

*The following sermon was preached at Redemption Baptist Church on Sunday, 23 June 2019. We encourage you to look up the Scriptures that are referenced. May the Lord speak to your heart as you study His Word.*

## **The Trial of Your Faith**

### **1 Peter 1:6-7**

There was a long chapter of my life, years ago, when the Lord allowed me to go through a trial. In my first year of Bible college, I became extremely sick with a disease of the colon called *Crohn's Disease*. My bowels were in extreme pain every hour of the day—so much so, that I literally could not stand up straight. Most of the time, I had to walk around hunched over. I lost so much fluid and blood, that within a two-week period, I lost about 50 pounds. The doctors gave me high doses of steroids in order to shock my system out of its death-spiral.

Little did I know what lay ahead in the next eight years. For eight years, my colon was severely ulcerated from top to bottom. I was constantly in and out of the hospital, and in extreme pain. I also had strange side ailments that went along with the Crohn's Disease—such as a rheumatic arthritis, which made my legs swell up like balloons within minutes, and which made it unbelievably painful to stand or walk. I also had strange, painful cysts that would spring up from out of nowhere, and which would grow to the size of a baseball. It was difficult to hold down a job for those eight years; and I had to sit out of college for two whole years. While in college, it was exceedingly difficult to get through a semester, because I spent so much time in and out of the hospital. The medications I was on were so toxic, that I quickly shot up to 210 pounds; and my muscle tissue and bones were so degenerated, that they were like that of a very elderly man. Finally, I was told that my entire colon needed to be surgically removed, or else I would either die an early death, or be dependent upon others for the rest of my life. The chances of the surgery's being successful in the long run were far from certain; but I felt that the surgery was the Lord's leading. Well, it turned out that the surgery was *remarkably* successful. Although the recovery was long and hard, my health is now as good as it *can* be. The Lord has been very gracious to me.

Now, Crohn's Disease is notorious for triggering deep depression in its sufferers. Because the loss of "quality of life" is so drastic, many people even become suicidal. For this reason, the doctors wanted to keep an eye on me, to see how I was doing mentally and emotionally. I was often visited by the psychologists at the hospital, to see how I was coping with the situation. The doctors were always surprised (even shocked) to hear me answer that I was in excellent spirits, and that I welcomed this trial from the Lord, because I knew God had a purpose in it.

Now, the point of my sharing this experience is this: **through this trial, I found just how much I need to trust the Lord with every part of my life.** Through this situation, my love for Him and my trust in Him grew. I certainly don't relate this story in order to boast. Quite the contrary. I relate this story in order to testify to the grace of God. God sent me a trial; and through that trial, He accomplished (and is continuing to accomplish) many things in my life, which otherwise would not have happened. Such God does with *every* member of His family. If you know Christ as your Saviour, you can be sure that there will be trials in your life. The question is: How will you respond to them? That is what we will be talking about this morning. The title of this message is *The Trial of Your Faith*.

**Read 1 Peter 1:6-7.**

## I. The paradox of trials (v. 6)

Some of you in this room do not speak English as a first language; thus, you might not know what a “paradox” is. Simply put, a paradox is a truth that *seems* to contradict itself. A paradox is a fact that is true, yet it *seems* to make no sense.

So, what is the big “paradox” about the trials in our lives? Well, according to **verse 6**, Christians can “rejoice,” even when they are heavy of heart. Even though they may be undergoing many temptations (or “tests”) in their lives, they are happy! Now, that doesn’t seem to make sense, does it? Normal human reasoning says that if you are going through huge problems in your life, you are not going to be “rejoicing.” What enables a Christian to “rejoice,” even when he is going through one trial after another in his life?

Well, let’s look again at **verse 6** to find the answer. See that word “*wherein*” at the beginning of the verse? The word “*wherein*” means “in which.” So, what is that “in which” Christians may rejoice? Well, you must look back at the previous sentence to know what Peter is talking about. In **verses 3-5**, Peter was talking about the wonderful *hope* that Christians have because of the new birth. He talked about the *inheritance* that Christians have in heaven, and about the unshakeable *confidence* that we have in Jesus’ ability to save us and *keep* us until the resurrection day. These wonderful promises are that “in which” Christians may “rejoice”!

