



“Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth,”
Colossians 3:2.

Faith’s Trial

Lesson Aim: To encourage believers to develop a proper perspective of life by gaining an understanding of what eternity holds.

L344. Date: July 1976. **Text:** I Peter 1:3-13. **Topic:** Faith: Trials of.

Today is a significant day in American history. It marks the two-hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence by representatives of the early American colonists. Much has been said about the trials through which our forefathers passed in establishing the new nation. As the pains of travail in birth are followed by the joys of newborn life, so the testings endured by our ancestors brought forth the new nation under God. Today, we honor them for their faithfulness to the ideal of freedom under law and we thank God for our nation and freedoms.

This Lord's Day is an appropriate occasion for a study of the meaning of trials in the life of a Christian. “Why does God permit trials to come upon His people?” That question has challenged thinkers through the ages. Some say He wants to protect His children and cannot. Others say He could protect them but will not. Neither is a Bible answer. There is a purpose, a benevolent purpose, in trials. Trials have a meaning. The Christian can understand the meaning of trials in his life and grow to greater maturity and more effective service through them. Christians should devote their minds and hearts to a serious study of the subject, “Why Faith Is Tried,” as set forth in I Peter 1:3-13.

Here are some guidelines to help direct your study: (1) Trials are real **“... In the world ye shall have tribulation ...”** John 16:33. (2) Trials are profitable. **“... the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth ... might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ,”** I Peter 1:7. (3) Trials must be met

with assured faith in God. **“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal,”** II Corinthians 4:18. Remember those guidelines as you study, asking God to speak to you through them.

I. TRIALS AMPLIFY HOPE (I Peter 1:3-5).

A. Jesus' victory through trials, verse 3 — Praise God who is overflowing in mercy toward you. Praise God who has shown His mercy toward you by causing to be born within you a hope which is alive. Praise God who gives fact for the foundation of that hope in that He has raised Jesus Christ from death into a life far beyond death. Praise God that the exaltation and coronation of Christ followed His humiliation and suffering. Jesus' victory followed His trials.

Do you feel the surge of hope within you? Your trials are so much less than that which He bore. His sweat became as great drops of blood falling to the ground. He whose every word, act, and attitude was prompted by complete and unceasing availability to God and obedience to God cried out, “Father, if it be possible; let this cup pass from me.” He who was totally innocent was convicted as if he were guilty and in His sufferings bore the actual sin-guilt of all mankind. No one has ever suffered as He; however, He gained victory through those very sufferings. Having undergone trials and death, He succours men who are tried and resurrects those who are dead. Be filled with hope, dear Christian! Jesus' victory through trials assures you that you, too, can triumph.

B. God's mercy in trials — God knew that believers would be tried. He was filled with compassion toward believers in those trials. As He set the rainbow in the clouds to give hope in the storms, He set mercy in suffering to give assurance of His presence and help.

Hebrews 2:1-18 recounts how God has come to the aid of suffering humanity. (1) He is mindful of man, verse 6. (2) He suffered death in behalf of every man, verse 9. (3) He provided salvation for man, verse 10. (4) He is personally related to man as Brother to brother, verses 11-13. (5) He has delivered man from fear of death, verse 15. (6) He comes to the aid of tempted man in order to strengthen and help him, verse 18. God's mercy is readily available to each one who is tried. **“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need,”** Hebrew 4:16.

Trials do not mean that God has deserted His child. They rather are

occasions for the believer to learn by experience how sufficient is God's grace.

C. The believer's inheritance beyond trials, verse 4 — There is hope ahead! The Bible records how Jesus was strengthened in His suffering by the anticipation of what was ahead, saying: “... **Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God,**” Hebrews 12:2. The believer may also find help in times of testings when he considers what is ahead.

God speaks of “... **an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,**” verse 4. Five things are revealed about the blessing the believer will receive. (1) It is an inheritance. It is received because of his relationship with God the Father. (2) It is an incorruptible inheritance. Being beyond reach of change or decay, it will never perish away. (3) It is an undefiled inheritance. It is stainless. (4) It is an unfading inheritance. It will never lose its freshness and delight. (5) It is a sure inheritance. Reserved in heaven for each believer, the divine inheritance is certain to be received and enjoyed. The believer should endure his testings, knowing that a glorious inheritance awaits him after trials are gone.

D. Christian's help in trials, verse 5 — One is not alone when trials assail. He is “kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.” The believer is guarded and afforded safe conduct through all of his testings. What an occasion for rejoicing.

One can watch with fascination and delight as the storm rages if he is sure that his shelter is secure. The Christian can have assurance in the midst of any trial, however severe. God's divine power, by faith, is at his defense. It keeps him under guard to guarantee his safety. Strengthen your hope, Brother Christian! Trials must never cause it to falter. Through your trials, your hope is amplified to your assurance and God's glory.

II. TRIALS SANCTIFY JOY (I Peter 1:6-8).

A. Joy of anticipation, verse 6 — Consider the waiting inheritance. Consider the present help of God's power. In those two blessings you have great cause for overflowing joy. In such a two-fold hope, keep on rejoicing. The passing moment may be filled with sorrow caused by trials of many kinds. The present grief is temporary. The divine prospect is eternal. You may find no pleasure in what is now, but you can exult in the prospect of what is to be.

B. Adversary of joy (verses 6-8) — No reasonable person enjoys

difficulties or sorrow. Each would prefer to live a life of peace and tranquility. That is not the reality one experiences in life. Testings come. They are like passing through fire, some are so severe. Those testings, however, are to prove the sterling quality of faith and devotion to God. It is possible for the flesh to sorrow while the spirit enjoys joy. That is why trials can never overcome the believer's joy in the Lord.

