

## **Rejoicing in the Gospel: A Call to Discipleship** 1Peter1:3-9.

Please stand if your able for the reading of Gods word:

*<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup>to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup>who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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, <sup>9</sup>obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

This is the word of God – you may be seated.

Good morning everyone. Yes, it's me, not Eric. It's been fun to see new faces lately, so if you don't know me – my name is Kent Tollakson. I do a few things with student ministry, small groups, and biblical counseling – and if any of that stuff goes well, its because of my amazing wife Karalee and any of it goes bad, it's because I didn't consult her.

For today - I felt led to address discipleship, again. Not a new topic, but, some things need repeating and discipleship has lots of factors. In the end....I just hope what I share is glorifying to God and helpful for you.

This opening of 1 Peter is rich with reminders of the gospel, the joy we should have within it, and Gods sovereign reign over the difficulties of life.. And as for life, God is always leading us deeper into living Godly lives, if we will follow.

For instance, the last time Eric preached he addressed the complexities of the OT 'schedule' in Leviticus. This yearly schedule with all its time-consuming demands this

seems to reveal how God “piled it on” so to speak – as strategy, to remind His people who He is as well as lead them in living Godly lives. My Thursday men’s study on the book of Nehemiah by Eric Mason had a similar message. If your familiar with the OT, you know that Nehemiah was a leader who oversaw the rebuilding of the wall, temple, and the worship of God, in Jerusalem as Gods people were allowed to come back to their land. After things were established, Nehimiah went back to Persia for a bit, and when he returned, the people had already bent the rules and were sinning.

So it, turns out, Nehimiah, a spirit led leader, proved to be a useful piece of the equation.

Pastor Mason shared a funny story about his kids – that modeled this; he walked into their playroom one day to find them drawing on the wall – he was ticked but responded in a way that **only** the Holy Spirit can provide.

He pointed out all the supplies they were given to draw, and pointed out all the freedom they had to enjoy drawing with all of these resources...on PAPER....not the walls.

Then, he stayed in the room, and his presence proved to be effective in helping his kids obey. But when he left to do a few things around the house, then came back, **you guessed it** – they were drawing on the walls again.

Pastor Mason did not tell us how he reacted that time, but his point was well illustrated, we are like his kids, we benefit from constant encouragement and redirection, in gospel truth and gospel work, by spirit led leaders. And who are spirit led leaders? Pastors & elders & paid staff – sure, but lots of you are spirit led leaders also, within small group leadership, youth group leadership, teaching our kids and with one on one mentorship – we gain from all of these– so that we end up doing more for God, than we would by ourselves.

And that goes both ways by the way....leaders gain like crazy when they disciple others. Leaders should have maturity and be able to provide good insight, but they are not perfect. In fact, if any leader you deal with isn’t willing to admit some faults – run. That’s an unhealthy leader. Galatians 6:2 says “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” But of course, in order to carry each other’s

burdens, we need to know what they are. Christian author Mike Novotny, stresses the importance of the church being a place where people can be open and honest, with this: "The devil is the master of 1 on 1 spirituality,"! "If it's me versus the devil, I rarely win. But if I have a couple of teammates with me... the devil is not very good at guarding 2 or 3 or 4 or 6 people at once." In other words, when we're by ourselves, the enemy can whisper all sorts of nonsense to us, and it will sound convincing. But coming together in prayer and honest conversation helps us break each other out of these spiritual echo chambers."

That's a big topic for a sermon, or series of its own but for our time this morning, there is a basic to be aware of; our leaders should have an open and honest humbleness that helps them grow right along with everyone else!

Now, lets dig into 1Peter 1:3-9. And, after, I'll share my thoughts about how these verses should affect our lives.

Here we see God reminding us to 1. Rejoice in the gospel, 2. Be ready for trials, and 3. Understand why trials are the norm.

Let's start with point 1. Rejoice in the gospel. Lolk at verse 6.

*<sup>6</sup>In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,*

The first 2 words, "In this" we are to "rejoice". So lets be clear about what this is. Its beautiful! It's the gospel! Look at verses 3-5.

*<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, (gospel) he has **caused** us to be born again **to a living hope** (promise) through the **resurrection of Jesus** Christ from the dead (gospel), <sup>4</sup>to an inheritance that is imperishable (promise), undefiled, and unfading (promise), kept in heaven for you (promise), <sup>5</sup>who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time (promise).*

Our Lord is to be praised because He has **caused** us to be born again. He has **caused** us to believe in His death for our sin and His resurrection from the dead. We are: saved by grace through faith, not of our doing, so we don't boast, Eph2:8-9.

