

Joy no matter what

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[0 : 00] But honestly, I am just encouraged myself, so thank you, and keep going, keep pressing on, keep holding on to Christ, because that is the way to live in this world, and it's just been a joy to have that time with you, so thank you.

I have just two book recommendations to add to the list. I forgot to email these in, so they're not on the list itself. Just, if you wanted a short book that unpacks how we got to where we got to in our culture today, some of the reasons why these different agendas that we've been thinking about have been so prosperous, and at least the beginning of articulating how we as the Church can and should respond.

It's a short book, in fact, it's only 117 pages long, but it's called *That Hideous Strength, How the West Was Lost*, and then a subtitle, dramatic, *The Cancer of Cultural Marxism in the Church, The World and the Gospel of Change*, by a guy called Melvin Tinker. Never met him, but I've read this book, and I found it really, really helpful.

It's not going to give you all the answers. Many of these books that try to analyse culture don't manage to do that. That's not really their purpose, but just a short, succinct, helpful, instructive analysis of how we got to where we got to, I really would recommend this book to you. I was told once that every Christian should have one book that they aim to read, you know, in a year, other than the Bible. So you pick your favourite book, you try and make sure at some point in the year, you read through it, and it's got to be, you know, it's got to be good, it's got to be like a genuine theology book, not like, I mean, I love Narnia, but that's pretty easy to read, isn't it?

So for me, it's this book by John Owen, he was a Puritan writer, it's called *The Glory of Christ*, abridged and made easy to read. Let me say that again, abridged, made easy to read.

[1 : 57] And the reason I stress that is because John Owen is notoriously difficult to read. I haven't really even bothered to attempt in some of his older writings, but I have read this. And it was written right before he died, I think it was published after he had died.

This is one of his last, if not his last writing, and it is a reflection on the person of Jesus, and in particular, Owen will walk you through how it is, as a Christian, you can think about Jesus in lots of different ways, and how we see him by faith in this life, and then how we'll see him by sight in that life that is to come.

And it is just immensely heartwarming. It will stir your soul to hear this old pastor, as he then was, talk so wonderfully about the person of Jesus Christ. I cannot recommend it enough.

So if you do want something just to thrill your soul about the person of Jesus, for me anyway, this has been immensely helpful. So the *Gospel of Christ*, you can find it on Amazon, find it on the Banners website, I guess ICM as well, they'll probably sell it too. Look online, it's well worth seven, eight pounds, whatever it is you need to spend to get it. So that's that.

Great. Let's read from God's words together. Turn with me please to 1 Peter chapter 1. 1 Peter chapter 1. We'll read the first 12 verses together.

[3 : 33] Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood, grace and peace be yours in abundance.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

In all this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[5 : 00] Concerning this salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Even angels long to look into these things. And our title for this session this afternoon is Joy No Matter What.

And thinking about that bit in our overarching title for this week, Outnumbered, or this weekend rather. Yes, I've just added an extra daze to it. So, Outnumbered but happy.

Outnumbered but happy. There was a famous preacher in London, Westminster Chapel, Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones. He said frequently, certainly more than once, that sometimes the worst advertisement for Christianity, Christians.

[6 : 14] And what he was getting at was a tendency that he saw in his day and age for Christians to appear very unhappy. The pressures of modern life and culture declining and church attendance falling and the difficulties of living the Christian life in a broken world and our own awareness and knowledge of our sin and our struggle and battle with our own weaknesses and the enemy, Satan, who attacks us, all leading us to that position of feeling downcast, feeling weary, feeling like there's no point.

And sometimes that's precisely what the Christian life can feel like. Let's be honest about that. It can be a daily struggle. A daily, as it were, irritation.

Something that you know that you want to feel and love and believe in Jesus more, but just having even a little bit of joy can feel so distant and so impossible.

And that's why it's good for us, to think about these things together from this passage. So we stand further back and look what we've seen so far. What have we seen? We've seen, first of all, that we are built on a solid foundation, the foundation of Jesus Christ.

We're part of this great building project that God is doing. Jesus is the living stone. We who believe in him, in contrast to those who reject him, like living stones are being built into the place where God meets with his people.

[7 : 48] And then we reach that climax in chapter 2. All these privileges that are ours in Christ. We're a chosen people, selected by God, set apart by God, for God.

We're a royal priesthood. We have access to God, every one of us, equal access in Jesus to the Father. And we serve God, all of us together, as we drew out earlier today.

All of us are ministers in that sense. We are all servants of the Most High God. And then we're a holy nation. We reflect God's character. We reflect not just his character, but the values that his word teaches, the values of the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

We are, as it were, the custodians, the representatives, the ambassadors of those values. And we take them out. And we model them to a watching world. And we're God's special possession.

So that even though God owns everything, there is a unique way in which his people, his blood-bought people, the ones he sent his son to die for, uniquely belong to him.

[8 : 50] In a dynamic and real and thrilling relationship with our creator. Once we were not a people, this is the genius, the power, the wonder of the gospel. Once we were not a people, but supernaturally, God himself, the creator of all, has chosen, selected, worked in you to make you one of his children.

