



7 Shaping Virtues: Joy 1 Peter 1:3-9

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INTRODUCTION

In his classic book, *Pilgrim's Progress*, John Bunyan tells the tale of two pilgrims, Christian and Hopeful, who are on a long journey to the Celestial City. At one point, the pair meets a group of shepherds and asks, "Is there in this place any relief for pilgrims that are weary and faint in the way?"

The four shepherds – Knowledge, Experience, Watchful, and Sincere – welcome them warmly and offer a place to rest for the night. In the morning, they show Christian and Hopeful various "Wonders" to strengthen their resolve for the journey. They lead them to a hill called "Error" where those who abandoned the faith have fallen. They point out a mountain named "Caution" where the spiritually lazy are trapped. And they show them the mouth of a cave called "A byway to hell" where hypocrites perish. Christian and Hopeful begin trembling in fear of the perils through which they have passed and those that are yet to come.

"Then said the Shepherds one to another, Let us here show the pilgrims the gate of the Celestial City, if they have skill to look through our perspective-glass. The pilgrims then lovingly accepted the motion: so they led them to the top of a high hill, called "Clear", and gave them the glass to look through. Then they tried to look; but the remembrance of that last thing that the Shepherds had shown them made their hands shake, by means of which impediment they could not look steadily through the glass; yet they thought they saw something like the gate, and also some of the glory of the place."

Having glimpsed the Celestial City from afar, Bunyan tells us, Christian and Hopeful went away singing, rejoicing in what they had seen. Have you ever wondered while you're commuting to work, caring for the kids, navigating conflict, or battling illness, "Is there in this place any relief for pilgrims that are weary and faint in the way? Is there anything that will renew my joy, sustain my joy, and increase my joy amid all the troubles of this life?"

This is the second week in a sermon series on our 7 Shaping Virtues. Coming out of our study of Titus where the Lord repeatedly exhorts us to be zealous for good works, we're lingering on the distinctive characteristics we believe the gospel should produce in our church and our entire family of churches for generations to come. Last week, we focused on humility. This week we're focusing on joy.

The original recipients of 1 Peter, no stranger to religious persecution, were certainly asking the same question Christian and Hopeful asked. It's the same question we still ask. And the Apostle Peter answers them and us in verses 3-9 with a resounding yes! Yes, there is abundant relief, a source of unshakeable joy for pilgrims that are weary and faint in the way, only it doesn't come



through a change in our circumstances. It comes through a change in our perspective. The promises in verses 3-9 are like Bunyan's perspective-glass. They sustain our joy by fixing our gaze on the end of our pilgrimage.

For every disciple of Jesus, the outcome of life is not a mystery. It is an unseen reality but not an unknown reality. Verse 8, speaking of Jesus, "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." **Amid the sorrow of trials, the people of God continue to rejoice in Jesus, knowing our eternal inheritance is secure.** Let's break that principle down under a few headings.

1) SALVATION IS THE REASON FOR OUR JOY (verses 3-6a)

The place Peter begins his meditation on joy is striking. Look at verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Friends, true virtue isn't grounded in who we are, who we aspire to be, or what other people say we should be. The goodness, beauty, and blessedness of the God who created us and redeemed us is where all true virtue begins.

Take any of our shaping virtues. If you ask, "Why should I be humble?" Or "Why should I be joyful?" The true answer always begins with "Because of who God is and what he's done for us." Virtue doesn't start with us. It starts with him. And by "him" I am not referring to a generic belief in a higher power of your choosing. Virtue begins with the God who has revealed himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

What has that God, the only true God, done for us, brothers and sisters? "According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again..." You will never find enduring joy by getting what you think you deserve. Joy is found in receiving what we do not deserve and could never earn. A life of joy begins with confessing our need for God's mercy and embracing our dependence on God's mercy.

Why do we need mercy? Because we come into this world dead in our trespasses and sins, deserving nothing but God's judgment. But what has God done for his chosen people? He has "Caused us to be born again." He infuses a new principle of spiritual life into our dead hearts. He awakens us to our need for a Savior and his glorious provision in Jesus! Peter is describing the miracle of regeneration.