His gift of faith provides us with our HOPE of eternal life. And this is the best kind of HOPE. This is HOPE in what IS...its not hope in what might be.

Hope for what MIGHT be is like me hoping to catch a 8lb smallmouth or 50in muskie. I hope for both someday. If I hope in a healthy manner I enjoy the pursuit, and if I hope in an unhealthy manner I idolize them and spend more time and money on it, causing stress, anxiety, and relational problems. Regardless, these are hopes for something of this world that may not happen.

The HOPE we have in Jesus is HOPE fixed on specific circumstances that are promised by God. This HOPE is our enjoyment in the **inherited gift of eternal life** that God the Father gives us, through faith in Jesus, a gift that is **imperishable, completely pure, never fading** and **kept** for us in **heaven** – **BY THE POWER OF GOD!**

IN THIS we rejoice? Well, yes! How can we not!? like Habakkuk wrote, *"I will rejoice in the God of my salvation!"* (3:18), or like Paul tells us *"Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice."* (Phil4:4) If you're listening and realize you do not have this pure, imperishable gift of eternal life with Him – but want it. Then ask Him, ask God. Just pray to Him right now, pray something similar to this and say "God I believe that Your Son Jesus died for my sin, I believe that He rose again to display His power over death and I want You to be Lord of my life. Please Lord, I believe, save me." Ask and you will receive. If this has happened to anyone right now, 1. Welcome to the family! And 2, afterwards let me know, or tell an elder, or a good Christian friend. We want to know and help you begin actively living your new life as a child of God.

And, as children of God, we are called to rejoice in the gospel, **although**.

Let's look at verse 6 again, it elaborates;

<sup>6</sup> *In this you rejoice, **though now for a little while, if necessary, you HAVE been grieved by various trials.***

Oh no..., that doesn't sound good. Grieved, by VARIOUS trials! But it's true. Which leads to point # 2 for today.

## 2. **Be ready for trials**

You may notice the wording "if NESSESARY" you have been grieved. That might make you think, well maybe I can live well enough to avoid trials that grieve me. I think you all know that's just not what's going to happen. (Wendy pointed out to me – right before we started today...it does say "YOU HAVE BEEN" grieved). EVERYONE deals with trials – suffering, hardship, and tragedy, its part of life.

But why? If God is a good and loving God – why allow suffering?

It's a question that gets brought up often, (we wrestled with this a bit on Wednesday with the youth) the quick answer is suffering exists because of sin, and the not quick aspect of that answer is, sin is complicated. I can't cover everything concerning sin but 2 basics about sin that cover lots of ground are:

A. Other peoples sin brings difficulties. (Matt5:11, Matt10:22, Jn15:19, 1Pt4:14, four of the many scriptures pointing this out. AND

B. Our own sin causes us difficulties. (Jam4:1 – why do you have fights and quarrels he asks? Is it not YOUR passions and desires that are at war, causing anger (murder) and coveting...and so we fight and quarrel. As a counselor I see fighting among people play out in so many ways. Of course there is yelling and hurtful words, but there is also stubbornness, and shutting down, and pouting, and manipulating. It's common for each of us, at times, to be our own worst enemy. And this leads me to point **#3. Why trials are the norm.** Trials are normal in life because everyone chooses to sin at times, and God, being a good and loving God, uses them for a purpose. Look at verse 7.

*...you have been grieved by various trials...."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."*

So, two ways that God responds to sin are;

C. For believers, God corrects our sinfulness, in love (Heb12). And

D. All the trials are used by God to test faith and grow faith. (1Pt1:7)

These are big people. Each difficulty in life is another training exercise placed before us by God to test our faith. And its even deeper work, when we reflect on Peters words about our faith being tested like gold, with fire! He is talking about refinement. Gold and silver are "tested" by melting them down, several times. Each time more impurity rises to the surface for removal. Each time it melts it becomes purer. Therefore, trials are for revealing impurities within us. Each trial, each difficulty, provides you with an opportunity to obey Him. Which will help remove impurity and make us more like Christ.

As Romans 8:28-29 "reminds us" For those of us who love God, ALL things work together for the good accounting to His purpose (both good things and bad things). As verse 29 says, for God also predestined you to be "conformed to the image of His Son". In other words, All things in life are used by God to help you become more like Jesus Christ. I hope that TRUTH helps you TRUST and OBEY God within difficulties.