And then from that, we thought this morning about the better story. It's not even a better story. It is the best story. A story that is rooted in the very beginning of all of time when God established certain norms for the good, not just of his people, but for everyone that he created, for all of

humanity, the truth that you were made in God's image.

You know, these agendas, as Luke drew out, that borrow from Christianity, the language of equality, for example. Our answer to that is that God got there first.

At the very beginning, Genesis, chapter 1, male and female, he created them. Equal, different, but equal in the sight of God. And this better story that we have is a story that celebrates and really believes in the actual genuine equality of every human being and the dignity that every human being has because they're an image bearer.

It's true of all of your friends, all of your family, and every human being in the world, an image bearer of God. The better story is that God has given to humanity this intrinsic dignity.

[10:24] This equality already exists. God got there first before any of these subsequent ideologies came up with the idea and then acted as if they'd come up with it. God got there first.

This better story that God's ways are genuinely, truly, really, I promise you the very best for all of humanity. And I never tire of saying this because this is what I think has gone wrong.

There's a crisis of confidence in the church. There's a crisis of confidence in our own lives and in our own experience. It becomes so difficult because we are so swamped and indoctrinated despite our best efforts by the thinking of the world around about us.

It seeps in. It creeps in. It gets in. And before we know it, it has subtly wormed its way in, even to our churches. And so we lose something of the confidence that God's ways are good.

As Luke drew out that powerful, powerful point, God is good. So good. So, so good.

[11:27] And if all you take away from today is that you go home and you repeat that to yourself again and again and again and you spend the rest of your life telling yourself that truth, you will do yourself a lot of good yourself.

God is good. When it comes to creation, there's a, there's actually a passage in Job. It's a sermon to one person.

God is preaching to Job. And he's questioning him. And for some reason, it's one of my favorite verses in all of Scripture. And he asked Job, you know, were you there?

Were you there when I made the earth? Were you there when I stretched it out on its measuring line? Were you there when the morning stars sang for joy as they looked out and all that had been created?

And that picture to me, this picture of this good world that reflects this good God, so much so that the angels or the stars, depending on what it's referring to, that they sang for joy as they saw the beauty of what God had made.

[12:30] This is our story. A story, of course, that climaxes in the coming and the entering into this world of Jesus Christ to reclaim, to repurchase, to buy a people for God, to die in their place.

You know, this message that we have about equality and dignity, people are crying out for it. That's why they're going to these other ideologies, because they all are desperately seeking to be part of something bigger than themselves.

They want to feel part of a story that is beyond them, and we have an answer to that, which is this better story. And if we know it, take it into our hearts, learn it, learn how to communicate it, what good could be done in the name of Jesus if we went out with our friends and we told them sensitively, lovingly, but truthfully this better story?

And then we delved into more nitty detail, didn't we? Looked at some of the challenges, the challenges on gender, the challenges on the trans issue, on homosexuality. These are, as Luke brilliantly said, these are people that we're talking about, real people with real problems, with real difficulties, and we have to learn how to respond to them.

It's a big danger, I think, for me and those I work with in our work at CARE, that very often we do deal, so often, at a theoretical level. We talk about these movements and ideologies and our opponents and what we're trying to do, and we forget that actually, behind all of our words, behind all of the language, there are real people who are suffering.

[14:01] That there's the woman with an unplanned pregnancy whose partner is putting pressure on her to go and have an abortion. That there's the person who genuinely is struggling with gender dysphoria and is completely disorientated and doesn't know how to respond to it and isn't receiving any help.

There's the Christian in our own church who is embarrassed because they feel same-sex attracted. What are they hearing from us with our words, with our comments, the way that we talk about these

issues?

What a challenge for us in this generation to be light, to be salt, to be gracious in how we speak about these things. And as we think about those challenges that are coming in upon us, there is a very real temptation, a very real likelihood that we will just feel overwhelmed by some of it. Notwithstanding the better story, notwithstanding the truths that we have thought about, we are so small compared to these challenges. We're just mere human beings, dust of the earth. And yet we are called by God to stand and be his ambassadors and his witnesses, outnumbered completely by so many more who are against us, it seems, than those who are for us, except for God.

[15:22] God who is on our side. God who is 100% for us. And that truth, and a number of others that we're going to see in a moment, means that as we prepare to go back out into the world, as this weekend comes to a close, we can go determined to tell that better story, determined to live for Christ, not just, as it were, by clinging on with our fingertips, but to live confidently and to live joyfully in front of a watching world.

Which takes us into this whole concept, this whole idea of living with joy no matter what. It is one of the most unique things about Christianity that you can be a Christian who is under the cosh, under pressure, under threat, in the deepest, darkest difficulty you can imagine, and yet you can be just like Paul, just like Silas.

What were they doing in prison? What were they doing? They were singing. They were singing hymns. They were given expression to a joy that is not dictated to by circumstances, that is not, as it were, affected by circumstances, a joy that is so real and so true and so deep and so magnificent that you can know it and experience it even in the valley of the shadow of death.

