasion because we are grateful to be alive. We can certainly praise God for the gift of life, but shouldn't we also celebrate the spiritual life we have found in Christ?

The Bible tells us that all of heaven rejoices when a person enters a saving relationship with God. This is cause for rejoicing on earth as well. If you are having trouble thinking of a reason to give thanks, this would be a great place to start. Thank you for giving me life, and thank you for giving me spiritual life in Christ.

We can praise God for what he is doing.

Again, there are countless ways God demonstrates his love in our lives each day, but Peter reminds his readers specifically of how the Lord is with us in the midst of our struggles. In verses 6-7 he says we...

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

When people go through adversity they sometimes ask, “where is God in the midst of my suffering?” Maybe the original audience found themselves wondering this very thing. They had received Jesus as Savior, and were determined to follow him, but it had come at a cost. These Christians found themselves ostracized in the community, treated with suspicion by their neighbors, harassed and mistreated for their faith. It would have been natural to wonder “Why is this happening to us? Peter reminded them that they weren’t facing their struggles alone. The Lord is with us, walking beside us, through all our troubles.

In verse 5 he says we are “...protected by the power of God...” The word can mean shielded or guarded. It is a military term, that makes us think of a battalion of soldiers walking the perimeter of their camp at night to make sure everything is secure. It reminds us that the Lord is constantly keeping watch over our lives, every moment of the day. That doesn’t mean that we are exempt from the heartache and sorrows of this world. But it tells us that through everything we go through, the Lord holds us in his arms and will carry us through. He gives us the strength that we need each day, and keeps us from falling.

Verse 6 reminds us that there will be moments when we “are distressed by various trials.” Each of us go through our own unique struggles. For the original readers of the letter, it was having to endure persecution for their faith. For us, it might be health problems, or the loss of a job, disappointment when things don’t go the way we plan, or broken relationships. It may be opposition as we seek to live out our faith. Whatever trials we might face, all of these things bring us sorrow and heartache. But if we take a step back and look at things with an eternal perspective, we realize that will last only for a little while. It may not seem like it, from where we are standing, and the heartache may feel like it will never end. But in light of eternity, these afflictions are only momentary.

God allows us to go through adversity for a reason. We are refined through the trials of this life. Peter says, “*These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold...*”

I’ve never worked with gold, but I have worked in a factory where metal is placed through a furnace and I can tell you it gets hot. But I’m sure that is nothing compared to the process involved in refining precious metals. The unrefined ore passes through the flames where it is heated to extreme temperatures, reaching the point where it is glowing. This is necessary to melt away every impurity. It doesn’t harm the metal, but instead it makes it more useful and increases the value.

In the same way, the struggles that we face have a way of refining us, strengthening our character, forging our convictions, drawing us closer to the Lord. In those moments all we can do is rely on God, and that brings us into a deeper relationship with him.

Paul makes a similar point in Romans 5:3-5 when he writes,

³ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵ and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Even though our trials are not pleasant, we can give thanks, knowing that God is working in us. We can pray, “Thank you Lord, for walking beside me. Thank you for giving me the strength that I need to make it through. Thank you for holding me when I’m having trouble holding on to you. Thank you for bringing something good out of negative circumstances, using them to refine my faith and mold me into the person you have called me to be.”

We can praise God for what he will do.

Go back to verses 3-4. Peter writes,

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,

Peter encouraged his readers by pointing to the future God has in store for us. We might be strangers and exiles on this earth, but there is a heavenly home waiting for us one day in glory. This is our hope. It is not merely wishful thinking, or a fairy tale that we hold onto to make ourselves feel better. No, our hope is certain, because it is grounded in the resurrection of Christ. He suffered and died, for us, but the grave could not hold him. Death could not keep him. He rose in victory, and opened the way for those us to follow.

This something no one can ever take from us, no matter what they do. There are Christians around the world who are thrown in prison for their faith. They have their homes and possessions taken from them. They face the threat of death. But even if the world takes our lives, it cannot take away our future.

The apostle describes our inheritance, something God’s people look forward to receiving in the future. Earthly parents may plan to leave an inheritance to their children. They might pass a house, or jewelry, or prized possessions that have been in the family for generations. But God promises his children a much greater inheritance. It is imperishable, meaning that unlike earthly treasures it will last for all eternity. It is undefiled, never to be tarnished or corrupted by sin. It will not fade away, but the glory we experience the moment we arrive will be just as impressive even after we have been there 10,000 years. What is this inheritance? Heaven. Sharing in the

resurrection of Jesus. Triumph over sin and death. Entering the presence of our Savior, where our faith will finally become sight.

Peter goes on to say in verses 8-9, *“and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.”*

Praise Him!

Imagine the effect these opening verses had on that group of believers who first read this letter. They were dealing with intense struggles, and may have started to lose sight of the blessings that God had given. But as the apostle praises God it must have lifted their spirits and reminded them there no matter what we are going through there is always a reason to give thanks.

Maybe you have been going through a difficult time in your life. It’s been tough. You had trouble seeing how the hand of God is working in your circumstances. Heading into the holidays makes it more difficult, because you know this is a time that should be joyful, but you don’t much like rejoicing. The Lord invites us to go to him, with our burdens. And we can go to him with our praise. Sometimes that’s what we need to refocus. As we give thanks for his work in our lives, we realize how blessed we are, despite our problems, and he lifts our spirit from despair.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He has done great things, awakening our hearts from death into life. He is doing great things, walking beside us through all our struggles. He will do great things, delivering us to a glorious home in his presence. And so let us greatly rejoice, not just one day as a year, but every day of our lives.

ⁱ <https://ministry127.com/resources/illustration/5-things-to-be-thankful-for>