That's where true joy begins. It's not found in power, possessions, or pleasure. Joy from those things is never enough and it never lasts. As soon as you gain it, it starts to slip through your fingers like sand! Real joy is only found in relationship with God, in the new life our Risen Lord holds out to all are willing to exchange living for yourself for trusting and obeying him.



When you do that, friend, when the Spirit mercifully empowers you to turn to Jesus, you don't just become a spiritual person or a religious person. You are "Born again" into an entirely new realm of existence. Verse 3, "He has caused us to be born again to a living hope..." What's the hope? Peter tells us in verse 4 – "An inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading..."

When God entered a covenant relationship with a man named Abraham in the Old Testament, he promised his descendants an inheritance in the land of Canaan. What happened within a few generations after the Israelites received her promised inheritance under Joshua's leadership? The land was defiled by idolatry. The joy and security of living under God's rule began to fade. She began to perish in the land and was eventually sent into exile. Everything Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob's descendants had been waiting for centuries to enjoy, was all gone, ravished by sin.

Brothers and sisters, the inheritance Jesus has promised us under the New Covenant is far greater. It is imperishable – it cannot be destroyed. It is undefiled – completely free from the corruption of sin. And it is unfading – for all eternity, it will never lessen in glory or slip between our fingers like sand. Why not? Because our inheritance is Jesus' inheritance.

As Paul says in Romans 8:17, we are "Fellow heirs with Christ." So what's Christ's inheritance? The answer in Hebrews 1:2 is stunning. "In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things..." In other words, all that God is even now preparing in the new heavens and the new earth, where there will be no more death, mourning, crying, pain or sin...it will all be ours to enjoy.

And best of all, far more precious than all the people and places and relationships that God restores, will be this: the joy of unbroken fellowship with God himself. He is the crowning jewel of your eternal inheritance, Christian, the Majestic One who outshines it all. Revelation 21:3, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God."

If you inherit stock from your parents, a market crash could wipe it all out. If you inherit cash savings from your parents, inflation could decimate it's worth. If you inherit a house or a car, the next natural disaster or the law of entropy will eventually leave you with nothing. Not so your portion in the blessings of the new creation, Christian. It is (verse 4) "Kept in heaven for you."

Some of you know what it's like to watch a family member squander your earthly inheritance. The God who died to make you his own will not do to you what they have done to you. He hasn't just provided you with an inheritance. He is guarding your inheritance. It could not be more secure!



And if you think, “I don’t doubt God’s ability to preserve it. I doubt my ability to remain faithful to the end so I can receive it.” Look at verse 5. “By God’s power (you) are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” He isn’t just guarding your

inheritance, Christian. He’s guarding you, sustaining, upholding, and preserving your faith until the day he brings you safely home!

As Christians, we often think of salvation as something God did for us in the past. Indeed, there is a glorious sense in which the moment you become a Christian, Jesus saves you from the guilt and power of sin, and the wrath your sin deserves. But the salvation 1 Peter emphasizes is something God has promised us in the future. Our salvation is both already and not yet. If you’re a Christian, you have been saved, you are being saved, and you will be saved!

What’s the “Not yet” part about? It’s our heavenly inheritance. It’s our living hope. It’s the salvation we will experience when all who have died in faith receive their resurrection bodies and are welcomed by Jesus into the glory of the new creation. That’s why the obedience of faith in Jesus ultimately matters. It’s not a ticket to escaping the trials of this life. It’s an assurance of salvation in the life to come.

Now look at verse 6. Because this is the application, this is the “So what” Peter has been building up to in verses 3-5. “In this,” Peter writes, “You rejoice.” It’s not a command, though there are plenty of other places where Scripture commands us to rejoice. It’s a glorious fact because it’s the divinely intended result of our promised salvation. Do we rejoice in what God has done in the past? Absolutely. Do we rejoice in what God is doing in the present? Absolutely. But what do we especially rejoice in? We rejoice in what God will do in the future.

