

1 Peter 1:1-6

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Introduction:

Barbara Johnson tells of the time she was doing a radio call-in show when she received a phone call from a lady looking for advice. Her problem was that her husband was an alcoholic, her son was gay and her unmarried daughter had just told her she was pregnant. On top of all this, her house and burned, the contractor hired to rebuild it had co-mingled funds and now creditors were coming from every direction wanting their money now. And yet the Paul tells us in Philippians 4 to “Rejoice in the Lord **always**. I will say it again: Rejoice!” But how can you in a situation like that? And if you must in what should you be rejoicing? We also need to remember that Paul was in chains in Rome when he wrote Philippians, so in what was he rejoicing in those difficult circumstances. Well here in 1 Peter the things in which he was rejoicing are explained to us. And so, if we are to rejoice in difficult circumstances, it is good that we to know in what we should be rejoicing.

Context:

Let us look at the context in which Peter was writing.

- *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ.* Peter identifies himself clearly at the beginning of this letter and specifies that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ to identify himself as the Peter and not another. As we are fairly sure that he died in Rome around 68 A.D., it would appear that he wrote this letter to these Christians from Rome sometime between 60 and 68 A.D.
- *To God's elect.* We need to note that he was writing to Christians, to those chosen by God.
- *Strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.* This is the area that is modern day Turkey. Peter call these people to whom he was writing strangers or pilgrims in the world. This is no longer their home, their home is now heaven and so they are only strangers in this world. They have a different set of principles by which they live, which also makes them strangers. But they were also a people who were being persecuted for their faith in Jesus Christ. As we read through this epistle we find them being insulted (4^{4,14}), having accusations raised against them of wrong doing (2¹², 3¹⁶), being social ostracised and even occasionally begin beaten (2²⁰) for their belief in Jesus Christ. Although the persecutions were apparently not official, it looks as if a blind eye was cast towards any violence done against the Christians in this area.

Doctrine:

So, in what are we to rejoice? Well, in verse 6 we read “in this you greatly rejoice” and this is the key to the whole question. The in this can only refer to those things that Peter has referred to in verses 1 - 5 and if we were to summarise these five verses we would, as I will show you, come to the following conclusion:

We rejoice as Christians because of the great things that God has done for us, which are independent of our circumstances.

Consequence : If this is the case then we need to know what God has done for us before we can have a motive for rejoicing that is independent of our circumstances.



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Explanation:

So now let us start to look at these first five verses in Peter. And as we start to look closely at these first five verses there is something which ought to spring out at us and hit us between the eyes. These verses are all concerned with what God has done, is doing and has provided. There is nothing about what we have done or are doing. God alone is the focus of these verses. But why should this be important? If we are to rejoice despite difficult circumstances then the things in which we rejoice should be external to ourselves and things which are permanent and will never change. And that is why the focus on God. As a result we can rejoice always and our witness as Christians is strengthened as we are forced to look outside of ourselves to the great God we serve. So let us look in more detail at these things that God has done in what we are to rejoice. Well, the epistle tells us that it is written to...

- *To God's elect ... we have been chosen.* This is the first of the great things that Peter tells us. Those to whom he was writing and ourselves, if we truly belong to Christ, are God's elect. God has chosen us, we have not chosen God. But how were we chosen? Is it because of some merit in you and I. No, it is...
- *According to the foreknowledge of God the Father.* Foreknowledge can be taken in two ways. The first is that of knowing before hand what will happen, like a scientist who predicts an eclipse. He knows before hand that it will happen. This is also true of God, he knows all things before they happen. Ah yes you say, see God knew we would chose him so that is why he chose us. No, I am afraid not. It is also used in Scripture in the sense of appointing or organising before hand. Thus we find it being used interchangeable with the word predestined. **Ephesians 1¹¹** tells us that "in him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will". He planned that we would chose him! We see this also in Acts were we are told in **Acts 2²³** that Jesus "was handed over to you (the Jews) by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross." Christ's death was not an accident. God chose us because he loved us from "before the creation of the world" as Paul tells us in **Ephesians 1⁴**, and not because of anything we have done.
- *Free will.* But then you may ask what about our free will. Surely we have free will. Yes, you do have free will. But image that you had been brought up in little village far removed from any other town. At a young age you were told that chocolate ice cream was poisoness and all your friends were told the same thing as well. No one in the village would eat chocolate ice cream. You felt perfectly normal. It was generally accepted. But now a stranger comes into the town and one day you go around there for the afternoon. In the middle of the hot afternoon the hostess offers you a choice - vanilla ice cream or chocolate ice cream? What would you say? This is the problem with sin. It has so corrupted our natures that we view the things of God as poisoness to us. Our will is free. But we will not chose God, because of the fact that we are sinners. In fact Scripture uses many different terms to describe how corrupting has been the influence of sin. It describes us as being dead in our transgressions and sin (**Eph 2¹**), as being blind and unable to see (**Rev 3¹⁷**), as being powerless (**Rom 5⁶**), as being a slave to sin (**Acts 8²³**) and of having a heart of stone that needs to be replaced with a heart of flesh (**Ezek 11¹⁹**).
- *Through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.* If we are dead in our sins, then how can we be made alive so that we can respond to God? This is the work of the Holy Spirit who brings life (**John 6⁶³**). He makes us a new creation (**2 Corinthians 5¹⁷**). It is the Spirit that makes us alive