The believer should make a distinction between “joy” and “happiness.” Happiness depends on one's “hap” (situation, circumstance), which can change from moment to moment. Joy is an inner spiritual quality of contentment and peace. That is why the Bible never promises the believer will ever be happy in this world — circumstances change and are fickle. God does promise the believer may be filled with joy day by day regardless of circumstances. It is always better to be joyful than happy.

C. Faith and joy (verse 8) — Joy is virtually related to faith. It is based upon assurance of the reality of the unseen. Believers today have never seen Jesus in the flesh; yet they are filled with joy. How? They believe in Him whom they have never seen. Faith makes Jesus real and Jesus puts joy in the heart.

There can be no abiding joy apart from vibrant faith. Peter wrote that it was through “believing” that the Christian can “rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” Ponder his full statement in I Peter 1:8. It may be paraphrased in these words: “You love Jesus though you have not seen Him in time past; and though you do not even see Him, yet you believe in Him, and as a result you are filled with a joy too great for words, a joy that is full of glory.” Keep faith alive and joy will fill you.

III. TRIALS MAGNIFY SALVATION (I Peter 1:9-13).

A. Salvation by faith (verse 9) —The major message of the Bible is that God has provided salvation for man. The sacrifices of the Old Testament period show how God can be just and the justifier of sinners. The judgments of the Lord show man's great need of remission of sin. The theology of the Word reveals man as he is, God as He is, and what must happen for man to be reconciled to God. The gospel of God is that God in grace has provided rescue for man from his sin.

Grace is God's act toward man in sin. Faith is man's response to God's gracious offer of mercy. Man can never be saved unless God deals with him in grace. God will never forgive and save a man unless he responds to Him in faith. Peter spoke of salvation of the soul as the harvest, the goal, the end of faith. That does not mean that one believes now and is saved at the

judgment. It rather means that the good which faith receives, when it is directed toward God as Saviour, is the forgiveness of sin and salvation in Christ.

B. Salvation beyond understanding (verses 10-12) — God's saving plan has been revealed to mankind. It was announced through His prophets who spoke in generations past. They foretold of a grace which was destined to be shown to those who lived long after they. The way was made so plain that even the most common of common men could enter therein. It is still so simple that even a child can understand and be saved. Although it is so simple, it is also very complex.

The prophets who foretold of God's salvation did not fully understand what they were predicting. They “enquired and searched diligently” to comprehend the message given them by the Spirit of God. Their earnest efforts were devoted to find out what was the time, and what were the circumstances, when their prophecies would come to pass. When Isaiah wrote of the suffering Messiah (Isaiah 53), and when Jeremiah wrote of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31), neither understood fully the details of what they wrote. God had made known to them the sufferings that the Christ must undergo, as well as the glories which would follow. Although they saw the broad outlines, they could not grasp the details. “. . . **These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect,**” Hebrews 11:39, 40.

The marvel of grace which could justify the ungodly was (and is!) so amazing that even the angels of God sought to understand it. They were concerned to get even a glimpse of what God was doing in salvation.

That is the gospel which is preached to you. That is the gospel which some have dared to ignore. That is the gospel which is the only hope for each person. Be sure you respond in faith to God and enter into the benefits announced by prophets, investigated by angels, preached by men, and applied by the Holy Spirit. It is the gospel of God.

C. Salvation of assurance (verse 13) — Keep your hope burning brightly. Present trouble may be upon you, but that should not dim the expectation of your hope. It may take a great effort of concentration of your mind. You may have to exercise strict self-control. Do not allow present trials, however, to cause you to lose hope of future glory.

“Keep your hope alive.” That is the call to Christians today. Understand what it means. “Hope” is often used in the sense of wistful thinking. One might say, “I hope it does not rain today.” That is not the Bible concept of hope. Hope is a strong word, when used in Holy Scripture. Hope is the

future tense of faith. A believer looks up to God in expectation of present blessings; that is faith. A believer looks up to God in expectation of future blessings; that is hope.

You can trust God for today by an exercise of faith. You can trust God for all the tomorrows, by an exercise of hope. The admonition of the Bible is, "Do not let present difficulties lessen your assurance of future blessings." God is faithful. Keep your hope in Him vibrantly alive.

It is easy to lose heart and hope when one looks at circumstances about him. It is easy to keep hope bright when one looks at God above him. Say often to your spirit, when in the midst of discouragement, **"Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance,"** Psalm 42:5.

Christians are living in an imperfect world. Troubles of many kinds abound. The Christian is not exempt from trials which beset mankind in general. The Christian has added strength in trials, however, because he has the help of God. For him, the trial works out a great benefit. Meeting them with assured faith in the Heavenly Father enables the believer to live above the circumstances and to know the joy of the Lord while in the midst of troubles.

The believer will find his times of testings to be of great profit if he exercises himself to find a three-fold treasure in them. (1) Trials can amplify one's hope, verses 3-5. (2) Trials can sanctify one's joy, verses 6,8. (3) Trials can magnify one's salvation, verses 9,13. When the believer is tested, he should ask God to work those blessed results in him.

Questions

1. How does John 16:33 relate to the lesson?
2. How does Jesus' resurrection give believers a living hope?
3. What does Hebrews 2:1-18 teach about the Christians' trials?
4. What blessing awaits the believer beyond his trials?
5. How can you know God's help in trials?
6. In what way can trials sanctify your joy?
7. How is Christian faith related to true joy?
8. What does it mean to be saved by faith?
9. How has the study benefited you?
10. How can you share the lesson with another to help him?