In **Romans 5:2**, the Apostle Paul said that believers “*rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*” Rejoicing in hope is something that should characterise every true child of God. In fact, rejoicing should be one of our most *overwhelming* characteristics. Now, this doesn’t mean that there won’t be plenty of pain. It doesn’t mean that there won’t be tears. However, *through* the tears, we can rejoice. We rejoice not in our circumstances, but rather in the hope that we belong to God. We rejoice in the inheritance waiting for us in heaven. We rejoice in the fact that God is using the trials that we are enduring for His own purpose.

Remember that little singing and praise session that Paul and Silas had when they were in prison in Philippi? How did that turn out? Let’s refresh our memory.

### **Read Acts 16:25-34.**

Because Paul and Silas did *right*, they were beaten and thrown into the stocks, in a filthy prison, with unwashed wounds and lacerations. In fact, they were placed in the *inner* prison—the darkest, blackest part of the prison, where there was no sunlight. Undoubtedly, there were rats and other loathsome creatures crawling around in the dark. Yet, they didn’t complain; instead, they sang praises to God! And what was the result? Because of their testimony for the Lord, and the supernatural joy that they showed, the jailor and his entire family received Christ as their Saviour!

A Christian who is rejoicing in the Lord is a Christian who has inner peace of mind. Fears certainly will arise; but faith in God helps the Christian to overcome all doubts and fears. **Second Timothy 1:7** says, “*For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.*” However, our peace of mind does not stay hidden inside us; it manifests itself *outwardly* in our countenance, in our conduct, and in our words. Lost people should be able to see the difference in you, Christian. They should be able to see your

peaceful countenance, and hear your sincere words of praise to God, and see that there is an “*excellent spirit*” within you. They should see that the Holy Spirit of God is inside you.

Now, it is important to understand the meaning of the word “temptation.” The Greek word for “temptation” is *perismos*; and *perismos* can have two different meanings. One meaning is “*enticement to do evil.*” This is the kind of “temptation” that *Satan* throws at us.

### **Read James 1:13-16.**

In this verse, James assures us that God does *not* “tempt” any man. Why, then, does Peter say that God *allows* temptations, and regards them as *precious*? Because “tempt,” in **James 1:13**, means to “*lure someone to do evil*”: and that is *not* what God does. He does *not* lure us to do evil. Our *own wicked lust*, which springs up from our sinful hearts, is what entices us to evil; and when we do not yield ourselves to God, we will give in to our lusts every single time!

God has no hand in *luring* us to do evil. However, he does *test* us, and *prove* us. This is the other meaning of the Greek word *perismos*. God tests and proves us in order to *show us* how strong our faith really is. He doesn’t test us because *He* needs to find out how strong our faith is, because *He already knows!* The purpose of tests is to show *us* how strong (or weak) our faith really is. God also tests us for the purpose of *strengthening* our faith through the trial.

The “tests” that God allows us to go through come in many different forms. Sometimes, “temptations” come in the form of a situation in which ***evil is placed right out in front of you***, and you have a choice to make. Now, is it God’s job to make sure that you don’t run across any tempting situations in your life? No, it is not. God does sometimes mercifully remove possible temptations from our pathway; but usually, He does not. It is *your* responsibility, Christian, not to *walk into* situations in which you know there will be temptation! **Proverbs 27:12** says, “*A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself; but the simple pass on, and are punished.*”

A Christian who sits up alone with his smart phone at night, when he knows that he will feel the urge to look at porn, is a “simple” Christian, who is ripe for a fall, and for chastisement from God. A Christian who hangs out with people who drink and go to the pubs, instead of with godly Christians, is foolish. He is setting himself up to fall into a snare. It is your responsibility, Christian, to *run* from temptation when it is placed before you—just as Joseph ran from Potiphar’s wife! **Second Timothy 2:22** says, “*Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.*” It is your responsibility to fill your mind with God’s Word, and be filled with the Spirit, so that you will be ready to put the fleshly impulses to death, and cast down wicked imaginations, as soon as they arise!