Because it is a joy rooted not in what is happening to you, it is rooted and grounded in Christ. This is Christianity. Christianity. Christianity is Christ.

It is all about him. Day by day by day as we'll see in a few moments, as Christians, we come back to Christ. We go to Christ. We choose to believe in Christ.

[17:00] The greatest person who ever walked on this earth. The founder of our faith. The hero that we can trust. Heaven's champion himself. And what a privilege.

The Bible says, whatever is good, whatever is right, whatever is noble, whatever is excellent, think on these things. I was once at a youth camp and in the morning at breakfast they were singing an Ed Sheeran song.

Nothing wrong with that. I don't listen to him myself, but, well I have, but, he's alright, isn't he? A bit nervous. He's ginger.

That, that, that basically is a sin. No, no, no. It's alright. I'm Scottish. I can say these things.

Anyway, they were singing an Ed Sheeran song at breakfast and I, I was in a funny mood. It was annoying me. I'm not very good at breakfast times and in my morning talk I am, rather cruelly I feel, asked him this question.

[18:05] I said, okay, so, when something goes wrong, you know, and you need something to sing because that's what we do sometimes when things go wrong. It's an Ed Sheeran song really going to help you.

They knew all the lyrics. That's what stayed with me. They knew all the lyrics. So I said, do you know the lyrics to any Christian songs off by heart? Could you do that instead? It's a bit of a twee point, but actually, what I was trying to get at was, in order to experience this joy that we're going to see in a moment, one of the things we need to be doing is hiding God's word in our hearts.

learning it, memorizing it. Gosh, there's an old-fashioned idea. Memorize scripture. No, do it. You know what? William Wilberforce used to go across Clapham Common on his way to the Houses of Parliament learning Psalm 119 off by heart.

The biggest psalm in the Bible. 176 verses. So next year, I probably won't be here. I'm going to send a message. I'm going to find out which one of you's learned at Psalm 119 off by heart.

You can send me a WhatsApp audio file. But what a wonderful thing to do. Anyway, this is what true Christianity is. It is by its nature joyful.

[19:19] And that means as we face this challenge together, we need to fight for this joy. And I hope as we come to this chapter here and as we look at this passage, particularly from verse 3 down to verse 9, that we'll be able to learn practical lessons about where this joy comes from and how it is possible.

Because for me, it's the joy that Peter speaks about in verses 3 to 9 that is the most surprising thing in this passage. The thing that takes me by surprise as I read it is the fact that they were rejoicing and knowing this joy.

But we'll come on to that. Just thinking about joy for a moment, you may know this, you probably do, but just its importance, it is something that is commanded in Scripture. This is not an option. This is not something that you can choose to do if you want to.

Now, if at the moment that is your particular struggle, you know that you should rejoice, but you know that you're not rejoicing, I say again, this is a command, but there is hope.

Because sometimes joy is difficult, and we'll come on to that. But let's just start here. This is a command. Delight yourself in the Lord. Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again.

[20 : 25] Rejoice. That's what Paul says in Philippians 4, in verse 4. Go through the Psalms, and you'll find this as a repeated refrain. Rejoice in the Lord. Delight in the Lord. But more than that, it's not just a command.

It is something that is intrinsic to who God is. He is a joyful God. And one of the things that God does is he rejoices over us as his people by singing over us.

Because he takes a delight in us. Luke mentioned there in Genesis 1, that first hint at the Trinity, the fact that God is one, but God is also three, three persons, one God.

There is a mutual joy in the relationships between the members of the Trinity. And you'll find expression to that in different passages of Scripture. You don't have time to look at them now. But it is part of who God is.

If it's part of who God is, then it's only natural that his people will reflect something of that joy in the world. Thirdly, joy is also a source of strength in the Christian life.

[21 : 20] Nehemiah 8 and verse 10, the joy of the Lord is my strength. And Paul and Silas in prison are a wonderful illustration of that. You've maybe heard of famous missionaries, Christians on the front line who have given evidence to this.

That in the midst of sorrow and sadness and difficulty and depression even, that nonetheless the joy of the Lord is what kept them going. The joy that comes from thinking about who God is and from knowing what God has done for you.

I cannot stress this enough that Christianity in its truest form is not simply a matter of how much you know up here. Our hearts are involved. Our hearts are engaged.

God has dealt with us. The gospel has come to us as whole people. God is not simply interested in what you think. He is interested in what you feel as well. And God is ultimately glorified when we evidence and when we show that we are enjoying God.

What is the chief end of man? And to enjoy him forever. I've heard sermons on the first. I've very rarely heard sermons on the last part.

[22 : 33] But what a treat. How phenomenal is that? That we come to a God who's not cold and distant and uninvolved and unloving. We come to a God who we can enjoy.

Just as we enjoy relationships with one another. As we experience the joy of love and companionship and friendship. How much more satisfying is our God, Father, Son and Spirit whom we have come to know, come to love and have experienced his grace and his work in our life.

It is just miraculous that any one of us are here in this room because God has supernaturally worked in you. In you. You must be careful here unless I insult you again like I did the first night.

