

## THE RAPTURE – 1 Peter 5:10

### World's Greatest Events #9

55 year old Patricia Haldin was sitting in a restaurant with her good friend, Carmen Brown. They were discussing the popular board game Monopoly. Patricia remarked that it would be nice to have a game where the goal was heaven rather than accumulating hotels on your property and bankrupting your opponent. Soon ideas began pouring forth from Patricia's mind while Carmen who was an artist began making sketches on napkins. By the end of their 3 hour session together the game "Eternity" was born.

In the game "Eternity" the goal is getting to heaven. Helping others get there as well aids in one's victory. The player has to throw a 3 or 7 with the dice to be "born again" and start on the journey to heaven. There are many pitfalls on the way like trials and sin-sickness and serpent cards and back-sliding. Helping one's opponent accumulates cards worth so many points. The game ends when one player gets himself and 3 other believers into heaven. Then all of the points are added up and the winner receives so many crowns.

Wouldn't it be great if there were really a game that secured a person a place in heaven? Don't you think that such a game would be a best seller overnight? I don't think stores could keep a game like that stocked on its shelves, do you?

But the reality is there can be no such board game in real life. While the idea of the game "Eternity" might be clever and might have quite a bit of symbolism in it, the simple fact is that such a game, if it really did exist, would just be another attempt at salvation by good works. After all, the winner is the one who secures heaven for himself and that winner is rewarded for all of the good deeds that he or she did.

The Bible makes it clear that citizenship in heaven is not earned by any amount of good deeds that we can accumulate. The Apostle wrote these words to a young church leader named Titus in chapter 2:4-7:

<sup>4</sup> But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

The Bible makes is clear that a person is born again into God's family not because of earning it through righteous works, but because of the mercy of God. God justifies or declares us to be righteous by his grace as we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and accept Him into our lives as our Savior and Lord.

Now a baby born into a human family in a hospital receives a new home. Calli Jo Rottier went home from the hospital this past Tuesday to live with her parents, Dan and Noelle. So a Christian who is born into God's family receives a new eternal home. That home is called heaven in the Bible. Christians enter that

home either through the door of physical death or through the event that is often called "The Rapture". We want to look at this event that calls us into God's eternal glory this morning.

During these past Sunday mornings, we have been looking at the top 10 of the world's greatest events. We have already seen:

- \*The Creation of the Universe

- \*The Fall of the human race into sin

- \*The World-wide Flood

- \*The confusion and scattering of peoples at Babel where languages and national identities were created.

- \*The calling of the nation of Israel through whom God would bring redemption to the world

- \*God entering human history through the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ

- \*The atoning death and resurrection of the God-man upon the cross of Calvary

- \*The Day of Pentecost when the Church was born.

Now in addition to each of these events being identified as one of the world's greatest events, each of the events that we have looked at so far also share in the fact that they are all history. These events have already happened.

The final 2 events that we want to consider have not yet happened. But we know that they are going to happen because God has promised them to us in His word. And I think you will agree with me that these final 2 events must be included in our top ten list.

The Rapture is the event when the Lord Jesus Christ is going to return to take all believers to heaven to be with him.

The Apostle Paul spoke of this event several times in his writings. In 1 Thess. 4:13-18, he wrote:

<sup>13</sup> Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. <sup>14</sup> We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. <sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage each other with these words.

In 1 Corinthians 15:51-57, he wrote:

<sup>51</sup> Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- <sup>52</sup> in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. <sup>53</sup> For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. <sup>54</sup> When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

1CO 15:55 "Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?"

1CO 15:56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup> But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Certainly it would be profitable to look at either of these passages. But because we just finished a series on 1 Thessalonians in our Wednesday night Bible Study and we almost always consider the passage in 1 Corinthians during our memorial services, I want to look at a passage from 1 Peter 5 that speaks of that call to eternal glory that God extends to every one of His children for it speaks not only of the call to glory but also of some of the process of our living that prepares us for that call. Notice it with me in 1 Peter 5:10:

1PE 5:10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Now there is a process here that is important for each of us to see. It is important for us to note this process because while we are naturally attracted to the call to eternal glory for that brings great hope and joy into our lives, we are not so attracted to the process that prepares us for that eternal glory. But this process is very critical for us to see. It is so important that God continually emphasizes it in His word. **The process begins with suffering.** "And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory, after you have suffered for a while . . ." The call to eternal glory comes after suffering. The suffering, of course, takes place in this life. The call to glory ends all suffering.

Now one of the questions that I am asked most often as a pastor is why do we have to suffer? Why is there so much suffering in this world? And why do Christians have to suffer? Why doesn't God protect His children from all suffering? If it is part of God's plan for Christ to come and take his followers home to heaven, where does suffering fit in?

The answer to the question of suffering in this life is too complex and lengthy to deal with in one sermon. But there are many blessings that can only come into our lives through suffering. The first half of this past summer was very dry, wasn't it? We didn't have to tell visitors to our state that we weren't having much rain, did we? They needed only to look at the brown, parched grass to see our need for rain. But then a wonderful week of rain came and the grass just greened up and began to grow again. This reminded us of the

blessing of periodic storms in the weather. Sunshine all of the time eventually makes a desert. We need periodic storms in order to have grass and flowers and trees and life.