Do you rejoice in the hope of heaven, Christian? In the salvation ready to be revealed? Or is your joy tethered to something else? To how your kids behaved last night, or how much you got done at work, or how fast you’re spiritually growing, to whether you feel like your parents and siblings are treating you fairly, or to whether you’re more healthy or wealthy than the unbeliever who wrongly divorced you? Have you ever wrestled with wondering why so many good things seem to happen to people who have no desire or interest in following Jesus? Why are they so successful? Why are they so happy? Here am I am making all these sacrifices to follow Jesus and I feel like my joy is tanking while their joy is increasing!

Consider this. What would you say to someone who wakes up on the west coast tomorrow, gazes across the ocean, and concludes that because they never saw the sun rise that the sun must not exist? Why would you call them crazy? Because the sun doesn’t rise in the west. It rises in the east. You’re looking at the wrong horizon. Friends, we do the exact same thing when we look for joy in our present circumstances, or how we’re fairing in this life compared to those who are not following Jesus, instead of looking to the hope of heaven.



Psalms 73:16–24, “But when I thought how to understand this, it seemed to me a wearisome task, until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I discerned their end. Truly you set them in slippery places; you make them fall to ruin... I was brutish and ignorant; I was like a beast

toward you. Nevertheless, I am continually with you; you hold my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me to glory.”

Our present circumstances are not the reason we are joyful, brothers and sisters. Thank goodness, because they are filled with trouble! The future salvation God has promised to those who love him is the reason for our joy. We are joyful because of what we know is coming, which reminds us joy isn’t a personality thing. Some Christians are serious. Some Christian are joyful. No! It’s a born-again thing. If God has mercifully made you alive in Jesus. If you have a living hope. If you have an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance. If you know God is keeping your inheritance and God is keeping you, your attitude in life will be characterized by joy.

I’m not talking about living on an emotional high or an unwavering feeling of elation. I’m talking about a deep and abiding gladness that it is well with your soul on account of the eternal life God has granted you. The hope of heaven is not a consolation prize. It’s the foundation of our joy.

2) SUFFERING IS SERVANT OF OUR JOY (verses 6b-7)

The hope of heaven doesn’t remove the present reality of sorrow. We still live east of Eden. Peter knows it. More importantly, God knows it. He too became a Man of Sorrows, familiar with suffering, and acquainted with grief. He knows our trials are real. He knows they are various. And he knows grief is the right response because it’s the way God responds to all that is not the way he created it to be.

Look at the second half of verse 6, “...though now, for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials...” Those short phrases contain a world of comfort, friends. What does “For a little while” point to? That our future as the people of God is not an endless cycle of blessing and suffering. Even now our trials are completely under God’s sovereign control and he will bring them to a swift end.

Compared to the eternity before us, what is our present life, brothers and sisters? It’s a momentary dot on a glorious, unending line. Don’t lose sight of the line while you’re living in the dot. Don’t allow what is momentary to take your eyes off what is eternal. Over even the most painful, most difficult trials that come a believers way, our faithful Father has written in blood, “For just a little while, my child. Trust me.”



But I've been waiting for decades, pastor. My daughter still won't talk to me. My spouse still won't come to church with me. They don't feel momentary. They feel endlessly long. God knows, friend. Read Psalms 22. And then take heart in the next precious promise in 1 Peter 1:6, our trials are more than momentary. They are necessary. Not always, but in most cases, they are how God accomplishes his best work in our lives.

Some think any form of suffering means I've messed up. I broke one of God's rules and now he's punishing me for it. Some think any form of suffering means they drew the short straw. I get the fact that Jesus has yet to make all things new, but how come brother Joe over there bought a new Audi and I'm still paying off my ex's credit cards? Some think any form of suffering means the devil is getting the upper hand. They picture God as doing little more than combatting the Evil One alongside of us, responding and dealing with whatever he throws our way.