We're not brilliant. Not by the world's standards. Yet God in grace has worked in you. The sovereign God has done something in your life. He has acted. He's taken the initiative.

So you find yourself here. So joy is commanded. Joy is intrinsic to who God is. Joy is a source of strength for us as we live the Christian life. But here's the other thing. Joy is also part of our witness to the world.

[23 : 41] Because it is a witness, isn't it? It is a witness to the fact that we are living and trusting in someone greater than ourselves when even when our circumstances to the outside world appear absolutely diabolically bad to the point where they're wincing and expressing sympathy and yet they're mystified by the fact that in that sadness you are still demonstrating joy.

only joy in God proves that durable that no matter what you are able to keep trusting, able to keep going, able to keep believing and able to evidence even in that a serenity, a calmness of spirit and above all a joy in God and the more that you know God, the more that you enter deeper and deeper and deeper into your relationship with your God, I think the more you will enjoy him.

Well let's come then to this passage together. Three things. Firstly, the situation. The situation. What's going on with these Christians, these exiles who are scattered, these people that God has changed, these Jew and Gentile that God has brought together in different congregations in a part of the world that's now mostly modern day Turkey that Peter's writing to. What is going on in their lives? What has been the occasion for this letter? Why is Peter writing to them? It wasn't just that he was bored one day and fancied writing a letter. There's a purpose going on here.

And again, we see three things here. Firstly, we read that they are rejoicing. Verse 6. In all this, you greatly rejoice. So not just, as it were, rejoicing, but they're greatly rejoicing.

[25 : 21] It is something that Peter knows is true about them, something that is characteristic of these believers here in Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia that they are a rejoicing people.

And as we think about that word rejoicing, the word means delighting in God. That's what rejoicing is, delighting in God. There's a gladness in the hearts and minds of these believers as they are glad in the Lord.

Glad in the Lord. And they're giving evidence of this. And so Peter actually connects it, as we'll see later, to various truths that we'll unpack in a moment. But that's the first thing. The first thing to note is that they are greatly rejoicing.

And immediately, antennae going off in our minds, we're thinking, right, okay, okay, so is that normal? Is that a good thing? Yes. Yes, it's a great thing. It's a good thing. It's commanded.

We're remembering that. Great. What's the second thing we know about their situation? Verse 6 again. In all this, you greatly rejoice, though now, for a little while, you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

[26 : 26] So they're experiencing trials. And you notice how general Peter is. He doesn't specify a specific trial. He doesn't say, some of you have been ill, some of you have got some debilitating condition, some of you have been persecuted, some of you have been mocked.

He doesn't. He leaves it as open as you can imagine. Some of you have been experiencing trials. These are the things that get in the way. They're the problems, the difficulties, the stones that cause us to stumble a little bit, the problems of life, the battles that we face.

Scripture is full of examples of these trials. There's Joseph, that great trial of faith when he was put into the pit and sold into slavery. There's Moses as well, that trial of faith out in the wilderness.

There's the people of God, 40 years wandering in the wilderness. There's David as well, the trial when he was on the run from King Saul even though he'd been anointed as king.

And how perplexed he must have been. Why is God doing this to me? That's the form that trials often take. Why? Why? Why God? The things that cause us to ask why of God. They're the trials of life.

[27 : 33] And we notice, secondly, that Peter does add a qualification to these trials, though now for a little while. Why does he say that? Well, I think Peter is teaching exactly what Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 4.

Our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal weight of glory. So as you think about trials, here's the thing you need to remember, as painful as they are, there's a time limit on those trials.

There is a day coming when trials will vanish completely from your life. And thinking that way, counterintuitively, but Christianly, recognizing your life, it's going to be hard because you're all young, so am I.

I am young. Yeah. No, I am. Your life is short compared to eternity to come. That's what Peter's saying.

They've come upon you. There's a qualification and encouragement just for a little while, but nevertheless, they're causing grief. Verse 6 again. You may have had to suffer grief, pain, sorrow, hardship.

[28 : 43] Here's the reality of the Christian life. Do you see what we've got here together? We've had rejoicing, that's what he says first, and then trials, and grief. One of the most important things I ever learned about joy and rejoicing.

I used to really struggle, I was saying over the break before this meeting, I used to really struggle with what Paul says. I still do struggle with what Paul says. Rejoice in the Lord always. And that's a

kick enough in the stomach.

Then he says, I will say it again, rejoice. And you're thinking, thanks. Rejoice in the Lord always. Again, I will say rejoice. But I think it's because I used to think that I must, as it were, get rid of every other emotion and just be rejoicing.

As if any sadness I was experiencing, any sorrow, any other worries or thoughts or whatever it might be, that somehow I just had to push that out of my mind, clear my mind, so I could just rejoice.

It's completely unrealistic. There might be times where that happens, brief windows where it happens, but we're more complicated than that. We have emotions of different kinds going on at the same time.

[29 : 48] But you see, what's different about this rejoicing is it's not grounded in circumstance, it is grounded in the unchanging character of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. So it's not rejoicing at the absence of other emotions.

It is experiencing the grief that comes through trials but nevertheless lifting up your head and finding within that some joy in the Lord.

