

# FAITH

VERSUS

# SIGHT

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After Jesus ascended, and especially after the gospel was taken to Gentiles, the believers were those who had not seen Jesus in person. In His conversation with Thomas, Jesus had spoken of such. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed" (John 20:27). As Peter addresses the elect, he speaks of their faith, love, and rejoicing in One Whom they had not seen. "Whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8, 9).

How could they love One they had never seen? Faith leads to love. Faith is concerned with things unseen (Heb. 11:1). Faith not only looks back to Christ's death, but also ahead to heaven. They loved Jesus, as we should, for what He had done, what He was doing for them, and what He would do. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). The people to whom Peter wrote apprehended Christ with the eye of faith, and had great confidence and trust in Him. They had an eye for seeing the unseen "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen" (2 Cor. 4:8); "for we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7).

They could not love an imaginary person or just an ideal person. Neither could they love one who, although real, was remote in time or space. What is the manifestation of love? "If ye love me, ye will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). It was their obedience to His way that made evident to Peter and all that these were people who loved the Lord "though now ye see him not." "Now" suggests they will see Him later. It was that confidence that enabled them to rejoice amidst their tribulations. "Believing is continual and habitual. We all must trust and keep on trusting.

Faith leads to rejoicing. Man cannot destroy our hope. Jesus promised His apostles that when He was resurrected, no one could take away their joy (John 16:22). A person can endure suffering joyfully if he is convinced that the goal ahead is worthwhile, and that the suffering may help him reach that goal. Their unspeakable joy came from faith. The joy of a Christian cannot be expressed adequately in human words.

Authentic joy cannot be contrived. Faith makes joy possible since by faith we live in fellowship with God. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ: and these things we write, that your joy may be made full" (1 John 1:3, 4). If we do not find such joy, it is not the fault of God or His gospel. It is our fault in failing to apply the gospel correctly.

Note the following about the Christian's joy. The ground of rejoicing is the One on whom they believed. Here is One Who is worthy of absolute reliance. Its attainment is by believing. The rejoicing is contemporaneous with believing. The characteristic of this joy is "unspeakable and full of glory." It is joy so extensive that it cannot be expressed fully. The obligation it brings is to rejoice even more when persecuted.

The Christian's joy also involves reception of the end or goal of faith which is salvation. Salvation should be our objective, and nothing should move us from that hope (Col. 1:23). It is a truncated faith that is sought only to help us make it from one day to the next, but not into heaven. We are receiving salvation now, and shall continue to receive it until heaven is ours. The salvation Christ brings is not of the body from persecution, but something higher. We may be on the losing side on earth, but, in Christ, we will triumph in heaven. The Jews wanted a Messiah to save them from the bondage of Rome, but Christ came to save them from the bondage of sin (Luke 19:10).

What an assurance we have as long as we live lives of trust in God. Peter's first readers were facing the loss of their lives, the maiming of their bodies, and great difficulty for the outer man, but the soul would be saved. Thus they could rejoice!