## **EXAMPLES**

Abraham, he doubted God at times, but proved his trust in God enough to obey the possibility of sacrificing his son – Abrahams reward – God fulfilled His promises.

Joseph was a prideful and boastful young man – his sin got him sold into slavery – thrown in to prison...but he trusted and obeyed God within it all – Joseph's reward - God fulfilled His promises.

Paul, was sinful – he confesses sinning often in Romans 7 - but he also trusted God with hardship after hardship and obeyed - he stayed the course – Paul reward - God fulfilled His promises.

And let's not lose track of every disciple endured great hardship for the name of Christ. To suffer for our faith is part of God's design. If we do not suffer for His name then others could easily dismiss our faith.

For example, If your life had no problems, unbelievers could say - "of course you love Jesus" everything is good in your life. **You** love life **with** Jesus and **I** love life **without** Jesus, what's the difference! Real testing comes with the difficulties. When we proclaim Christ in the midst of a trial, then unbelievers have to declare something else. They will have to declare that we are crazy or we are empowered by something bigger and better than life itself! As Job proclaimed – the Lord gives, and the Lord takes – blessed by the name of the Lord! Unbelievers cannot understand that. It makes no sense.

But it makes sense to us. It makes perfect sense because God has **caused** us to understand. It breaks my heart at times for unbelievers. They can't understand us because **they don't see** or **believe** the gospel and therefore, without the gospel, they don't have the HOPE of God's promises.

We all suffer in life. As Christians we suffer within promised purpose and eternal hope. His word says:

*So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal. 2Cor4:16-18*

And that is what the last verses in our reading are saying.

*<sup>8</sup> 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, <sup>9</sup> obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

This life is not the end. This life and its suffering is a small season within an eternity of praise. He is our **Hope, He is** our Righteousness! To close today we will be singing – “Hope has a name, His name is Jesus”! Praise Him!

Now, because I prepared this message with the title of “Rejoice in the Gospel: a Call to Discipleship”. I should probably talk about discipleship.

How about I start with 2 “IF” statements that lead into 2 questions.

My 2 “If questions” =

1. If all things in life (including the trials) are used by God to lead us into becoming more like Jesus.... AND
2. If the entire ministry of Jesus was that of making disciples unto Himself, then giving us THE SAME JOB ... before ascending to His throne. (You know... the great commission....“go forth and MAKE disciples of all nations, baptizing & teaching them to obey all I have commanded...I am with you until the end....Matt28:19-20.)

If both of those are true. Then I’ve got 2 Questions.

1. Shouldn’t ALL of us be experiencing some trials that grieve us because of efforts to make disciples and teach them?
2. And, If you are NOT experiencing trials that grieve you because of discipleship work, then, are you really following Him?

I’m not talking about trials with jobs, kids, marriage, hobbies, & money.

I’m talking about trials because of ministry effort.

Are you juggling the issues that come with discipleship? Does your schedule have complexity because of bible study, worship practice, youth ministry, prayer meetings, women’s ministry, men’s ministry, discovery land, children’s church, as well as



connecting with a mentor or being mentored yourself, and more. These are all wonderful things to be involved in, and **I'm not saying** you should be **involved in ALL** of them, but are you involved with at least one of them?

What about relationship issues that come with those efforts? Do you have relationship struggles with brothers and sisters in Christ?

I'm so convinced about the foundational importance of discipleship, that I say, "if you don't have **some** difficulties in life due to intentional discipleship efforts, I think you're missing a core piece of Christianity."

I often have to deal with difficulties because of ministry work. I know that's unfair, I get paid to do ministry. But those of you know me, you know I do more than I get paid to do. I volunteer in DL, & music, & men's ministry, & church projects, & maintenance, & church cleaning & service work, etc. And I'm not bragging, I'm just stating these things so you understand that I know about trials that grieve when ministry is embraced **outside** of normal life and work.

It's hard. And 'hard' means there is a challenge to persevere.

### **Perseverance is the Essential Proof of Faithful Ministry – Not Success**

It's hard because it's a long view effort. Awesome short-term ministries are service projects, or mission trips. And those are both wonderful and awesome! They can change a participant's life, or the life of someone served – which is a long view result. But I'm pointing out that they are short term – they have a beginning and an end. Discipleship with individuals is **not** a one-week effort or a project. For that basic reason, discipleship ministry will present more ups and downs. The good times are not the challenging times, the good times are for celebration and praise. But the down times are included. Trials come, and we need to stay the course, to persevere, to overcome, to run the race as well as we can!