Because no matter how bad the situation may get in your life or how bad it is today, right now, at whatever time it is, on Saturday afternoon, on the 7th of September, 2019, in Whitby, no matter how desperate your situation is, and I don't know, it is still true that you are saved by God, by His grace. It is still true that you are a child of the living God. It is still true that your sins in their entirety have been dealt with and washed away.

It is still true that the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, dwells in your heart by faith. It is still true that everything that God has promised to give you will come to you.

[30 : 59] There is nothing in this life that will stop that from happening. So, to quote Lloyd-Jones again, let's get practical. What do we do? What's one of the reasons why we struggle for joy?

It's because we listen to ourselves more than we preach to ourselves. We listen to ourselves more than we preach. And that actually came from a series of sermons on Psalm 42, where the psalmist is expressing his distress, and then there's a refrain that you get in 42 and Psalm 43, why are you downcast, O my soul?

Why so disturbed within me? The psalmist takes himself to task and preaches truth to himself. We can do that. You can do it when you wake up first thing in the morning.

C.J. Mahaney says this, preach the gospel to yourself first thing when you wake up. Remind yourself of who God is, what he's done for you in Christ. It doesn't have to be a half-hour sermon. Just a couple of minutes will do. Think of a verse. You know, my brother used to do this, just getting practical again, he used to put a verse, he had a bed with bedboards, obviously, he used to put a verse just on his bedboard so that the first thing that he woke up would be that verse.

[32 : 08] Now when I saw it, the first thing I said was, well what happens if you wake up on the other side? But it was still an absolutely brilliant idea. He would put one on his chest of drawers, on the top one, because that was the first one that he went to.

He put a verse there. All these are really, really good ideas. Get an app on your phone. You can get fighter verses on your phone. Not about boxing, obviously. About living for Jesus.

Verses, so that the first thing that your mind encounters as you wake up is God's truth. As it were, to shape your reality and your perceptions as you begin the day. What's the third thing?

We must press on. What's the third thing we find out about these believers? Well we must travel down to verse 8. So come down to verse 8. Where Peter says this, though you do not see him, you love him, that is Jesus, even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

Now, here's something interesting. Let me just back up a minute. The word rejoice and the word joy, very similar.

[33 : 11] The word for rejoice, the Greek word, is only found in New Testament Greek, apparently. That's what I read. In other words, Greek writers at the time did not have this concept.

This is unique to Christianity. That would make sense because we know Jesus, right? And it's rejoicing in Jesus. The joy that Peter then speaks about in verse 8, this is mind-boggling.

He said they're rejoicing even though they're in trials. That's amazing. The joy he speaks about in verse 8 is a joy that is even deeper and even greater than the rejoicing he speaks about in verse 6 because he says it is an inexpressible joy.

It is a joy so fundamental, so buried deep in our hearts that words cannot express it. And then you notice it's a glorious joy. The word connected to the idea of glory meaning glory.

A glorious joy. That is, I think, a heavenly joy. It is, as it were, the joy of heaven that's broken into your life now as a foretaste of that even greater joy that will be yours when you reach the promised land.

[34 : 15] Now, if you read some old commentators, they'll tell you that all Peter is speaking about in verse 8 is a joy that comes when you get to heaven. They are both right and they are wrong. It is absolutely true that the joy we experience in glory will be in times inexpressible and glorious, but Peter, the tense that he uses here and in verse 6 is the present tense meaning this was true of these believers right now.

These believers were experiencing a joy that was without words. A joy so real, so profound, so deep in God that words were not enough to express it.

There was a gladness in the Lord, a delight in their souls and as I say, do you not want to know that joy? Do you not want to experience something of it? Does it just seem so distant and so impossible that it must be for super-Christians who are far more holy than we are?

But it's fascinating, isn't it, that Peter writes to the whole church here. He's not written this section to a special subgroup within these churches. He's writing to Jews, to Gentiles, to men, to women, to slaves, to masters.

He's writing to everybody and saying they were all together filled with this incredible joy. Do you want that joy? It's possible. This isn't something that is outside of us as it were that is just unobtainable.

[35 : 43] If these believers sharing in the same privileges that we have, if they were experiencing this joy, why not us? So then what's the explanation? We've seen the situation, they're rejoicing, they're in trial and yet they're still filled with this joy.

What's the explanation? Firstly, back up to verse 3. In God's mercy he's given them new birth. This is where it all begins. Verse 3.

In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. Now why is this important?

Well it's the secret to this joy. This joy belongs to believers. It belongs to those who have received the new birth that Peter speaks about here. The same thing that the Apostle John spoke about when he gave that account in John's Gospel chapter 3 when Nicodemus came to see Jesus.

Jesus said you must be born again. There must be a supernatural change that takes place within you. Where does that come from? It comes from God. It says in the text in his great mercy he, that is God, has given us new birth.

[36 : 51] God has acted on your soul soul to change you from the inside out to implant within you by his power through his spirit new life.

So that as a consequence you are enabled to believe and to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and became a child of God. It all began with this supernatural God created work.

