

THE BELIEVER'S VIEW OF THE UNSEEN CHRIST

1 Peter 1:8-9

1 Peter 1:3-9 is a call to rejoice in God for the benefits of salvation. The text neatly divides into two sections. Verses 3-5 exhort us to praise God for our salvation. Verses 6-9 exhort us to praise God in our suffering. Verses 3-5 teach us to rejoice in God because of. Verses 6-9 teach us to rejoice in God in spite of. Verses 3-5 tell us there is joy in focusing on what God has in store for you when all of our trials will be over. Verses 6-9 tell us there is joy in focusing on what God is doing in your life in the midst of various trials.

Our text is a part of this later section of the paragraph. Verse 6 tells us what to do when we are grieved by various trials: "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials." When you are grieved by various trials, praise God anyhow. How can you rejoice in this midst of trials? Verse 7 tells us we can rejoice because we know "that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

The word "revelation" means an unveiling or uncovering. It refers to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. There is a real sense in which Christ is present among us. In Matthew 28:20, Jesus declares, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." Yet the fullness of his presence is veiled or covered or hidden. But there is coming a day when the glorious presence of the Lord Jesus Christ will be fully manifested. The veil will be lifted. The cover will be removed. The curtain will be drawn back. 1 John 3:2 says "we shall see him as he is." Revelation 1:7 says, "Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him." But what do we do in the meantime? Verse 7 is a promise of future reward for those who remain faithful to Christ in the midst of life's trials. This is good news. But what do you do when this good news is not good enough? What do you do when the promise of future reward does not seem to be sufficient to help you get through your present trials?

In verses 8-9, Peter says there is another spiritual resource we have access to in Christ that gives real hope for difficult times. We have the promise of future reward. But we also have the power of a present relationship. The promise of future reward means nothing if you do not have the power of a present relationship. The thought that you will be with the Lord one day will not help if you do not know how to be with the Lord now. The hope of seeing the Lord one day will not make a difference if you cannot see him now. This is the final word of hope Peter offers these troubled Christians in this passage: You can see Jesus even though you cannot see Jesus. The promise of future reward is inextricably tied to the power of a present relationship. You can face life's difficult times with hope when you focus on your personal relationship with Jesus. Christ.

The believer's personal relationship is described negatively and positively in these two verses. There are two negative statements in verse 8. Peter says, "Though you have not seen him..." Then he says, "Though you do not now see him..." You did not see the incarnate Christ in the past. And you do not see the glorified Christ in the

present. Yet there is a real sense in which you can see him, even though you cannot see him. Peter advises these troubled Christians to stop looking at what you can see. Focus on what you cannot see through your personal relationship with Jesus Christ. In verse 8-9, Peter gives four marks of a true relationship with Jesus Christ.

I. PERSONAL DEVOTION

Verse 8 says, “Though you have not seen him.” Peter’s readers did not see the incarnate Christ when he walked the earth. As a result of providence, geography, and history, they did not see the sandaled feet of Jesus when he walked the earth. Sure, there may have been some people in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia who saw Jesus during his earthly life and ministry. But this number was so miniscule that Peter could categorically say to his readers that you did not see him.

There is a hint here of personal testimony and theological controversy. Peter’s readers did not see Jesus during his incarnation. But Peter did. Peter was one of the first disciples of Jesus. Peter was one of the members of the inner circle of disciples. Peter was the de facto spokesperson for the twelve. They thought it; Peter said it. Peter is the one who made the Great Confession: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). In Peter 5:1, Peter calls himself “a witness of the sufferings of Christ.” This personal testimony may point to hint of theological controversy. Scholars suggest that one source of tension in the early church was between those who had physically seen the Lord and those who had not. But Peter makes it clear that the Christians who did not see the Lord in the flesh are not second-class Christians. To the contrary, Peter commends their relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 8 says, “Though you have not seen him, you love him.”

This is the first mark of a true relationship with Jesus Christ that Peter identifies in this text. Genuine salvation is evidenced by personal love for the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus debated unbelieving Jews in John 8:39-42. They declared, “Abraham is our father” (v. 39). But Jesus rebutted, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would not be acting the way you are. You are trying to kill me for telling the truth. Abraham would not have done that. You are doing the works your father did.” They answered, “We were not born of sexual immorality. We have one Father – even God” (v. 41) In John 8:42, Jesus says, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me.” This is the mark of true Christianity. No one can say that God is my Father who does not love Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 16:22, “If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed.” And Ephesians 6:24 says, “Grace be with all who love the Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.”