What other kinds of temptations are there? Well, sometimes a “temptation” is a difficult situation, in which you are faced with the choice of whether you will trust and praise God, or become bitter. Are you going through a problem in your life, Christian? Have you allowed that problem to make you bitter, or to cause you to blame God? If so, you need to repent! Now, it certainly is not wrong to ask God “why” He is allowing a trial in your life. Even our Saviour, in His humanity, asked, “*My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*” (**Psalm 22:1**). Christ was filled with genuine grief, because the Father *did*, in a certain sense, have to

turn His face from His Son during those terrible hours when He was bearing our sin! Yet, Jesus did not bitterly blame God. He continued to pray to the Father until His substitutionary work on the cross was finished; and the Father finally heard His cry, and delivered Him. *That* is the example we must follow, brethren! **God wants us to talk to Him during our trials!** It's not wrong to ask Him to show you "why" He is permitting a trial in your life—as long as you humbly submit to Him and say, "Not as I will, but as thou wilt."

Sometimes, a "temptation" takes the form of a *burden* that God puts upon your heart. God wants us to be burdened with the things that burden Him. He wants us to sorrow over the things that cause *Him* sorrow. As we see **sin** all around us, we should sorrow over it. As we see perishing, hell-bound souls all around us, and as we see the misery and ruin that sin causes in people's lives, our hearts should *break* at the sight of it! God wants us to weep! Jesus said, **"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted."** God wants us to weep over our *own* sin, as well as over the sin of others.

Now, this thinking is utter foolishness to unsaved people. Unregenerate minds reason that a "loving God" would not want His children to experience pain or sorrow. Sad to say, even many *saved* people have a hard time wrapping their heads around this truth, because they are not thinking biblically. Should *you* be having trouble understanding this precept, Christian, then please take this statement into your heart: **God saved you so that you could be conformed into the image of His Son.** He wants you to be like Christ: and being like Christ includes being grieved by the things that grieve Him. This means that when we see people whose lives have been destroyed by sin, we should be grieved by their sin, and filled with compassion for them as individuals. Think about the compassion that God showed to *you* as a poor, miserable sinner. Don't you think that God wants you to have the same compassion for other sinners that *He* had for *you*? He surely does. He wants you to weep over lost souls, pray for their salvation, and endeavour to reach them. He wants us to have a *burden*.

The prophet **Jeremiah** was a man with a burden for souls; yet, he was not without his struggles. At one point in his ministry, he was ready to "throw in the towel." He was tired of being mocked, and of having his life threatened. He said, **"I am in derision daily, and everyone mocketh me."** He just wanted to shut his mouth, and to stop prophesying. He said, **"I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name."** He just wanted to live a "comfortable" life, and not be bothered anymore with the thought of the people around him who were rejecting God. Yet, he couldn't keep silent. His burden would not go away. He said, **"But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."** In other words, he couldn't keep silent: he had to speak God's word to the people. He had to warn them that judgment was coming!

Paul had the same kind of burden that Jeremiah had. In **Romans 9:1-3**, Paul said, **"I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart."** Why did Paul have continual heaviness and sorrow in his heart? Because he realised that most of his own Jewish brethren were lost and on their way to hell! He was so burdened for them that he said, **"For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh!"** In other words, he would have been willing to *go to hell*, if by doing so it would be possible for the whole nation of Israel to be saved. *That* is a burden! *That* is a trial! Yet, Paul did not shrink from it. He did not immerse himself in his own selfish pursuits, so that he didn't have

to think about those who were perishing. He embraced the burden, got down on his knees, prayed fervently for his brethren, and poured himself into taking the Gospel to them.

How was Paul able to have such a self-sacrificing burden for others? Because he spent much time with the Lord! The *Lord* had placed a deep burden for the Jewish nation on Paul's heart. His heart was imprinted with the stamp of Christ Himself. He had become very much like Christ. *Jesus* loved people who continually rejected Him; and Paul had become the same way.

**Read Matthew 23:37-39.**

Christians who are not walking in the Spirit recoil from this kind of trial. Christians who are not yielded to God, and not filled with the Spirit, go through their day thinking mostly about their own needs, and not the eternal destiny of people around them. Perhaps this describes *your* attitude. If so, it doesn't have to stay that way. If you will yield yourself to Christ, and be controlled by the Spirit of God, you will begin to experience sorrow for sinners, as Jesus did. You will begin to have a burden. This is exactly what God wants to see in your life!