The ups and downs of ministry was the theme for Ralph Shepherd last week. He used the parable of the Sower to share how he and his wife stayed faithful to sow seeds of

gospel truth into hard ground, for over 40 years. They 'chose' to keep planting despite the difficulties that were so very common.

I think many of us get caught up in only "sowing" into ministry efforts that are easier or "within our gifts". Saying NO to ministry opportunities because the work doesn't fit into areas that are enjoyable or come easier to you is NOT what Ralph and His wife were obedient too. That is NOT what the disciples displayed for us. They plowed hard ground, planted seeds in ALL the different soil types and even in the rocks, resulting in some wonderful fruit at times, and no fruit at all in others. The end was not about specific results, it was about faithfulness. Ralph preached that to stay faithful in the work of planting seeds and then watering any that spout is work that:

1. We cannot predict the results, therefore do not look to results (or fruit) as your reason to keep going or quit – just stay faithful.
2. God will use what you plant in others (leave it up to God!)– just stay faithful.
3. God tells us to fight against growing weary (Gal6:9 *...do... not grow weary in doing good, ... in due season we will reap, **if we do not give up.***) – just stay faithful.
4. Spiritual investing is SLOW and PATIENT work with LONG periods of uncertainty and waiting. (Ralphs words) – just stay faithful.
5. We can create better soil by speaking scripture into lives while backing that up with supportive relationships and faithful prayer. Long view work....not short.... – just stay faithful.
6. Speaking bible truth into lives can be how hard soil, even rock, is broken into dirt.... – just stay faithful.
7. Remember to be patient to keep working the hard rocky soil that some people are...but also, rejoice when you get to plant in some soft, fertile, receptive soil – because it can produce exponential results.
8. Sometimes faster is not better.

It's a marathon as we say, not a sprint. Sprints are painful enough, but let's admit it, a marathon is more painful because the pain is extended over a long period of time. Tasha Tiry has set new records for Amery High in the 1600 and 800, ask her about pain! I bet she will agree with the words of Stever Prefontaine, a famous Olympic long-distance runner from Oregon who said "I can endure more pain than anyone you've met. That's why I win because I can endure more pain." Get involved, and just stay faithful.

To finish, I hope I have provided you with some encouragements in the realities of:

1. we have the gospel, we have faith in Christ - Rejoice in it,
2. Be ready for trials, because they are coming. And,
3. Understand why trials are the norm.

But I also realize one of the jobs of being a Spirit led leader is to speak the truth even if its uncomfortable – or challenging. If any thing has been uncomfortable or challenging this morning, it is probably a Holy Spirit conviction, or even a gentle disciplinary voice of God. Or bad preaching, I'm not perfect, I may have said something poorly. But, perhaps my 2 questions from earlier are convicting: they were;

1. Shouldn't ALL of us be experiencing some trials that grieve us because of efforts to make disciples and teach them?
2. And, If you are NOT experiencing trials that grieve you because of discipleship work, then, are you really following Him?

Examine your life. See if you are engaged in any dedicated, intentional discipleship efforts, and if not, simply look at all that our church has going on. There are plenty of opportunities to engage in. Or look to your family and friends and engage in sharing the gospel, in word and deed, and embrace the good and bad that come with it.

Or do nothing and risk the chance that I'm right. If you do nothing I think your risking it because He commands you to make disciples and if you refuse, I think that when you stand before Him on His throne, He might say....I don't know who you are, other than I

know you worshiped and followed your own version of Me, depart from me, I never knew you.

I don't want to hear that; I don't want you to hear that. I want us to embrace the great commission and strive to make disciples with our lives. I want us to make disciples while being fueled by the joy of the gospel, and hear Jesus say, good job faithful friend, its good to be with you. Lets pray.

Lord, I bow before you in humble submission. I am fully aware that I am just a man and You are Lord of all. I am so thankful for who You are and how You love us despite our deficiencies. Please be gracious unto me and what I have shared, whatever is accurate and true, use for Your glory, whatever may have been wrong, block it from our minds and sharpen our hears to what is pure, and right, and profitable.

Help us follow You despite difficulties that will come, help us be like You and, just stay faithful. We ask within You father – through Your Son, and by the power of Your Holy Spirit – Amen.

**Benediction thoughts and verse.**

*<sup>13</sup> Therefore, preparing your minds for action,<sup>[b]</sup> and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, <sup>15</sup> but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup> since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."*

Go in peace, serve your King. Amen.