The greatest act of creation that God does is not when he created the heavens and the earth in six days and all very good. Not one part of creation objected to being created.

It wasn't like he made the stars and they went well he didn't want to be created. But in the new birth it's even more remarkable because God does it to his enemies. God takes those like us implacably filled with hatred towards him resolved to shake our fists in his faith determined to get rid of him and he just comes and he takes your stony heart and he breaks it and he gives you a new heart.

None of us can do that to another human being but he can and he's done it to the people that I am looking at to myself. Why? Why? Because we are good?

[38 : 08] No, because of his mercy. Not just his mercy his great mercy. But then we must press on. What's the other explanation? Well secondly they have hope.

New birth into a living hope. Verse 3 through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Keller Tim Keller speaks about the fact that all human beings have a hope shaped whole in their hearts. Every human being searches for hope and the world desperately seeks it looking all around for hope finding it in lots of different places but it never satisfies and it never lasts and it is not of the same order and same quality and same character as the hope that Peter speaks about here.

In New Testament terminology hope is a confident expectation that that which you are hoping in will be delivered. It's a world apart from the kind of things we say I hope to go home to London tonight. I hope to but it's not guaranteed. This is something different. And do you notice Peter uses this very interesting description. He says it's a living hope which suggests that this is a hope that can grow that can develop that can grow stronger.

[39 : 20] It's a living hope it's not a dead hope or a dull hope it's a living hope. It's something that's dynamic it has an effect upon our lives. And we immediately ask ourselves well fine great what did I hope in?

Well then we come down to verse 4 into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.

That by the way that line there this inheritance is kept in heaven for you is the answer to anyone who would suggest that the gospel is all about getting rich in this life. An inheritance is something you receive normally when someone else dies right?

They die you receive an inheritance that's in an earthly sense. Well you see some people teach that God wants us all to be rich that's really the good news of the gospels rubbish absolute rubbish this inheritance is not as it were kept on earth for you it's given to you but it's kept in heaven you will receive it when you die and when you enter into that world that is to come when you go to be with Christ you will become the recipient of this inheritance what is the inheritance?

Well Paul gives us a clue in Ephesians where he prays that the eyes of our hearts might be opened so that we might know the riches of our inheritance or his inheritance in us let me put it like this I think the inheritance that Peter speaks about here if I could summarize it is we will receive God in all his fullness we will enter into that new world and in a richer and deeper and more magnificent way we will know him love him and experience God in a way greater than anything we can experience in this life it is the confident hope that God will keep you until you come into that inheritance it is the knowledge that all will be kept for you locked up in the safest vault that there is it is the knowledge that when Jesus says he's going to prepare a place for you he really is preparing a place for you and it will be kept for you and unlike buying a house here or renting a property here [41 : 35] I just rented a flat took me weeks tried numerous places the last minute constant let downs one of them we had everything secure I'd even begun packing my room got a phone call from the agent that said it was all off just like that good news is that's not this inheritance this inheritance the place that Christ is preparing for you will absolutely be given to you and there's a sense in which the reason that we can rejoice is because we're able to think about heaven now and about this inheritance now and experience some of its power in our life now for it then to be realized when we get there a Christian is someone who lives with an eye upon heaven right we're citizens of heaven we're to live with thoughts of heaven we're to be heavenly minded says Paul in Colossians there was a great old dead Puritan writer Richard Sibbes it was said of Richard Sibbes that heaven was in Richard Sibbes before Richard Sibbes was in heaven because there was something about him about how he thought about heaven do you ever think about it do you ever think about all that is to come do you ever think about the fact that this life is a mist it's a vapor compared to the life in Jesus' presence seeing him face to face belonging with every single believer from every tribe and every nation united together with one tongue singing praises to our God for all of eternity never bored never unsatisfied never disappointed no decay no death no setbacks no illness no trials no problems not in that place that's where you're going that is where we're going so what joy

I can have now as I think about all that my God is going to give to me though I am unworthy it's all possible through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead the resurrection of Jesus Christ was God the Father's way of saying I am satisfied with all that you have done my son I keep my promise to you I've raised you from the dead I'm going to seat you at the right hand we're going to build this kingdom that belongs to me and to you we're going to gather everyone from every tribe from the east and from the west from the north and from the south we're going to come together until all is made new we can go on though they can rejoice and have joy because of the new birth because they have hope because they have an inheritance all made possible through the resurrection of Jesus Christ kept for them by God's power that's verse 5 who by faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the last time it's just great isn't it God's power many mighties in this world only one almighty that power that same power that raised Jesus from the dead is working in you will keep you until the end but we must press on here's the

ultimate reason why we must travel down now to verse 8 there's more I could say verse 7 for example is another reason it's because they have a knowledge because Peter teaches them that there's a reason that trials come it's so that their faith is matured is tested is strengthened but I won't dwell on that because I want to get to verse 8 which says this though you have not seen him you love him and even though you do not see him now you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy for you are receiving the end result of your faith the salvation of your souls what is the single greatest reason that you and I can know this joy can rejoice in the Lord it is Jesus Christ it is a daily living real dynamic relationship every second of every minute of every hour of every day with Jesus himself with the King of Kings with the Lord of Lords with our brother our friend our Saviour our Lord and coming to him day by day means listening to him hearing his voice as he speaks to us through his word coming to Jesus day by day having friendship with him means reading about his life and learning about his character it is seeing him as he grew in wisdom from a young age it's hearing him as he spoke to the great minds of the day when he was first taken to the temple it's hearing his passion as he preached that he was the fulfillment of all the Old Testament prophecies that he had come to give sight to the blind and to make the lame leap for joy it's seeing the way he was so patient with his disciples though they let him down again and again and again how faithful he was how loyal he was how kind he was even when Peter disowned him at his hour of need