and enables us to seek and respond to Christ. He then continues to work in our life to encourage us to holiness and as a witness and seal that we have indeed been chosen by God. If we are to live in heaven after we die, we need to start to learn how to live for heaven there. Holiness is that the preparation for heaven. As **Hebrews 12¹⁴** tells us “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no-one will see the Lord.”

- *For obedience to Jesus Christ.* This is our part. This is why we are called by God. This is what he wants from us. It is our response to what God has done. God chooses us and sanctifies us that we might be obedient to Jesus Christ and all his commandments. As John tells us in **1 John 5³** “if we love God we will obey all he commands.”
- *And sprinkling by his blood.* In the Old Testament, it was required that an animal be sacrificed before sins could be forgiven. Leviticus 4 gives us the rules for the various people about what they needed to do in order to be forgiven of their sin. The common elements though are that they were to bring their sacrifice and then lay their hands upon its head and confess their sins over it. It was then slaughtered and the blood was sprinkled on the horns of the altar. In Exodus 24 we read that all the people agreed to obey all that God had commanded and the covenant of God was ratified by the sprinkling of blood on them. And as **Hebrews 9²²** tells us, “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.” We also need to be cleansed from our sin and declared to be righteous before God and the only way that can be achieved is by having the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ sprinkled on us. When God saves us we are declared righteous before God. We are made holy in his sight because we are then in Christ. This is what is called our justification.
- *Analogy:* Many people battle with this concept of God saving us. But they say, surely I had to do something. Yes you did, but not in your salvation but in response to what God has done in saving you. A analogy, which like all analogies cannot be pushed to far, is that of a young man in courtship with his girlfriend. He organises a candlelit dinner at a restaurant, buys her a huge bunch of her favourite flowers and organises for her favourite music to be played at the restaurant. After supper they go down to the beach. The moon is shining brightly and the water is calm. And there he proposes to her. The young lady has done nothing towards the evening except be there and respond. It is the same with our salvation.
- *Grace and peace be yours in abundance.* Peter can say this because it is God that gives his favour and his peace. God has promised both to us through Christ.
- *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!* We should give thanks to God for these great things he has done. Our circumstances should never so overwhelm us that we stop praising God for the great salvation he has wrought.
- *In his great mercy.* Now Peter changes to his emphasis from what God has done to what God has given us. The former is not possible without the latter. And he tells us that the cause of our salvation again lies in God. It was because of his great mercy that we were saved. What we deserved is hell and damnation, what we got is eternal life. Now that is mercy.
- *He has given us new birth.* We had no choice over this. We did not chose to be born in the flesh, we were. Likewise with our spiritual birth. As Paul tells us in **Ephesians 2^{1,5,6}** “As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ... But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions.” If we go back to our analogy, the first part we be that first the young man has to raise the lady to life before he can woe her! As Jesus said, we have to be born again and that is a work of the Spirit (Matt 3³⁻⁸).
- *Into a living hope.* We are not just born for no reason at all. No, we are born into a living hope, the hope of eternal life. Glory awaits us in heaven and as Paul tells us in **Romans 8¹⁸**,



“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” But how do we know that we will be raised again to eternal life?

