

Joy Inexpressible

1 Peter 1:8-9

I have an impossible task this morning. An absolutely impossible task. And it is impossible because the subject of this sermon is what Peter calls inexpressible joy. That's the key phrase in our text, the main idea. Inexpressible joy. And so what I am trying to do is to proclaim to you something that the Holy Spirit would label as inexpressible. I am trying to find words to express to you something that the Apostle defines as inexpressible. That seems like a hopeless endeavor, doesn't it?

I put it that way to emphasize that what Peter writes to us, what God would have us to learn and know from Peter's words, goes beyond the objective definition of those words themselves. The grammatical understanding of the word is not enough. Inexpressible joy. The intellectual definition of the word is not enough. A study in linguistics is not enough, nor etymology. Study the word all you want, and you are still left with the simple definition—this joy that Peter is writing to us about is actually unspeakable. It can't adequately be put into words. So our focus cannot be merely upon the objective content of those words, but also the subjective experience of our own hearts in receiving those words. Thus, much more broadly, the Christian faith is not simply about propositional truth true; it must include and clearly address our subjective response.

Don't misunderstand me. Propositional truth is crucial. Vital. Absolutely essential. The objective, verbal declaration of the gospel is the foundation upon which our faith is built. We rightly emphasize the doctrines of our faith, whether that's in the form of the Westminster Shorter Catechism or the Apostles' Creed. I studied a lot of theology in seminary, and ongoing reading and studying of theology is vital for the well being of my mind as I

preach the gospel from week to week. That doctrinal study and theological knowledge needs to form the foundational background of every sermon I preach. Otherwise, we all would be easily and quickly led astray from the truth.

But there is more to the Christian religion than doctrinal proposition. That's my emphasis. There is more to our faith than the objective definitions of good theology. There is something very, very subjective. What I mean by that is something in the context of your own experience. There is more to your faith than what you believe. Specifically, there is to be joy; a word I define as the happiness of the soul. The delight of the heart in the goodness and presence of God. Joy. But again, Peter identifies that joy with the description, "inexpressible."

Let me begin by putting together all these verses we've been studying for the past three weeks, the blessing, beginning in verse 3.

v.3 "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls."

Blessed be God. He saved us. He promises us an eternal inheritance. And in that sure and certain hope, you rejoice. Even though you will suffer various trials. For those trials will only last a little while, until Jesus returns. And even though you don't see him now, you believe him. You believe his word. You know he will come at the day and time appointed by God. Therefore, you are able to "rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory."

Do you get the big picture of where we are this morning? This whole blessing needs to be in your mind. The whole subject of your salvation. The whole consciousness of your eternal inheritance. The full confidence of Jesus' return at the end of this age. Blessed by God for all of that. And that is where I want to begin this morning with my first main point. Faith. The faith to believe all of that.

Thus the question,

I. WHAT IS FAITH?

Faith is the foundation upon which joy is built. But again, what is faith? Look at verse 8. "Yet believing." Faith is believing. Specifically,

A. Faith is believing what you cannot see.

Verse 8 again, "Though you do not now see him, you believe in him."

For a cross reference, we could go to,

Heb. 11:1 "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

"The conviction of things not seen," as the NASB and ESV put it." Faith is the evidence, the conviction, the certainty and the

assurance of things you now only hope for. Things you wait for, with confidence. Because God has promised.

What is faith? Faith is Abraham, leaving Ur because told him to go.

Heb. 11:8 "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. 9 By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; 10 for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Faith is believing because God said it, not because you can see it with your own eyes. Faith is believing God's word to be true, without demanding proof or evidence for your own eyes. Faith is trusting what God's says is true, that what God promises will come to pass.

Do you remember Thomas? Doubting Thomas we call him.

John 20:25 The other disciples therefore said to him, "We have seen the Lord." So he said to them, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." 26 And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!" 27 Then He said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." 28 And Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" 29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Blessed are you, all of you, who believe Jesus even though you have not seen him. That's faith.

Our Westminster Confession of Faith puts it this way, "By this faith, a Christian believeth to be true whatsoever is revealed in the Word, for the authority of God himself speaking therein." Or, as we studied last Thursday evening from the Heidelberg Catechism, "True faith is not only a sure knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed in His word, but also a hearty trust."