The sure sign of a true Christian is personal devotion to Jesus Christ. At its core, Christianity is not about a doctrinal statement, moral code, ethical system, religious formula, or order of worship. It is a love affair. Christianity is the ultimate long distance relationship. Verse 8 says, “Though you have not see him, you love him.” The word translated “love” is the word used throughout the New Testament to speak of God’s love for us. It is a sense of goodwill that is moved to act in the best

interest of the one love, even to the point of self-sacrifice. And it is in a grammatical emphasis that denotes continual actions. This is real love. It is not a response to a feeling. It is an act of the will. Even though you cannot see what the Lord is up to in your life, you love him anyway.

Mark it down. If you do not love Jesus, nothing else matters. Jesus wrote a letter to the church at Ephesus. He commended them for their good works, moral integrity, and doctrinal fidelity. But Revelation 2:4 says, "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first." Jesus threatened to remove their lamp and their lampstand from its place if they did not repent and come back to their first love. The practices of religion will only ensure you are a candidate for judgment if it is not rooted in and flowing from personal devotion to Jesus Christ. But 1 Peter 4:8 says, "Love covers a multitude of sins."

II. ABIDING TRUST

John 20:24-29 records the conversion of Thomas. Thomas was not present the first time Jesus appeared to the disciples after the resurrection. But the next time the guys told Thomas they had seen the Lord. Thomas answered, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe" (v. 25). John 20:29 says, "Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'"

Jesus declared that those who believe in him without seeing him are blessed. This is a logical conclusion. The irony of this wonderful blessing is that your faith only operates in the realm of what you cannot see. Anyone can believe if they can see it right in front of them. But real faith is demonstrated when you trust the Lord beyond what you can see. Proverbs 3:5-6 says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." 2 Corinthians 5:7 says: "for we walk by faith, not by sight." And Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." So Jesus declares that those who believe in him without seeing him are blessed. Peter affirms this divine blessing by declaring, "Though you do not now see him, you believe in him." You do not see the resurrection, enthroned, and glorified Christ as he sits at the right hand of the Father. You will see him one day. But you do not see him now. Yet you believe in him.

This reference to faith does not merely mean that you agree with what the Bible says about Jesus. Faith is more than mental assent. In fact, you can accept the facts about Jesus in the Bible and still go to hell. James 2:19 says, "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder!" Real faith is more than agreement with facts. It is confidence in a person. Say a friend invites you to hang out with him over the weekend. You ask where you will be going. But he tells you don't worry about it. You agree. You get into the car. And you pull up at the pier. This is when you object and make it clear that you do not do boats and water. But he assures you the boat is not going to sink or tip over. And he explains why. You have

no idea what he is talking about. But you get on the boat anyway. And you end up having a good time. You enjoy yourself not because you understand the construction of ships, the rules of navigation, or the dynamics of the water. You enjoy the ride because you trust the word of your friend. So it is with faith in Jesus. The Lord does not explain all the details of how he is going to get you from earth to glory. CHARLES SPURGEON said it well: "Little faith will take your soul to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your soul."

Verse 8 says, "Though you do not now see him, you believe in him." This verb "believe" is in a grammatical emphasis that denotes continual action. It means that you keep believing no matter what. Mark 5 records the story of Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue whose twelve-year-old daughter was low sick. He went to get Jesus for help. Jesus agreed to go home with him to minister to his daughter. But as they were on the way, messengers came from Jairus' house with the news that his daughter had died. And they told him not to trouble the master any further. There was nothing that could be done now for his daughter. But in Mark 5:36, Jesus said to Jairus, "Do not fear, only believe." Literally, Jesus said, "Stop being afraid. Keep believing." If I may paraphrase, Jesus said, "You had enough faith in me to ask me to help your daughter. Do not stop believing in me now that you have been frightened by bad news. Keep believing!" This is my word to those of you who are dealing with bad news in your life. Keep believing.

I TRUST IN GOD WHEREVER I MAY BE,
UPON THE LAND OR ON THE ROLLING SEA,
FOR, COME WHAT MAY, FROM DAY TO DAY,
MY HEAVENLY FATHER WATCHES OVER ME.

III. ABUNDANT JOY

What is a sure sign you love the Lord Jesus and believe in him? Verse 8 says, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Thou you have not seen him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory." This is the second reference to rejoicing in this passage. Verse 6 says, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials." True believer's rejoice in spite of and in the midst of various trials. How can we rejoice? First, we have the promise of a future reward. Verse 7 says: "so that the tested genuineness of your faith – more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire – may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." We also rejoice because we have the power of a present relationship. Verse 8 says, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory."