"If necessary" points in an entirely different direction. "If necessary" says in the mystery of his sovereign will, God is not just allowing or responding to your suffering. He has ordained your suffering no less than he ordained Job's. It may have compounded his pain, but the truth of Job 2:10 ultimately reflected his fear of God and preserved the wellspring of his hope. "Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" Why did God lead Job into the wilderness of suffering? For the same reason he leads us there, brothers and sisters.

Look at verse 7. It's never without purpose, even if the contours of his ways remain hidden to eyes of human wisdom. "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."

Is that not why we refuse to lose heart? In every trial, what is our faithful God doing? He is proving, purifying, and strengthening our faith. In the same way that our physical bodies both grow and maintain their health through exercise, so too trials develop and nurture our faith. Why? Because they do two exceedingly helpful things. They expose the poverty of human self-sufficiency, reminding us this world is not our home. And they provide opportunities to cast ourselves on the arm of the Almighty and experience his faithfulness in ways we never would otherwise.

Hands down, the most difficult trials in my life have been the unexpected loss of relationships that were precious to me. One day they're strong. The next day they're gone. As someone who deeply cares about people, that's really painful. And yet every time it happens and a new wave of anguish washes over my soul, you know what happens? The Lord continues to hold me up. He comforts me. He sustains me. As I wait upon him, he renews my strength. He enables me to run and not grow weary. To walk and not be faint. It's a miracle and one I rarely sense in the moment. But as I look back over the years, I marvel, "Lord, you've kept me. You've been so faithful to me. Faithful to my family. Faithful to our church."



I can honestly say I know the Lord, trust the Lord, and am able to serve the Lord far more effectively because I have walked through the valley of the shadow of death. Would I choose it again if given the chance? Of course not. Who would? But my Father has not wasted my grief. He will not waste yours either, friend.

But pastor, why does it matter how strong my faith is? If Matthew 17:20 is true, and even a mustard seed of faith can move a mountain. If it is genuineness of faith, not the vigor of faith, that secures my interest in Christ, why is God testing me? Because faith is a precious, exceedingly valuable thing, friend. Gold is a precious metal, right? One of the most valuable metals on earth. So why do we melt it in the heat of a blast furnace and burn away all the impurities in it? Because it's that precious. When something is glorious in our eyes, we delight to make it even more glorious. In fact, the depth of our commitment to purifying it reveals the true measure of its worth.

When Christ returns and all things are made new, the old world as we know it will be consumed. Few things are more precious in this world than gold. And yet, it too will ultimately perish (Zephaniah 1:18). You know what's more precious than gold and will never perish? Genuine faith in God. What does Peter say in verse 7? It is "More precious than gold." Why is our faith so valuable? Two reasons. First, because faith makes much of the trustworthiness and glory of God. Second, because faith is the servant of your eternal joy.

Look back at verse 7. What does the tested genuineness of faith result in? "Praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Who is the praise, glory, and honor for? In one sense, and this is incredible to think about, they are for us, brothers and sisters. Matthew 25:31–34, "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

As Jesus says in the parable of the talents immediately beforehand (Matthew 25:21), "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." Jesus continues the same theme in Revelation 3, vindicating his own through the rewards he lavishes upon them in response to their enduring faith.

Revelation 3:11–12, "The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name..." Then he adds in verse 21, "The one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne."



Peter Davids helps us understand what's going on here. "Christ (is) announcing the genuineness of their tested faith. [He] then praises his faithful ones, giving them honor and glory, an honor and glory that is his by right and that their lives have demonstrated, but that he is pleased to share with those who have been faithful to him."

So yes, in one sense, the praise and glory and honor tested faith yields on the final day is our own. The joy we experience on that day will be the result of the faith we exercise on this day. But ultimately the praise, glory, and honor God bestows on his people, vindicating our faith, doesn't make much of us. It makes much of him, because faith is a gift. God is the gracious author of our faith. He is the steadfast perfecter of our faith. It is because he is interceding for us, no less than Peter, that our faith does not fail. Yes, all the saints will be glorified. But God "Will be glorified in his saints" (2 Thessalonians 1:10), and "Marveled at among all who have believed." We will join the twenty-four elders in casting our crowns before him, crying, "Worthy, is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" (Revelation 5:12)!