Jesus didn't call down fire and fury on him he simply looked at him and even that was a look of love because Peter needed to be convicted and as Peter saw what he had done and as he broke as it were into tears what did Jesus do when he was resurrected he didn't say where were you when I needed you that's what I would have done but Jesus Jesus forgave him taught him a lesson reinstated him it's Jesus who gathered his disciples after he was resurrected just before he was to teach them for 40 days and he appeared to them on the shore and he said come come and have breakfast breakfast with me breakfast with the creator of the universe breakfast with the one who had made them breakfast with the one who had just died and was raised to life you know I cannot stress this enough Christ loves you so much with a love that is deeper and wider and higher than we can ever imagine and here in the west in Britain we're embarrassed by any show of emotion why?

Christ is the ultimate treasure the greatest pearl see him in the garden at Gethsemane see him on his knees imagine you were there you crept forward you parted the branches imagine that you were able to speak to him in that moment as he was praying to his father you dared to interrupt him my lord my saviour what is wrong?

[48 : 16] and he would turn and he would look at you and I'm sure that he would say I am doing this for you this agony this hell that I must go to I am doing it for you so that you do not have to experience it hear him hear him on the cross father forgive them they don't know what they're doing my God my God why have you forsaken me and hear that triumphant piercing cry it is finished and then see him raised to life see him ascended to the right hand think of him think of him as Psalm 110 pictures him seated at the right hand of father God ruling and reigning everywhere think about his love his mercy his gentleness his wisdom his control of the wind and the waves what I'm getting across

I hope is that there's so much to think about and you'll spend the rest of your life thinking about Jesus and it will never be a waste of your time if you choose not to watch that next episode immediately but just spend 20 minutes thinking about Jesus do you think you're going to do damage to your soul and guess what with Netflix you'll still be able to watch it in 20 minutes but can we not find it within ourselves to spend more time with Jesus who's done all that for us maybe this is our problem maybe this is why we don't know joy because we're not actually experiencing daily friendship and fellowship with Jesus we give him snatches of our time we can do more than that can't we and for your final encouragement Jesus longs to experience this with you and I know that because of what Jesus himself said to a church that was so rubbish he wanted to spit them out of his mouth Revelation chapter 3 the church in Laodicea they're lukewarm this isn't the lukewarm one forget I said that just listen to this instead

Revelation chapter 3 verse 19 those whom I love I rebuke and discipline so be earnest and repent here I am I stand at the door and knock if anyone hears my voice and opens the door I will come in and eat with that person and they with me that's a promise it's a marvellous picture of the love of Christ that though we often shut the door of our hearts to him he comes and I love that he knocks

you know I'd pound I'd kick that door I'd tell you you were an idiot for being so stupid for locking me out but he comes he knocks and he promises if you open the door of your hearts if you open yourself up for friendship and fellowship with Jesus he will come and eat with you back here in 1 Peter though you have not seen him you love him that's faith isn't it by faith we believe in things not seen and trust in all that he has done by faith we believe in what God has recorded in his word and yet the promise is that experiencing

Jesus and friendship with him will be even greater in that world that is to come think of it like this here's I think how the New Testament sees it now there's many other examples you could use but here's one I tried a few weeks ago so about four months ago my niece was born first baby in the family as it were I was so excited I really was I bombarded my brother with messages he got really annoyed I was so excited now I hadn't seen her I didn't even get a picture I didn't want a picture in the you know yeah didn't want a picture then but when I found out she was born if not even before I loved her I loved her simply because she was part of the family I loved her even though I'd not seen her even though I'd not set eyes upon her just the mere knowledge of who she was that she was a person she was part of the family I loved her but then when I went to see her about four or five weeks later and I actually saw her it wasn't that I hadn't loved her before it was that I was experiencing her in a much more meaningful way as I finally got to hold her in my arms and as she showed me how much she loved me by being sick rude but it's something like that isn't it we know him we want to know him more like Paul