Faith means that you hold for truth all that God has revealed in his word. But there is actually more to it than that. It is not just believing, after all, even the demons believe!

James 1:19 "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble."

Even the Devil believes in God! But there is more to true faith, more than believing what you cannot see.

B. Faith is loving whom you cannot see.

Faith embodies love. Faith encompasses love. Faith includes love. For to believe God, to truly believe God in the fullness of faith, you must love God!

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"Though you have not seen him, you love him."

It's hard enough to love those whom you do see, isn't it? It's hard enough to love people whom you live with, with whom you can talk and interact. It's hard enough to define and understand love in the context of human relationships.

When two people get married, it's easy to see the love. When

they get engaged, you can see the love. It's evident and obvious. So should it be with your love for Jesus.

So do you love Jesus? It is the greatest of all the commandments, isn't it? To love God, and to love him wholly and completely, with all your heart, soul, strength and mind. And that is how the Bible defines Christians, as lovers of God.

Not just those who believe, but those who love. Faith is not only believing what you cannot see, but also loving whom you cannot see.

But how is that love defined? How is it expressed? And Jesus himself is very practical at this point.

John 14:23 "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me."

Remember the words Jesus spoke to Peter, words of restoration after Peter had so grievously denied Jesus three times. Do you remember the question Jesus asked?

John 21:16 "Simon, son of John, do you love me?"

So do you love Jesus? That really is the call of the gospel. It is the call to salvation, the invitation of the gospel. If you are an unbeliever, it is the call to trust in Jesus Christ for your salvation. It is the call to love him, and not to despise the promise of the gospel that through faith in him, your sins will be forgiven.

"Do you love Jesus?" I know you can't see him. But you have his word. Do you believe his word to be true? Knowing that word promises the forgiveness of sins to all who trust in him, the

probing question is appropriate, “Do you love Jesus?”

Put yourself in Thomas’ shoes, and listen to Jesus speak to you even this morning. “Do you love me?”

I don’t want to pass quickly over that question this morning, because the gospel is at stake. Faith is not just agreeing to a set of propositions. Faith is love whom you cannot see. Faith is loving God. Faith is loving Jesus, knowing and believing that he first loved you.

Perhaps you have never thought of it that way. Or not thought about it deeply enough. The call of the gospel is the call to love God, and that is a call that I proclaim to you this morning. Love Jesus. Love God.

Mat. 22:39 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment.”

Young children, boys and girls, its not enough simply to do what your parents tell you to do, or to believe what they teach you to believe. Those are good things, but the call of the gospel is this, love Jesus. So let ask you again that question, Do you love Jesus?

Young adults, teenagers, college students, listen to this question, and in your own heart answer it. Do you love Jesus? You adults, especially you who have been in church all your life, do you love Jesus? Not just, are you a member of the church, but do you love Jesus?

In one sense, all of that is just the introduction to the main point today. Remember, the main point is joy, inexpressible joy. And here is where that joy begins. Believing what you cannot

see. And loving whom you cannot see. That’s faith.

Then I would ask, as the second main point of the sermon, a second, related question.

II. WHAT IS THE GOAL OF FAITH?

Or, maybe better expressed, what is the purpose of faith? What difference does it make in your life? What effect does it have upon your life? And that’s where the subject of joy is introduced.

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In the very next verse, Peter identifies all of that as “the end of your faith.” Or the outcome of your faith, in the NASB and ESV. The Greek word emphasizes the end result, the intended result, the purpose. That’s what the word “end” means in some English translations. The goal for which it all exists. The end of your faith, the goal for which God enables you to have faith, is, as Peter puts it,

A. Inexpressible joy.

v.9 “Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory.”

“You rejoice with joy inexpressible.”

Why rejoice, as we read in verse 8? How can you rejoice, even in the face of various trials, as we read in verse 6? Just keep going back in the chapter. The reference point is in verse 5, “salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” You rejoice because your salvation is ready to be revealed. That salvation is described as an inheritance, “reserved in heaven for you.” So, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

That’s a summary of the last four sermons.

