

More Precious Than Gold – 1 Peter 1:6-9

Sermon – Pastor Joe Davis

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INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. Simple words from a gospel tract that has been used extensively over the past 60 years to lead people to Christ. Words that have truth and yet can easily give followers of Christ a flawed perception of what to expect from God during this life on earth...a flawed perception that can set us up for enormous faith struggles when the *wonderful plan* God has for our lives does not end up being *wonderful* in the way we so naturally expect when we hear those words.

When a non-believer or a new believer hears that God has a *wonderful plan* for their life, what images do you think pop into their mind? Most likely things like good health, financial blessings, strong marriages, well-behaved kids, enjoyable jobs, and all kinds of other earthly blessings. But is this really the wonderful plan God has for our lives? And if this is what we expect from God, what are the chances that our faith will be deeply shaken when the wonderful plan we had envisioned doesn't turn out at all the way we expected?

Jeff attended Bible college, met and married his wife there, graduated, and entered full-time ministry. Within two years his wife decided she was a lesbian and abandoned their marriage for her new love interest. Anna married a man who claimed to be a Christian. They had two children, but then they found out that her husband had a serious and painful health issue with a grim prognosis. Her husband soon grew bitter and angry at God and over the years became a God-hater who wanted his kids to hate God as well. Susan had an incredibly close relationship with her mother and was deeply upset when her mom was diagnosed with a debilitating and terminal disease. As she watched her mom die painfully, little by little, over several years, and as God didn't choose to heal her mother – though she prayed over and over for that outcome – Susan grew angry with God, stopped attending church, and decided she was done with Christianity.

Fabian is a pastor in Columbia in the dangerous red zone, where rebel armies involved in the drug trade forcibly recruit young men and kill them if they refuse. One of his sons was actually killed by the rebels because he wouldn't join their army. Pastor Fabian has had to send his other son to a different part of Columbia to avoid the same outcome.

Wonderful plan? Not in the way we think of that word, for sure. Wonderful is a dangerous word to use, isn't it? It can build very flawed and unrealistic expectations within us that will set us up for failure when the trials and testing of life on a sin-filled, groaning, decaying earth, break upon us like a tidal wave. And if we do use that word in sharing the gospel with someone, a lot of time needs to be spent explaining what exactly we mean by wonderful.

What do you expect out of God as you live your life on earth? How would you respond in each of the painful situations I just described? Would your faith survive? Would your current worldview be able to handle these challenges and grow your faith in God, rather than debilitate it? We don't know what challenges are in store for each of us in this life, and we hope they won't be as difficult as some of these I just shared with you. But we do know each of us will face trials in this life, some of them incredibly painful and disappointing. And to be prepared for them, we desperately need the worldview Peter is seeking to share with us in the book of 1 Peter.

So let's begin our study this morning by reading the verses we've already studied so far. I'll make a few comments by way of review, and then we'll read today's verses in preparation for what God has for us today. Here we go: 1 Peter 1, verses 1 through 5:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. 3 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, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being

guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Followers of Christ desperately need this worldview Peter shares with us in these 5 verses. The worldview that tells us: *we are chosen exiles, sojourners, pilgrims, just passing through a foreign country that is in no way our true home. Sojourners who've been chosen for a purpose. And that is: FOR forgiveness and peace with God through the blood of Jesus and a new life of obedience to Jesus, where we walk with him to become like him in our thoughts, words and actions by the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.* That's what our life is about on this earth. This is God's wonderful plan for your life, and it's not at all about building up treasures on earth or about achieving the American dream. It's about walking with Christ to become like him and accomplish his purposes by the power of the Holy Spirit on this earth. Is that what you think your life is about right now?

You see, those of us in Christ are radically different on the inside from those without Christ. We've been born again spiritually and God's Holy Spirit dwells within us. We have a hope that is alive and certain and will come to pass...a hope that is an imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance kept for us in heaven and a portion of which we're already receiving even now...a hope that's founded on the abundant mercy of God, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the reality that right now God himself is guarding us by his power as we trust him and ensuring that we will take full possession of that amazing inheritance when Christ returns and our salvation is finally revealed to the whole world.