Now, there is one more kind of trial that God puts us through: and that is the trial of prosperity! Believe it or not, prosperity is the hardest test of all! The trial of *affliction* makes us see our need of God; but in the trial of *prosperity* and *ease*, it is extremely easy for us to *forget* that we need the Lord! That is why, in **Proverbs 30:8-9**, a believer named Agur pleaded with God *not* to give him riches. He said, "***Feed me with food convenient for me*** (in other words, "Don't give me any more food than what I absolutely need"): ***lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD?***" King David knew the danger of prosperity, as well. He knew all too well that he tended to be lifted up with pride when all was at ease in his life. In **Psalm 30:6** David wrote, "***In my prosperity I said, I shall never be moved.***" By the way, it doesn't take *very much* prosperity for us to forget God. The smallest bit of expendable money, pleasure, ease, or *praise of men*, can entice us to life up our hearts in pride, and to say, "I don't need to spend time with the Lord today. I don't need His help. I don't need to spend time with God's people. I'm grand. I'm going to have some 'me time' now."

**Read Proverbs 27:21.**

Praise is like a refining pot for silver. Just as the refining fire brings dross and impurity to the surface, so a little bit of praise shows what is really in our hearts. If there be pride in your heart, it will manifest itself very quickly when others praise you! So it is with *all* forms of ease, comfort, and prosperity. Prosperity shows what is really in our hearts.

Pastor McKinley has told me several times of a situation that once happened in his home church in America. Pastor McKinley's father (who was the pastor of his home church) was once invited to dinner by one of the families in their church. They had invited him to dinner to show him a family boat that they had just purchased. They had saved up for years to buy this boat, so that they could go fishing at the lake on the weekends. Pastor McKinley was happy for them; but before he left their home that evening he gently warned them, "Don't let this boat become your god!" They said, "Oh, no, pastor, we won't let it become a god!"

Well, it wasn't long before they began to arrive late to Sunday School. They would spend all Friday evening after work, and then all day Saturday, at the lake, and come home late; thus, it

was hard for them to get up early for Sunday School. Then, they began to miss Sunday School altogether—and then Worship Hour. Soon, they began to stay at the lake *all* day Sunday, and miss Sunday evening, as well. Then, they began to miss on Wednesday evening.

Well, Pastor McKinley paid them a friendly visit; and he warned them, “God will burn your god to the ground if you don’t start obeying Him!” That did scare them a little; and they started to come to church. However, they were soon missing church again. Well, months went by. Whole weeks would go by without their being in church; and no chastisement from God seemed to be forthcoming. But then, one Sunday morning, this family showed up for Sunday School *early!* The first thing that came out of the husband’s mouth was, “Well, pastor, you were right. God burned our god to the ground!” Apparently, while they had been driving to the lake that past Friday, a fire had broken out in the engine of their boat, for some bizarre and unknown reason; and the fire was so quick, and so intense, that the only thing left was the metal frame of the boat carrier! They had failed the trial of prosperity; and God had finally dealt them some affliction. But you know what? From that point on, they *never* missed Sunday School, Worship Hour, Sunday evening, or Wednesday evening!

Christian, how are you doing in the trial of temptation to sin? How are you faring in the trial of difficult situations? How are you reacting to the *burdens* that God is trying to place in your heart? How are you doing in the trial of prosperity? Should you be failing in any of these trials, ask the Lord do whatever it takes to increase your faith and love for Him!

## II. The value of trials (v. 7)

(**Read verse 7.**) Back in **verse 6**, Peter said “*if need be*” (in other words, “If necessary”) you are, for the present, in heaviness through many temptations. In other words, it *is* often necessary for us to undergo temptations. Our all-knowing Father *deems* them to be necessary. We, as Christians, may be *certain* that we will experience trials and tests in our lives. God has actually *appointed* us to suffer afflictions! In **1 Thessalonians 3:3**, Paul encouraged the people in the church of Thessalonica not to be “*moved*” because of the afflictions that he and his missionary partners were suffering, because they were “*appointed thereunto.*”

Now, I wish to make one thing very clear: there are sufferings in our lives that are the natural consequence of our own sin. When you disobey God, there will be consequences! In **1 Peter 2:20**, Peter wrote, “*For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?*” In other words, if you be suffering the consequences of sin in your life, it’s your own fault: and God will not reward you for enduring these sufferings. “**But,**” Peter says, “*if, when you do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.*” The suffering that you endure for *servicing God* is the kind of suffering to which God has appointed you. To God, trials that *He* sends into your life are not “misfortunes” or “tragedies” which “shouldn’t have happened.” He *intends* for us to suffer these trials; and they are extremely valuable to Him. As Peter says in **verse 6**, they are far more precious than gold!