Philippians 3 everything else is rubbish compared to knowing Christ and as we go on this adventure together as we go and learn more about Christ and as we hear his words and as we do so as a community of people as we as we see Christ in one another this is one of the other I could go on about this I must be quick this is one of the great reasons why you need to be in a local church which you are which is great never stop being in a local church because there you're with people and you will see Jesus in them and in different ways you'll see Jesus in the way that that one person over there always has a kind word for that other person though they are super annoying you'll see Jesus as the pastor preaches Christ faithfully from the word you'll see it in your parents the way that they interact if they're at church you might see it in brothers and sisters you might see it in the person who is just always faithful all the time always doing the jobs that no one else thinks of you're seeing Christ modeled shown to you that you can learn that you can rejoice and that you can know Christ better he is the deepest and most satisfying relationship which is why if you're single and struggling with singleness there's good news and as Luke said marriage is not the be all and end all that there are other relationships other than that as Luke said that we can find satisfaction in supremely in Christ himself so if you are single let me encourage you to focus on your relationship with Christ and God will take care of the rest pursue Christ follow Christ do it in preparation if God provides someone in due time because hopefully if they're a Christian that's what they'll be looking for they'll be looking for

[54 : 35] Christ likeness in your conduct so follow Christ pursue him as I come to a close what do we need to do we've seen here that these believers were rejoicing though they were in trials and they knew a joy so deep that words could not express it we've seen that that was possible because they'd been born again because they had a living hope all of God's mercy they had an inheritance that could never perish spoil or fade just Peter piles on the words to make the point this inheritance God has got it it's all secure it's locked up in heaven you're shielded by his faith they could rejoice not only for those reasons but also because they knew that their trials were working on their faith strengthening their faith but supremely they could rejoice because they knew Jesus Christ and that to me is the wonder of Christianity Christianity is about God coming down stepping in intervening taking the initiative doing what you and I could never do and Christ wants to know you better he knows you perfectly but he wants a deeper relationship with you and he's so gentle and so wise that he stands at the door of your heart and he says let me in let's have fellowship together feast then on his word because it's in his word that we encounter Christ keep going to church when every fiber of your body is screaming at you to just give up but above all take time to meditate on the person of Jesus Christ and to think about it think about what he's done you know the same guy who wrote this book he once said this the failure of Christians to think about the privileges that are ours in Christ is our sin as well as our folly or to put it in modern parlance it's just pretty stupid to not think about the privileges that are ours in Christ think again about how often the New Testament writers just simply hold up Christ again and again and again in your Christian lives your greatest need will be to come back to Christ to come back to Jesus that rock that we are built upon that foundation that we stand

upon the one who came whose glory you have seen by faith and the one who you will see face to face have you ever thought about that you'll be able to look Jesus in the eye with resurrected eyes and you won't fall down as it were dead but you will finally see him who died on that cross for you

I don't know what we're going to say to him when we do but Revelation has those marvellous pictures doesn't it that great people singing his praises worthy is the lamb that's coming there's no doubt about it there's nothing that will stop it so live for him now give everything you have for Jesus now because the future is secure that's life in abundance in the here and now and the more you focus on Christ and live for Christ I hope I pray the more of this joy you will know and what a witness that might be to a watching world let's pray together Father we thank you because thinking about what you've done for us and thinking about your son the Lord Jesus and all he is all he did thinking about his life and his ministry and his words thinking about those awesome events that took place at Calvary why would we ever grow tired of hearing this story

Father we pray that these truths would become more and more real to us we pray that you'd help us to remember in the trials of life that joy is found not in our circumstances but in you the unchanging God we thank you that you've given us new birth we thank you that you've given us a living hope and an inheritance that will never perish spoil or fade we thank you that our faith is being strengthened by our trials we thank you that though we do not see him we do love him oh Father we pray that as we reflect and think about Jesus Christ and as we talk about him together that something of this inexpressible joy this glorious joy this heavenly joy would fill us we pray that there would be reason for people in our lives to look at us and ask where does this joy come from Father forgive us that all too often we become obsessed with our own problems our own difficulties we become those who look inwards rather than looking upwards we pray that you'd help us to remember for every look at ourselves to take ten looks at Christ

Father may our friendship with him deepen may our relationship with him grow stronger we pray that he would be the first in our life the number one priority whether we are single or married or in a relationship Father we pray that our relationship with you would be the one we treasure supremely above all others and oh Lord as we learn more about Jesus we pray that our love for him would increase we pray that the eyes of our hearts would be opened so that each one of us might know the hope to which you have called us and the riches of our glorious inheritance we pray heavenly Father that we would know more of the love of Christ and how wide and how deep and how tall it is we pray that you would help us to remember that you are the God of the impossible the God who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine Father equip brothers and sisters here to live for you in this day and age give us wisdom courage give us commitment faithfulness loyalty when we get things wrong may we repent when others fail us may we forgive but above all Father may we be like the sweet aroma of Jesus Christ himself so wherever we go whatever we do wherever you take us in future that we would go knowing that Christ is with us we are his ambassadors his witnesses and everything we do in this life is just leading up to that point when you take us into your presence and when we see him face to face Father we praise you and thank you so much for who you are and for all you have done may we know you better and may you help us in these coming days to live courageously for you we pray in Jesus name Amen well let's sing together again as we close let's sing 637 637 all I once held dear built my life upon all this world reveres and wars to own all I once thought gain I counted loss motel lost leave ■■ all I had heard said devil he have lost

[62 : 22] THE word they cannot conceal to people have his faith an a will she