

## Reasons to Praise

1 Peter 1:3-9

Let us pray: Father God, we believe your word in Proverbs 13:14: "The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life, turning a person from the snares of death." Fill us today with the life-giving power of your wisdom. In Jesus' name. Amen.

The First Epistle of Peter was written by the apostle Peter between AD 64 and 68 to believers in Asia Minor, which is present-day Turkey. In AD 64, a great fire broke out in Rome, and Emperor Nero shifted the blame onto Christians, initiating a period of persecution. Christians were misunderstood as people who practiced cannibalism because of the Lord's Supper, where they spoke of eating the body and blood of Christ. They were also accused of causing plagues and famines because they refused to worship the emperor or offer sacrifices to the Roman gods.

As this hostility toward Christianity spread to the provinces, including Asia Minor, believers suffered greatly in their daily lives. Because of their faith in Jesus, they were driven from their homes, expelled from their workplaces, and at times even put to death in brutal ways. For this reason, Peter addresses the recipients of this letter as "sojourners" scattered throughout Asia Minor. To be sojourners on this earth means that we are citizens of heaven.

The First Epistle of Peter was written to comfort these believers and to give them hope. Though it is a short letter, it is profoundly rich, and the more we meditate on it, the more it nourishes us. Therefore, we will take time, as much as we are able, to carefully reflect on it verse by verse.

We have not experienced much persecution ourselves. Of course, on a personal level, we may have faced criticism or insults while sharing the gospel. But we are not imprisoned or killed for going to church. Then how can this letter of 1 Peter apply to our daily lives? From a spiritual perspective, we must understand that we are always on a spiritual battlefield. We should take to heart Peter's warning in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

The church, in times of persecution, has often become purified and has experienced revival. Because Satan has witnessed this throughout history, he changes his strategy when persecution does not succeed in destroying the church. When there is no persecution, believers tend to grow lax. Prayer decreases, and the culture of the world begins to seep into

the church. Since life seems manageable without prayer or the reading of the Word, only a **form** of godliness remains, while its power is lost, leaving behind merely a shell of religion.

Another way Satan attacks is by taking advantage of this spiritual looseness and bringing various kinds of suffering. He may afflict people with illness, stir up conflict within families, allow natural disasters and human-caused hardships, or tempt people into sin. Through such all-encompassing attacks, he seeks to cause believers to lose their faith through various trials. Think of Job.

Everyone faces some degree of suffering. Our attitude and perspective toward it can shape our entire lives. The First Epistle of Peter is often called the "Job of the New Testament" because it deeply teaches us how to face suffering and truly strengthens us in the midst of it.

Amid intense persecution, the very first words of the main body of Peter's letter are, surprisingly, a call to praise. Why do we praise? Peter goes on to explain at length, but in short, it is because of salvation, which God has given us. Peter describes this salvation in three aspects as the reasons for our praise.

First, we praise because we have been born again.

Second, we praise because, through this new birth, we have a living hope. This living hope is the hope of receiving an inheritance kept in heaven for us.

Third, we praise because God, by his power, is guarding and protecting us even now while we are still on this earth.

Returning to the first point, new birth, this began because of the great mercy of God the Father. God did not merely have compassion in thought or word, but sent his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us and raised him from the dead. The death of Christ was a death in which he bore our sins, and his resurrection is the firstfruits of our own resurrection. These two together form the very heart of the gospel. Through this good news, God has caused us to be born again.

To be born again is not to become slightly improved, but to be completely made new, to be born as a new person. This is why we can praise even in the midst of suffering.

Second, we praise because we have been given a living hope of the inheritance we will receive. What kind of inheritance is this? It is an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. You might remember it as the "IUU inheritance," imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. An inheritance is something received from a parent. But every inheritance in this world eventually perishes, becomes defiled, and fades away. Everything in this world grows

old and deteriorates, but we are people of a living hope, living a life that is connected to eternity.

This inheritance is kept in heaven. God the Father himself is holding and preserving it securely. When we look only at this world, where Nero, that is, the enemy, brings persecution, we cannot sing. But those who live connected to eternity can look toward their heavenly home and praise.

Third, we praise because we are being protected by the power of God. What is the purpose of this protection? What is God preserving us for? It is for salvation.

Have we not already received salvation? Yes, we have. But the salvation we experience in this life is not yet complete. Our bodies are still imperfect, and the sinful nature, the old self, remains within us. Even as we read Scripture, our minds sometimes wander. That is why Peter speaks of "the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time." The "last time," in a broad sense, spans from Christ's first coming to his second coming, but in this passage it specifically refers to the time of Christ's return. We are being guarded through faith so that we may obtain that final and complete salvation, which Jesus will bring when he comes again. Though there is persecution, God is protecting us by his great power even in the midst of it. Therefore, we are called to praise.

In Revelation 7, God commands his angels to place a seal on the foreheads of his people. This seal carries two meanings. First, "you are mine." Second, "I will protect you." This sealing points to God's promise to preserve his people in the coming day of wrath, the time of great tribulation.

As the promise in Romans 8:35 states, no matter what kind of suffering we face, war, famine, danger, imprisonment, or persecution, nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. Therefore, until we receive that great and final salvation, we are called to live on this earth with praise.

Verse 6 says, "In all this you greatly rejoice" (NIV). This means that we rejoice in the three blessings we have just considered. Even though we may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials for a little while, we still rejoice. To rejoice is essentially the same as to praise.

There is one who does not want us to live enjoying these three blessings. It is the devil. He brings not only temptation but also trials. Yet God allows these trials to come.

In Revelation 6, a white horse appears, symbolizing Christ who has conquered through the cross. Then a red horse appears, which can be understood as representing persecution. Why

does God allow this season of the red horse? It is to test whether our faith is genuine. Trials are like winnowing. The wheat is drawn toward the one who winnows, while the chaff is blown away. Through the winnowing of suffering, the impurities that are mixed into our faith, such as unbelief, laziness, love of money, love of the world, and hidden immorality, are removed. Trials do cause us grief, but even in the midst of them, we are called to praise within the three blessings of salvation.

A faith that passes through trials with praise is said to be more precious than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire. Why is gold described as perishable? Because it can be lost, spent, or left behind at death. But why is a tested faith more precious? Because when Jesus Christ is revealed, such faith will result in praise, glory, and honor before him for eternity.

Can we truly live according to the Word by only receiving grace and hearing sermons without going through trials? Very few can. For our faith to become pure and strong, it must pass through trials. Only a tested faith will receive praise, glory, and honor before the returning Christ.

Peter had seen Jesus, but the believers in Asia Minor had not. Yet they loved him. Peter describes, "Though you do not see him **now**." "Now," that is, even while they were under the persecution of Nero, they believed in him and were filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy. To rejoice is to praise. They were already tasting the praise, glory, and honor that were to come. What made this possible? It was faith that passes through trials with praise. And the outcome of that faith is the salvation of their souls.

Beloved, as we pass through suffering, let us praise God. Let us praise him with songs, with words of thanksgiving, and even by speaking his Word like a song upon our lips. When we praise, the presence and anointing of God come, Satan is weakened, and the powers of darkness flee.

Trials are not the end. As you pass through them with faith and praise, may you look forward to the praise, glory, and honor that will be given after the trial. Amen.

Let us pray: Lord God, we give you thanks and praise, for you have redeemed us, given us a living hope to receive the IUU inheritance, and are guarding us by your great power until we reach complete salvation. Help us praise you every day, so that the powers of darkness and death are driven away, and the works of life appear in our lives. In the name of Jesus Christ, who will come again. Amen.