Now, I don’t think I need to point out that gold means nothing to God. God doesn’t need gold. (The *streets* of heaven are paved with gold!) Yet, have you ever stopped to consider that God doesn’t need *us*, either? God is all-powerful. He doesn’t need our help. Furthermore, we have rebelled against Him. Why should He desire to use the likes of *us*? That is the very question that David asked in **Psalms 8**: “*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy*

*fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?"* We are mere specks in God's creation. Yet, for some reason, God loves and values us. He loves us so much, that He sent His own Son to die for us, so that we might be redeemed, and be used in His service. Yet, He cannot use us much when we are contaminated with sin. *That is where the trials come in.* God uses trials to *purify* us. God desires to remove all the sin and impurity from your life, Christian—just as dross is separated from gold by fire. Our *trials* are that purifying fire.

**Read Job 23:8-10.**

Don't resent your trials, Christian. They are precious to the Lord. He has a purpose in them. He wants to use your life for His glory: but He can use you only when your **faith** is refined, and when the "dross" of sin, unbelief, self-righteousness, and self-dependence is removed.

### III. The ultimate purpose of trials (v. 7)

(Read verse 7 again.) What *is* the ultimate purpose of our trials? What does God intend to accomplish through them? Well, as we've seen, God uses trials in order to refine us, and to enable us to serve Him better. However, in light of *eternity*, what is the *ultimate* purpose?

Well, in verse 7, Peter says that our faith is refined so that it "***might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.***" One day, Christ will return in the clouds to take us home: and when He does, the things that God did *in and through us*, because we submitted to Him and *allowed* Him to work through us, will result in eternal praise, honour, and glory. The big question is: *To whom* will the praise, honour, and glory be directed? The Lord Jesus Christ! *He* is the one who will receive the praise, honour, and glory from our lives!

**Read Revelation 4:10-11.**

In heaven, we will receive crowns of glory. There will be five different kinds of crowns, which we will receive for different areas of faith and service. We know, for example, that there will be a "***crown of life,***" which will be given specifically for enduring temptation (James 1:12). Also, Scripture indicates that there will be degrees of *light* shining from our glorified bodies, in accordance with how we endeavoured to win souls in this life.

**Read Daniel 12:2-3.**

There will be many different kinds of rewards that we will receive in heaven. However, here is what we need to understand: **The purpose of our rewards will not be to bring glory to ourselves!** We will not be going around in heaven bragging about what *we* did for God. No, all the praise will go to *Jesus Christ*. We will cast our crowns at *His* feet and say, "***Thou art worthy, O Lord.***" The rewards that you receive, Christian, will be a testimony of what God did in and through you. If you don't have many rewards, God will, nonetheless, be glorified by what rewards you *do* have: but what a horrible shame that the God who loved us so much, and who has given us *everything*, should receive so little glory from our lives!

I don't know about you, but I do not want to be empty-handed when I stand before God. **I want to bring glory to God.** I want the glittering crowns, and the resplendent glory shining

from my resurrected body, to be an everlasting jewel, testifying to the incredible love, grace, mercy, and saving, sanctifying power of my Saviour! Is this *your* desire, Christian?

**Conclusion:** If you know Christ as your Saviour, there *will* be trials in your life. How are you handling them, Christian? Are you belly-aching about your trials? Or are you praising and glorifying God through your trials, and thereby pointing others to Christ? **To those who might not be saved**, I would say this: whatever sufferings you may be going through in your life *cannot*, in any way, make you worthy of salvation. Going through a hard time in your life cannot atone for your sin. Only one man's sufferings can atone for your sins: and that man is Jesus Christ! Run to Him for salvation today! Stop trusting in your own righteousness, and trust instead in the righteousness of Jesus Christ!