So it is in our personal lives. If we only received sunshine throughout our entire life without any storms at all, we would miss out on so many blessings. Our lives would be extremely shallow. We would become parched and barren in our character.

Now Peter in the preceding context gives 3 great blessings that suffering brings into our lives.

**The first is humility** – “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

There is nothing that brings humility into our lives faster than suffering. When we’ve got life by the tail and everything is going our way, we can get pretty cocky and proud in a hurry. We are in control and we’re doing a pretty good job. But then suffering strikes. Our life quickly spirals out of our control. We can become humble in a hurry when that happens, can’t we? But this is a great blessing. For humility puts us into a position where God’s grace can pour into our lives. Pride on the other hand puts us in opposition to God. God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.

There was a baker many years ago who noticed that a poor, little girl would always get the smallest loaf of bread when everyone pushed into his bakery to get their loaves for the morning. She was more shy and timid than the other larger adults and stronger children who shopped in the morning. But this small girl patiently waited while all of the other people pushed her out of the way and took the smaller loaf that was left. One day the baker decided that he would reward this little girl. When the girl bought her loaf and took it home she quickly returned to the bakery. Her mother had found several pieces of silver baked in the bread when she cut the loaf open. When the girl came to give the silver back to the baker, he simply smiled and told her to keep the money. He had baked the silver in her loaf to reward her for her humility.

That’s what God does for His children when they are truly humble. God gives his grace to the humble. God’s grace is the most precious treasure that any person can ever receive. God’s grace is His unmerited favor, His richest blessing. This is one of the rewards of suffering. Suffering brings humility into our lives which in turn allows God to give His grace to us.

**But notice also that suffering leads us to turn to God.** Verse 7 invites us to cast all of our anxieties on the Lord because He cares for us. The Bible reveals to us a God who is unlimited in His mercy. God delights in helping His children. God invites us to bring our concerns and worries to Him and He promises that He will give us His peace and contentment in exchange. But the cold reality of life is that we are more likely to cast our burdens upon the Lord during times of suffering than we are when everything is going our way.

Now actually in the context casting our cares on the Lord is given as one of the ways that we express true humility before the Lord. The verb cast is actually a participle. The command is to humble ourselves. One could read verses 6 and 7 literally in this way – “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time by casting all your anxieties upon Him because He cares for you.” When we try to shoulder all of life’s burdens ourselves, God sees this as an expression of pride. We are saying that we can handle life problems ourselves without His help. When we cast our cares upon the Lord, God sees this as an expression of humility. We are saying that we need the Lord’s help in handling life’s problems. But just as suffering brings the blessing of humility into our lives, suffering also often leads us to cast our burdens and anxieties on the Lord.

**The 3<sup>rd</sup> blessing Peter mentions is a greater awareness of the spiritual battles of life.** Verse 8 speaks about the Devil prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Peter reminds us of our need to be self-controlled and alert, resisting the temptations that he brings into our lives, standing firm in our faith.

There’s nothing like a measure of suffering to remind us that we are in a continual state of spiritual conflict in this world. This past week we remembered the September 11 anniversary. It was often called the day that changed our lives. Before September 11, 2001, we had been in a state of peace for a couple of decades. To be sure, other countries had gone through difficult times of conflict and we had sent troops to help them out in their attempts to maintain peace, but we had been immune from national wars for some time. If someone would have seriously suggested greater airport security or increased border controls before September 11, 2001, there would have been an outcry against such measures as impinging on our freedoms. Now remember, we were at war before September 11, 2001. There were sleeper terrorists who were scattered throughout our nation diligently training for an attack on us. They were taking flight lessons. They were plotting their strategies. They were gathering their resources. But during the times when the stock market was soaring up and everything was going well, our nation was basically unaware of the conflict. But then September 11 hit. And in one day, everything changed. Since that day we have patiently endured longer lines at the airport and we are happy for them. Now we wait with perseverance when crossing over the bridge or through the tunnel and we are content to wait. Because the suffering that we endured as a nation made us painfully aware that we have an enemy that is dedicated to our destruction.

So it is in our personal lives as well. When everything is going our way, we tend to forget that there is a devil out there who is prowling around just waiting for a chance to devour us. When everything is going our way, we often are lured into thinking that the world system that Satan has authored isn’t so bad after all. But

then suffering hits. And we are suddenly reminded of the spiritual battle in which we are engaged. This is a blessing for we will never win any victories until we are first aware of the battle.

**Now what happens as we endure suffering with humility, casting our anxieties on the Lord and alert to the spiritual battles around us? We become strong, firm and steadfast.** READ vs. 10:

1PE 5:10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

Now the word that is translated “restore” here is an interesting one. It means to equip or outfit someone with all of the gear needed for a successful mission. It is the Greek term from which we derive our English word “artisan”. An artisan is a craftsman, someone who is skilled at a specialized trade. Peter is saying here that while suffering is necessary in the growth process so that humility and dependence and an awareness of spiritual conflict is achieved, God will never leave His children to suffer helplessly. Rather God equips His children as a skilled mechanic so that followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are prepared to endure the sufferings to which they are called victoriously.