This word "**rejoice**" translates a Greek term that means, "much leaping." Some people think it is too much to say "Amen," clap their hands, or stand up in praise to God. They do not think it takes all of that to praise the Lord. But Peter says if you love Jesus and believe in Jesus, the joy of the Lord ought to well up in you and

make you leap for joy. It has nothing to do with your racial background or cultural idiosyncrasies or educational level or denominational affiliation or theological distinctives. It is about your personal relationship to Jesus Christ. If you love Jesus and believe in Jesus it ought to cause you to rejoice. CHARLES SPURGEON was witnessing to a stubborn unbeliever. In an attempt to brush him off, she said, "Ah, Mr. Spurgeon, "If the Lord ever saves someone like me, he would never hear the end of it." She was talking better than her understanding. If the Lord has saved someone like you, you ought to never let him hear the end of it. Psalm 107:2 says, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble."

If you know the Lord for yourself, it ought to make you leap for joy. Every now and then you should feel like David when he brought the Ark of the Covenant home. He danced right out of his clothes. When his wife chastised him, he told her the Lord had chosen him over her father and family. And he would dance even harder for the Lord. Likewise, you ought to rejoice in Jesus. And it ought not require you to be entertained or pressured or manipulated to get you to rejoice in God. Psalm 100:4 says, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him, bless his name!" Many people come to worship down and defeated and discouraged, waiting for someone to do something to get him or her in the mood to worship God. But the psalmist says you ought to enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. What? Why? How? Psalm 100:5 says, "For the Lord is good, his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations."

A personal relationship with Jesus is marked by abiding joy. Verse 8 says, "Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory." The word "inexpressible," used only here in the New Testament, describes joy that is so deep that words cannot explain it. It is unutterable joy. This is the irony of Christian joy. To love Jesus and believe in him will cause you to leap and shout for joy. You cannot keep it yourself. Yet you cannot explain it. My dad used to tell of three men who were talking about the goodness of the Lord. Two of the men eloquently testified about how good the Lord had been to them. But the last man could not speak well. He said to them, "I cannot tell you, I have to show you." He took them outside and gathered some sticks and set them on fire. Then he dug up a worm and put it in the fire. When it seemed like the flames were going to consume the worm, the man reached in and snatched it out. "That's what the Lord has done for me," he said. We too should rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory.

IV. CONFIDENT ASSURANCE

If you are lost, the Lord wants you to be saved. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance." The Lord Jesus Christ will return to rapture the church, consummate history, and judge the wicked. The reason the Second Coming is delayed for these multiple centuries is

because the Lord is patient. He does not take delight in the wicked. Without longsuffering, he continues to give sinners an opportunity to repent of the sins and run to the cross and trust the blood and righteousness of Christ. I repeat: if you are lost, the Lord wants you to be saved.

The Lord does not want lost people to think they are saved. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus says, **“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’”** The most disturbing part of the divine warning is that Jesus declares there are “many” people walking in a false-presumption of salvation. They believe they are right with God. But they will have to introduce themselves when they stand before the Lord at the final inspection.

The Lord warns against false assurance. But he wants true believers to have confident assurance. How does one have true assurance of salvation? Peter answers: “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” Faith has a specific outcome. It is not health, wealth, and success. The outcome of your faith is the salvation of your souls. We are saved in three time tenses. We have been saved from the penalty of sin. We are being saved from the power of sin. But we will be saved from the very presence of sin. Faith has an outcome. Assurance of salvation comes through faith, not a feeling. Because we love Jesus and believe in him and rejoice in Christ, we are obtaining the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls. Romans 8:23 says, “And not only creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the spirit, grown inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.”

I don’t eat cake. But when my mother would make cakes when I was a boy, I would love to lick the bowl. The batter in the bowl was not a finished product. But everything in the bowl would eventually be in the pan. The stuff in the bowl was the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Before the cake was finished, we got a taste of what it was going to be by licking the bowl. Moreover, Peter says that if you love Jesus and believe in Jesus and rejoice in Jesus you are already obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your soul.

**BLESSED ASSURANCE, JESUS IS MINE!
O, WHAT A FORETASTE OF GLORY DIVINE!
HEIR OF SALVATION; PURCHASED OF GOD!
BORN OF HIS SPIRIT, WASHED IN HIS BLOOD!**

**THIS IS MY STORY, THIS IS MY SONG!
PRAISING MY SAVIOR ALL THE DAY LONG!**