- *Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* This is the ground of our believing that we will be raised to life and that we will spend eternity with God and Christ in heaven. This is the act of God the Father as Judge and of the Son as Conqueror. And a more solid foundation is difficult to imagine. But that is not all. Not only do we have a living hope, but we are also born again into...
- *And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.* Inheritances here on earth are fading and passing. Thieves can steal them, time can rot them. We may die before we get them. But this inheritance is perfectly safe because it is ...
- *Kept in heaven for you.* Nothing corruptible can enter heaven. God himself protects it. But you say, this is all very well, but how can I be sure I will reach heaven, when down here I am battered by temptations, persecutions and illnesses? How do I know that I will make heaven? This is a genuine concern and so Peter answers it. We will persevere because God is the one who is keeping us.
- *Who through faith are shielded by God's power.* Faith is a gift of God, **Ephesians 2⁸** tells us so “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.” We have a responsibility before God to exercise that faith he has given us. But it is through that faith that he has given us that we are shielded by God's power. If you have been chosen by God then he will make sure that you persevere to the end. He may not keep us from temptations, persecutions, illness or even death, but he does promise that we will reach heaven. Paul tells us in **Romans 8^{38,39}** that he was convinced that “neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” And in **2 Timothy 1¹²** Paul tells us that he was convinced that even though he was suffering for the gospel he was not ashamed because “ I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.” This does not mean however that we are to do nothing about our salvation. We are saved for obedience to Jesus Christ. If we are not being obedient it is a sign that we are not really saved, but only fooling ourselves. Such is the depth of our sin, that we can even deceive ourselves about such great things. The Pharisees and the scribes deceived themselves, as will the people Jesus mentions in **Matthew 7²¹⁻²³**. On the great day of judgement may will say to our Lord ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then he will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ And till when are we kept?
- *Until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.* Our salvation is complete. Christ ensured that. We await now only the final consummation, the great day of judgement, when we will be clothed with our immortal bodies and we will be with Christ forever. Then all will see that we are saved. And those that have ridiculed and thought that to follow Christ was foolishness will be ashamed, which is indeed a terrifying thought.

So these are the great things that should make us rejoice even in the most difficult of circumstances. And I think you will agree, that not to rejoice in these things is either a sign of great ingratitude or a sign that we do not fully understand the great salvation we have received. But such is the corruption of our hearts, that often we do not rejoice, but rather we grumble against the Lord. But now let us apply these great truths.



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Application:

- It should now be clear that it is possible for us to rejoice no matter what the circumstances because our reasons lie not within ourselves but within God.
- This should be a very powerful motive for wanting to serve God and avoid sin.
- It should send us to self-examination to see if we truly be in the faith or not as 2 Corinthians 13⁵ tells us to do. Use the tests in 1 John. It is possible for us to deceive ourselves as the Pharisees and the scribes were deceived in Jesus's time.
- It should be a motive for us to read his Word. We should want to find out more about what God has done for us so that our joy may be even greater. Peter tells us that it is these great things that fill us with inexpressible and glorious joy.
- It should encourage us in our witness for Christ. It is not our job to convert anyone - we cannot anyway. But we are called to disciple others and to witness to Christ and what he has done. If you truly believe these things it will free you from the great burden of having to convert people and leave you free to have compassion on them, to witness to them knowing that God will use even the weakest efforts and will send you to prayer to plead before the throne of grace for them.
- As I said, it should encourage us to pray for others.
- It shows us the seriousness of sin. Sin is not just some small problem. It makes us totally incapable of doing the thing we need most - of taking hold of Christ that we might be saved. In fact it makes us want to reject Christ and unless God in his great power steps in, there is no hope.
- That should make the unbeliever tremble lest God has not chosen him. If that is the case then he is predestined for hell, as Peter tells us later in this epistle (1 Peter 2⁸). So if you do not know that your sins are forgiven and that you are chosen of God, go plead with him. I am called to plead with you to go to God and I do. Hell is far worse than you can ever imagine. I cannot tell you whether you are chosen or not, you must go to Him who is able to save you. And do not delay. Go now.

Conclusion:

So in conclusion, we rejoice as Christians because of the great things that God has done for us, which are independent of our circumstances. Are you?



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