Several years ago when my boys were younger, I went with them on a couple of Wilderness Trips to the New River Gorge in West Virginia. We always left about midnight and drove straight through. As we arrived about 9 or 10 in the morning, needless to say nobody was at their sharpest. The drivers who had taken turns at the wheel were the most tired. But even the young people were rather bleary eyed because they hadn't slept very soundly in the vans throughout the night. As we arrived at Liberty Expeditions, the leaders there would have everything laid out and ready to go so that we could hit the trail. Every person was given a back pack with all of the supplies necessary for a successful trip in it. All of the food, the tents, the sleeping bags, the water purification filters, the stoves and eating utensils, everything was already packed in the back packs. No single person carried everything, but each one carried his own load. Some would carry a camp stove; others would carry some tent stakes; still others would carry pots and pans or food stuffs. The back packs were already sorted to be of differing weights because we had sent ahead the heights and weights of all the people who would be coming weeks earlier. So each person would strap on the back pack that had his name on it and off we would go. When we got to camp at the end of the day and opened up our back packs, we would find everything that we needed to be nourished and sheltered for the night.

Peter is saying that this is what God does for us as His children. He knows how much we can carry and all that is necessary for our life journey. God knows what we are going to be called upon to suffer. So He equips us so that by trusting in Him and walking in His will, we can journey through this life victoriously.

And Peter uses 3 words to describe our growth throughout this life journey.

\*We will be made strong – our spiritual muscle of faith will be strengthened in the process. As we flex our faith muscle while trusting God through adversity, we will grow stronger and stronger in our faith.

\*We will be made firm – this Greek word is found only here in the Bible. It has the idea of not wavering or vacillating, being convinced of one’s faith and convictions.

\*We will be made steadfast - this word comes from the Greek word for the foundation of a house. It has the idea of an enduring structure, one that is built solidly upon a foundation of bedrock.

The first word that Peter chooses here is the very same word that Jesus used while addressing Peter in Luke 22. This has lead many commentators to believe that Peter had this scene in mind as he was originally writing these words.

You might recall the scene from Luke 22. Jesus had just revealed his upcoming betrayal and death to his disciples. But the apostles were so consumed with who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom that they were arguing with one another. Peter in a boast of self-confident pride asserts that even if all of the other disciples fall by the way side, he will stand with Jesus even if it means his own death. Jesus realizes that Peter’s pride has so blinded him that he isn’t even aware of the spiritual battle in which he is engaged. So Jesus says to Peter as recorded in Luke 22:31, 32:

LK 22:31 "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

That word translated “strengthen” that Jesus spoke to Peter is the same word that Peter uses here in 1 Peter 5:10. And Peter experienced the equipping power of God in his life, didn’t he? Even though Peter failed the Lord miserably because of his pride and arrogance at the time of Christ’s crucifixion, Peter was not overwhelmed by his suffering, but he recovered to the place where he became the primary speaker for the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost just 50 days later.

Peter had experienced the process that he was speaking about here in his life. He knew what suffering was all about. But Peter also knew a God who was able to fully equip His children so that they could endure the suffering successfully.

And now Peter writes that the end goal of this process is eternal glory, the event when the Lord Jesus Christ will come from heaven to take all of his children home to be with Him forever.

1PE 5:10 And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ,

Every true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ who has been born again into the family of God has the secure hope of eternal glory to look forward to. Our true citizenship is in heaven. We are pilgrims and sojourners on this earth. So when the process of becoming strong, firm and steadfast through suffering is

completed, God will take us home to heaven either through physical death or through the Rapture of the church. He will do this because we have been called to eternal glory.

Dr. Henry Morrison was a well-known missionary in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He happened to return from Africa when he was retiring on the same ship that President Teddy Roosevelt was on. President Roosevelt was returning from one of his famous hunting safaris that he loved so much. As they passed Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty into the harbor of New York City, they could see thousands of people who were lined up on the docks waiting for the arrival of the ship. It soon became apparent that the crowds had gathered to welcome the President home and they applauded his disembarking off of the ship. The crowds swarmed around President Roosevelt and went off with him like bees swarming around their queen. By the time the Morrisons had gathered all of their many belongings together and were ready to disembark the ship as the last passengers to do so there wasn't a single soul remaining on the dock. Not one person had come to greet the missionaries from Africa who had given their lives in service to the Lord.

In a moment of self-pity, Henry remarked to his wife about the difference in how the leaders of the world were greeted compared to how the servants of the Lord were greeted. His wife with great wisdom turned to her husband and replied, "But Henry, you're not really home yet."

If you are a child of God this morning, you have been called to eternal glory. Right now you might not feel too exhilarated by that call because you are in the midst of a process. That process involves suffering. But that suffering will eventually make you to become strong, firm and steadfast. And God has equipped you with everything you need to make it through the process. But at the end of the process is the Rapture. For we have been called to eternal glory.

No wonder the Apostle Paul could exclaim in Romans 8:18:

RO 8:18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.