This is the worldview and the wonderful plan and the living hope and the great salvation we need to embrace if we're to fully walk into God's purposes and be prepared for whatever comes our way in life. And this worldview is the foundation for the verses we'll study today, verses 6 through 9. Let's read them now in light of this worldview. Peter says:

6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 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. 8 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, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Notice that Peter says, *IN THIS you rejoice*. In other words, *your joy is to be found in the worldview, the wonderful plan, the hope, the realities, current and future, I just outlined for you in these first verses...NOT in the places the world is looking for joy.*

Notice also, the two contrasting time periods referred to in verses 5 and 6. Verse 5 mentions THE LAST TIME, a future time when Christ returns, our salvation is revealed to all, and we come into that inheritance we've been setting our hope on. Then verse 6 talks about NOW, the current time, life on this earth...a time period when we find ourselves grieved by various trials, yet are still able to be full of joy. Why? Because God is with us through it all and our hope is not set on this life. Our hope is not dependent on our earthly dreams coming true and on everything going well here.

So today, Peter is going to address the NOW time period: What's going on NOW and how it will affect what happens in the future, THE LAST TIME. And in doing so, Peter's going to provide us with what we need in order to win the spiritual battle going on in the NOW time period...the time period of trials and testing. And what we need is all wrapped up in a key battle tool, which Paul in Ephesians called the shield of FAITH. Peter is going to provide us with *4 truths about FAITH that will enable us to keep perspective through life's trials.*

FAITH IS PROVED GENUINE THROUGH TRIALS

The first truth is this: *Faith is proved genuine through trials*. Peter says: ***...now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, SO THAT the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. The tested genuineness of your faith.*** Anyone can say they believe in Jesus, can't they? And lots of people do. But the reality is, only time will tell whether a person's faith in Christ is genuine, real, saving. And faith is proved genuine through how we respond to the trials we face in this life...trials which will be various...in other words more than one, and of different types.

Jesus rightly said, ***“In this world you will have trouble...”*** It shouldn’t be a surprise to us, he warned us ahead of time. Peter, later in this very letter, in chapter 4, verses 12 and 13, affirms this reality again. He says: ***Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*** And yet, aren’t we so often surprised and perplexed and perhaps even angry at God when painful things happen to us? Finding joy that we’re sharing in Christ’s sufferings is not usually our first reaction, is it? Instead our first reaction is often: *Why is this happening to me? What have I done wrong? What have I done to deserve this? God, how could you let this happen?*

You see, our worldview too often doesn’t incorporate trials and testing as a normal, expected and valuable part of our walk with the suffering Savior. Yet that is what they are. They are unavoidable and are meant to bring great growth and great experience of the grace of God for our desperate need. We can’t stop them from coming, but we can choose by God’s grace to respond to them in ways that build our faith rather than exposing it as ungentle. We will all experience diverse trials in this life, and whether these trials build our faith or cause us to abandon it, will determine in the end whether it’s genuine or not.

Fortunately, our first reaction to trials is not really what determines whether our faith is genuine or not. Trials by their very nature bring grief, pain and distress, none of which are enjoyable, and the very natural human reaction is to be upset, to ask why, and to try to grapple with the new reality that has caught us by surprise. What’s most important instead, is where we go from there and how we begin to work through it with God in honesty, and allow him to give us grace for the moment and the patience and endurance we need.

Many true believers may have seasons of life where they’re deeply struggling with doubt or bitterness or sadness over painful things that have happened in their lives. This does not prove that their faith is not genuine. It could simply be an intense season of struggling which will result in great growth and strengthening of their faith in the end. The proving of our faith is a lifelong process and one that God will assess in the last time, not us. But let’s always remember that trials are to be expected in life. This is not our home. This world is not our inheritance. Let’s be ready for them and ready to hold tightly to God in faith, believing he will

accomplish something good through them and prove our faith to be genuine. The trials that do come are necessary, they have a purpose, and God will give us endurance and patience with joy when we keep trusting him through them.