Rejoice, you who believe in Jesus, you who love Jesus, because you have been promised eternal life. Rejoice with inexpressible joy, because I can't fully explain to you just how great that inheritance will be. We can read bits and pieces about heaven. We can read descriptions of heaven in the Bible, but none of us can begin to fully explain it. It is so glorious, we are unable to define it adequately.

Just imagine. Streets of gold. Just imagine, the sun will not be needed because Jesus will light up the world. Just imagine, no more darkness. No more tears or sorrows. No more sin. No more sickness. Or death. No hunger, no weeds in the garden, no pain in our bodies. No personal conflicts. No more hurricanes. No more presidential primaries.

Just imagine everything that is hard or difficult about this life, imagine everything that is painful or sad, and imagine that it is all gone. Gone completely, forever, for eternity. You can't find the words, can you? It is simply indescribable. Inexpressible.

So now, as you with that great hope, "you rejoice with joy inexpressible." Believing, you rejoice. Believing God's word to be true, you rejoice. With a joy that I cannot fully define or express with words. It is that great! It really is a joy unspeakable. Words cannot define it. This joy cannot be fully defined by any precise use of the words of our human language. It is an inexpressible experience within your soul.

And that's what I'm trying to capture this morning. That sense of the glory of the gospel, made real and personal to your own lives. Notice that language being used as well, that your joy be...

B. Full of glory.

That's a word generally used to describe God, not us. God is

full of glory in the greatness of his own eternal being. God is glorious in ways that so clearly transcend our very existence as human beings, creatures. But here, our joy is glorious. Our joy is full of glory, because it is a joy built upon the foundation of God's promise in the gospel. Our joy is full of glory, because God has promised a glorious eternal inheritance.

So the question is not only, "Do you love Jesus?" But if you do love Jesus, the question becomes, "Is there joy in your soul this morning?"

Notice, I didn't say, "Are you in a good mood?" "Are you happy?" But much more meaningfully, is there joy in your soul? The joy of Jesus. The joy of knowing, believing, and loving Jesus.

Some of you have had a good week, I suspect. A happy and pleasant week. Some of you have not. Life was hard this week, difficult and maybe even grievously burdensome. It doesn't matter. Not where we are right now, right here. Because right here, as we are gathered together in this place, we have come together to meet with God, to worship him, knowing and believing that Jesus has laid down his life for our sins. Knowing and believing that "according to His abundant mercy [God] has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." And therein is real joy. The inexpressible glory of joy. The joy of believing. The joy of faith.

And with that joy, the anticipation of the,

C. The completion of your salvation.

Don't miss,

v.9

That's what it is all about. The salvation of your souls. Its not about your job. Or your college exams. Its not about your health or the wellbeing of your children and grandchildren. Its not about whether your marriage is happy or your career successful. Real joy, joy inexpressible comes when the thoughts and desires of your heart are nothing other than the completion of your eternal salvation.

You might ask, is your salvation complete? The answer is "no." No! The work of redemption is complete. The work of propitiation is complete. The satisfaction of God's justice and wrath which my sins deserved is complete. My regeneration is complete. I am a new creature in Christ. My justification is complete. So is my adoption. Full and final, an unalterable declaration by God.

Jesus doesn't have to accomplish anything else. His suffering is over, and he sits at the right hand of the throne of God in heaven.

But there is still more to come for us. Our salvation is not yet complete, because that word "salvation" includes everything up to and including our glorification. And in that sense, your salvation won't be complete until your body is raised from the dead incorruptible. "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."

So your salvation won't be complete until death is destroyed. Your salvation won't be complete until your body is raised in glory. Your salvation won't be complete until the day of the Lord comes when both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up, "the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat." Your salvation won't be complete until that day when you who love Jesus will live in a "new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

And only righteousness.

Your salvation won't be complete until you see the reality of what the Apostle John say in his great apocalyptic vision,

Rev. 21:1 Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. 2 Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." 5 Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new."

People of God, your joy now, in this age, in this place even today, your joy is in the confidence that you are obtaining just that – the completion of your salvation, the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls.

With that hope, beloved, rejoice. You who love Jesus, rejoice with joy inexpressible and fully of glory.