What does all of that mean for today, brother and sisters? It means trials are the servant of our joy. By testing and strengthening our faith, they increase the eternal joy we will experience when Jesus returns to prove to the world that you did not trust him in vain. Through tested faith, our joy is multiplied and God's glory is magnified. So do not begrudge or despise the trial that tests your faith, friend. In a way we will not see until "The revelation of Jesus Christ," God is increasing your joy and his glory in your joy.

3) JESUS IS THE CENTER OF OUR JOY (verses 8-9)

Maybe you believe in your mind the gospel is the reason you should be joyful. You can't deny the fact that God uses trials to strengthen our faith and ultimately advance our joy. But that doesn't change the fact that right now, even though you consider yourself a Christian, joy feels utterly out of reach.

There's no way I can cover in our remaining time all Martin Lloyd-Jones covers in his excellent book, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*. If you've been struggling for joy as a believer for some time, I encourage you to read and discuss his book with a mature Christian friend.

But Peter does not leave us without pointing out the path of growth in the virtue of joy. He knows joy isn't something we concoct like a cake recipe, checking a list of spiritual discipline boxes. Nor is joy a problem we solve like a math formula, as if plugging in the right answers to all the Bible knowledge questions has the power to change our emotional life.

A lack of joy also doesn't mean you should quit your job, your spouse, or your church (unless the gospel is no longer being preached), as if simply shaking up your routine will do the trick.



Losing weight, going on a vacation, or doing a hundred other cultural infatuations which self-care commends will not satisfy your soul. Like every fruit of the Spirit, joy is ultimately a gift from God.

But that doesn't mean we are passive in the fight or sit around waiting to get knocked up the side of the head with gladness this side of heaven. Rather, we follow Peter's lead in verse 8-9

where he nourishes our joy not by turning our attention to joy, but by turning our attention to Jesus. "Though you do not see 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..."

What must we do and keep on doing when our joy begins to wane? When our living hope grows dim? When we feel the gap between the salvation God has promised and the emotional response in our souls? We direct our faith and love toward Jesus. Why? Because biblical joy, at its core, is the fruit of faith working through love, faith in Jesus expressed in love for Jesus.

What does faith in Jesus do? It chooses to trust God's Word and all it reveals about Jesus, the Word Made Flesh, as the standard of what's true, not our shifting emotions. Faith says, "Lord, I cannot make myself joyful. But I can choose to trust what the Word says about you, Jesus, more than my feelings, including my feelings about your Word! I have yet to see you with my physical eyes, but I believe you. I lean the weight of my life on you. You proved your trustworthiness by laying down your life for me. Not one of your promises have failed." That's what faith in Jesus does.

What does love for Jesus do? Love chooses to seek our satisfaction in Jesus instead of all the fleeting treasures of this world, even when our feelings don't immediately change, even when the darkness doesn't lift. Love for Jesus says, "You are my chosen portion, Lord. I will have no other gods before you. I will not chase after joy in sex. I will not chase after joy in entertainment. I will continue to love you by holding fast to you and remaining faithful to you, especially when it feels like I could find happiness a lot faster elsewhere.

"No one is able to satisfy my soul like you. And I don't say that, Father, because I feel the joy in you I want to feel right now. I'm setting my affections on you because your Word tells me better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere. I choose to trust you, Jesus. I choose to love you, Jesus." It's as we do those two things, KingsWay, as we trust Jesus and express our trust by loving Jesus, that the Spirit will work enduring joy in our souls. He will assure us that we are indeed on the narrow road that leads to salvation.

CONCLUSION

Salvation is the reason for our joy. Suffering is the servant of our joy. But the Savior who makes it all possible is the center of our joy. Through the work of the Spirit, he is the One who delights to give to us out of his own joy that his joy might be our joy and our joy might be full. He is



faithful to do the work, brothers and sisters. Let us be faithful to confess our need for him and to ask for more of his joy through prayer.