When the trials come, and they will, be on your guard. Don't let Satan and sin deceive you into turning against God, hardening your heart, and abandoning your faith in him. Instead show Satan the awesome power of enduring faith in God. The writer of Hebrews expresses it well, when he says:

Hebrews 12:13-14

12 Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Always hold tight your confidence in Christ to the end. Let your faith in him be proved genuine through the trials of life.

FAITH PROVED GENUINE IS MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

And this brings us to the 2nd truth about faith that Peter shares with us in these verses: *Faith proved genuine is more precious than gold.* In other words, the incredible value of genuine, proven faith far exceeds the value of the most precious thing the earth has to offer – gold. Think for a moment about the history of gold and how the desiring of it and the pursuit of it has had such a massive impact upon human lives. Think of gold rushes...how people uprooted their entire lives, put their whole family at risk, invested every cent of their money, and many even died in pursuit of finding it and becoming rich by it.

One writer says this: "For [over] 5,000 years, gold's combination of luster, malleability, density, and scarcity has captivated humankind like no other metal." [History proves this to be so true. And listen to this interesting fact about gold:] According to Peter Bernstein's book *The Power of Gold: The History of Obsession*, gold is so dense that one ton of it can be packed into a cubic foot."

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Imagine that: 2,000 pounds in 1 cubic foot! Another source said 1 cubic foot of gold would weight 1,206 pounds. So let's just go with the more conservative estimate. When I checked the price of gold last Wednesday, it was \$1,291.05 per ounce. So let's say we have a cubic foot of gold, weighing 1,206 pounds, sitting up here on the stage. At 16 ounces in a pound, that means our block of gold up here would weigh 19,296 ounces. Its current worth would be – are you ready?! – a whopping \$25 million dollars. And your faith would be proved genuine, by whether or not you would be scheming a way right now to steal it for yourself!



But I would say this pretty well proves that gold is quite precious here on earth, wouldn't you? And yet, faith proven genuine through the trials of life is way more valuable than that! Do you believe that today? That's what God's word teaches us. Gold, even though incredibly durable and lasting and beautiful and valuable according to earthly standards, and though able to remain solid even up to temperatures of 1,947 degrees Fahrenheit, is still perishable. Proven faith, on the other hand, is of eternal value and carries with it benefits that defy the imagination.

This means that how our faith fares in the trials, testings and persecutions we face in this life is so important! If it's proven genuine it will result in praise, glory and honor at the return of Christ, when it will be examined to see how it held up during our life on this earth. Don't ever underestimate the incredible value of faith proven genuine through trials. Hold tightly to it. Let nothing shake it. Remember that trials are its required testing process. When the tests are complete, may we be like the infamous man of great trials, Job, who in the midst of some of the worst trials that could ever come on a person, said this: ***[The Lord] knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.*** He rested in the reality that God knew exactly what was going on, would be with him through the trials, was accomplishing something through them, and would bring him out as gold in the end. May we do the same!

FAITH IS THE PATH TO JOY IN THE MIDST OF TRIALS

But not only is faith proven through trials and more valuable than gold when proven, faith is also the path to JOY in the midst of trials. And this is the 3rd truth Peter shares with us about faith: *Faith is the path to joy in the midst of trials.* If

you want enduring joy to accompany you through the ups and downs of life, faith is the way. And the joy faith will bring you is not just the worldly and temporary joy that all people experience from time to time, but rather, God's kind of joy that is inexpressible and full of glory.

Look at the end of verse 8. Peter speaks of followers of Christ rejoicing with joy that is inexpressible and full of glory, and doing this even while enduring painful trials. And why are they able to experience this joy? Because they are exercising faith. They are holding on to confident trust that what God says is true IS TRUE...that what God says life is about IS WHAT LIFE IS ABOUT...that when God says he will provide grace for each moment, HE ACTUALLY WILL...that when God says he will work all things together for good and bring forth something more valuable than gold through trials, HE WILL...that when God tells us this world is not our home and that he has an imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance waiting for us in heaven, IT'S TRUE...that when God tells us that he guards us by his power, through faith, HE REALLY IS DOING IT.

But there's more. Look at the first part of verse 8, which gives a beautiful picture of what faith looks like. Peter says: ***Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him.*** That's faith, my friends. As Jesus said, ***Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*** (John 20:29b). The result for those who believe in Jesus and love him, though they've never seen him with their eyes, is rejoicing with joy inexpressible and full of glory. The wonderful truth about faith is that it is rewarded by God. We experience not only joy, but God's presence and power working through us to give us what we need and accomplish his will in a way we could never do in our own strength.

Just as God is already giving us the firstfruits of our inheritance even now, so also, as we choose to trust him through the good times and through the trials, he gives us himself and the grace, the provision, we need. He shows us again and again that our faith is well-founded. He provides each time, not always in the way we would want if our hopes are still set on earth, but he provides, and he grows us, and he makes us more and more like Christ through the process. And as he does, our faith gets stronger and proves to be genuine and worth more than gold.

I think it would be helpful at this point to refresh our understanding of the biblical concept of joy. And that's because we easily envision it as a constant smile on our face and looking happy, happy, happy, even though inside we may be on the verge of a nervous breakdown. That's not biblical joy. That's also not biblical happiness, by the way. Both biblical joy and biblical happiness are authentic and the natural result of internal well-being. They are not pasted on because we need to look like good Christians.

Biblical joy flows out of an internal and authentic sense of well-being that arises from faith, from knowing and believing: *God's got this; God's got me; no matter what happens here, God will provide, will bring good out of this, and will faithfully bring me into my promised inheritance!* Dallas Willard defines joy as: *a pervasive sense of well-being that's not dependent on our circumstances.* That's why it can be present even in the worst of trials. The Lexham Bible Dictionary says: *[though] closely related to gladness and happiness,...joy is more a state of being than an emotion; a result of choice.* Choice to TRUST. Faith is the path to joy.

Now our ability to experience this joy in trials is enhanced when we understand what God is accomplishing through them. Two other passages in Scripture do a really good job outlining the incredible value of trials in transforming us and preparing us for our future of reigning with Christ. First, let's look at Romans 5:3-5. Paul says there:

3 ...we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, 4 and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, 5 and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Again we see JOY in trials. And the joy arises out of knowing that God is bringing great good through them. They have an essential purpose. Remember trials come when they are necessary. Now the first thing God produces in you through trials and suffering is endurance. He shows you that by his strength and provision you can endure anything. And as you choose to trust him and keep following him and obeying his word through the hard times, you begin to see godly character growing within you...you're actually becoming like Christ...God's is sanctifying you and you can see his work within you. You begin to see evidence that your faith is genuine, that you are born again and indwelt by God's Holy Spirit. And as you see

this happening your hope grows. You begin to see, and others begin to see, more and more evidence that God's kingdom is real. God is at work in the world today. He's changing you and transforming you and revealing his glory to the world through you. He's accomplishing his will on earth through you by the power of his Spirit!

James echoes these truths in another familiar passage about joy in the midst of trials. He says, in James 1:2-4:

2 Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, 3 for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. 4 And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Count it all joy when trials of various kinds come, because they're proving your faith, which is more precious than gold...proving it as you endure and remain steadfast and let God sanctify you, making you like Christ through the process...making you perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

FAITH'S OUTCOME IS THE SALVATION OF OUR SOULS

And this brings us to the 4th and final truth Peter shares with us about faith. And that is this: *Faith outcome is the salvation of our souls.* As your faith is proved genuine through trials, you obtain genuine faith's certain outcome: the salvation of your soul. Genuine, proven faith in Christ always results in certain salvation. There's only one name given among men by which we must be saved: the name of Jesus Christ (see Acts 4:12). Everyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame (see Romans 10:11)! But our salvation in him is not proved because we said some magic words a long time ago that we didn't really mean in our heart. Salvation in him is not proved because we consider ourselves a Christian and we believe in our head that Jesus really is the Savior, but we aren't really following him. Salvation in him is not proved because we attend church or maybe even volunteer in some ministries.

On the contrary, true salvation through faith in Christ, is proved to be genuine over time as our faith endures through the various trials that are certain to come our way in this life...as we time after time choose to trust and obey...as we return

to God in humility and repentance if our faith is shaken and we wander off for a time...and as we see over the years God growing our Christ-like character, making us people with life-giving hope and joy inexpressible and full of glory. The outcome of this kind of faith proven genuine through the trials of life is the very salvation of our souls!

APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Count it all joy, my brothers and sisters in Christ, when you encounter trials in this life. Don't be surprised as though something strange were happening to you...as though God has let you down. Instead, let confident faith in Christ and love for him be your lifeline, what you hold on to with all you have, and you will find joy and grace for each moment and God will change you through those trials and make you more and more like Christ, our suffering Savior. He will build your hope and reveal himself to others through you in ways you've never imagined as you hold faith as a lifeline and let it be proved genuine, bringing praise, glory and honor at the return of Christ. Trials are a key part of his *wonderful plan* for your life.

But, my friends, we'll only be able to view trials this way when we've embraced the worldview Peter is giving us in these first few verses of 1 Peter...when we've truly accepted that our hope is not in this world... that God has not promised us a life free of trouble, a beautiful house, lots of money in the bank, all our earthly dreams being fulfilled, perfect health, freedom from pain and suffering, and all the other things those without Christ are pursuing. This life is not about our comfort, our pleasure, our earthly success, our entertainment, and on and on. Instead, this life right now, whether we're at work, home or play, is about living with with Jesus and like Jesus in a world not our home, with our eyes and our hope set on our eternal inheritance, allowing God to prepare us for it through the trials and challenges of life...and it's about allowing God to speak his life and hope through us to others who need him so desperately.

But as we live this way, he's not going to leave us depressed and burdened and joy-less and disappointed that we're missing out on all the good stuff in life. Instead we're going to find enduring joy that will surprise the people around us who don't know Christ. We're going to find that living in the ways of Christ is the best way to live, even though it involves suffering and persecution and great

trials. And that's because we're going to receive the Lord himself as our portion in this life. And there's nothing greater and more joy-inducing than that! Though in this world we will have trouble, take courage because Jesus has overcome the world and he will enable us to do the same as we hold tightly to faith in him.

What are you expecting out of this life? Are you expecting trials and do you see their great value? Or do they make you angry and disappointed and bitter at God, and lead you into disregarding and disobeying his word? I want to close today by returning to the infamous man of great trials, Job. You remember what he said: [the LORD] ***knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come out as gold.*** Do you want to come out as gold, like Job, as you navigate the trials of life? Then expect trials and learn to see their value. Let them become stepping stones, instead of sinking sand. Learn to find joy and hope in them as you watch God provide for you, comfort you and grow your character through them. Let them be the proof that you have faith more precious than gold.

Job, in the verses immediately following the one I just read for you, gives us a great picture of what it looks like to have this kind of faith through trials. Listen to his approach to trials and why he was confident he would come out as gold. It's a picture of enduring faith and what it looks like. Job said, in verses 11 to 12 of Job chapter 23: ***My foot has held fast to his steps; I have kept his way and have not turned aside. I have not departed from the commandment of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my portion of food.*** May this be how we respond to all the trials that come our way!

Now if you're a person here today who's in a season of shaken faith, may I invite you to confess it to God and call out for him to rebuild it. May I invite you to honestly tell him about it and that you want to change. May you ask him to forgive you for doubting his goodness and allowing Satan to deceive you. May you re-express your faith in Christ, his work on the cross and his resurrection. May you invite him to take over and lead you out as your Lord and Savior. He wants to do that for you today.

For Additional Study and Application

Describe someone you know who previously professed faith in Christ, but has now abandoned faith in him as a result of something that happened to them in life. How do you think their worldview (their expectations of God in life) contributed to this?

How does the worldview presented in 1 Peter 1:1-9 serve to protect us from falling into the same trap described above?

Read 1 Peter 1:6-9; Romans 5:1-5; and James 1:2-4. What are the various truths we learn about trials/suffering in this life?

Why is faith proven genuine more precious than gold?

Read Job 23:10-12. What was Job's strategy for surviving the incredible and painful trials he faced in his life?

Read Philippians 3:8-11. Summarize Paul's worldview (what he expected out of life and what was most important to him).