

Message: Born again to a Living Hope

1 Peter 1:1-12

Just to give you some background, this letter was written by Peter to Christians who were scattered around. It mentions five cities specifically. It was written about AD 64. In it Peter mentions suffering 16 times. Later, in AD 67, Peter himself was crucified. Tradition tells us that he was crucified on a cross like Jesus, but he didn't think he was worthy to die in the same way. So he asked to have his cross put in the ground upside down. And that is the way he died, praising God.

Peter wrote this letter to Christians who were beginning to suffer persecution under Nero. You all know about Nero, right? He was a Roman emperor, and a real messed up man. They called him the beast. He had ultimate power and had many people killed, especially Christians. He had them fed to animals for entertainment. He would have them dipped in tar and tied up on poles in his garden and set on fire in the evening to use as lights. This wasn't enough for him. He even would have people tied to a stake, put on an animal skin himself with real sharp blades in his hands for claws, and literally tear them apart.

This letter is addressed to Pilgrims in the dispersion. It is the Christians, mostly non-Jews who were scattered around. But it also applies to us today. We who are Christians in this world. We are exiles in a sense. Our citizenship is in heaven, not here on earth. There is a saying, "The world is a bridge. The wise man will pass over it, but he will not build his house upon it." Our permanent home is in heaven. And like these 1st century Christians, we in the 21st century may have to go through suffering. This letter is an encouragement for us. It also teaches us several very important things regarding our relationship to God.

Just for the sake of getting it right, note the whole trinity of God is shown in verse 2. ***("elect according to the foreknowledge of **God the Father**, in sanctification of the **Spirit**, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of **Jesus Christ**:") The Father elects, through foreknowledge who will be saved. The Spirit sanctifies those people. To sanctify means they are set apart from sin and evil. And Jesus Christ, the Son gave his life as a sacrifice and the sprinkling of his Blood. Much more could be said about how all this takes place, but that will have to wait for another message. Today, just note the Three in One God at work. The Father electing, the Spirit sanctifying and the Son being the sacrifice. All of this is so that we can be in God's family and receive eternal life, to live forever in heaven.

In verse 3 it says He has begotten us again to a living hope. ***("Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has **begotten us again to a living hope** by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,") This translations uses the phrase begotten us again, other translations use we have been born again. It is a new life, given to us by God.

We have been born again to a living hope. What is this hope? Is it like something that we want to happen, "I hope it cools off soon!" Is it some good feeling we have, like when you are going through a hard time and you think it is almost over. "I hope this trouble will be over soon."

Actually, this hope is more than that. This hope is built on the fact of Jesus' resurrection. There is no wishing that it were so. It is a fact. The Bible says it is so. Jesus died and rose from the dead. The evidence says it is so. If you were to examine the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ as if it were a case in court, it would be decided that it is so. The eyewitnesses said they saw Jesus. Not just a few people, but hundreds of people. ***("1 Corinthians 15:6 "After that He was **seen by over five hundred** brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.")

Now sometimes people will say things that aren't completely true, just because they want them to be true. But if you press the person who is doing this, or if he is threatened with death, he will change his story. But these eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection didn't ever change what they said. In the end they were tortured and killed, but they wouldn't change what they said. Jesus is alive. They were hung on crosses, Peter who wrote this book was hanged upside down on a cross. They were burned alive. They were boiled in oil. They had their skin cut off. They were put in the arena to be killed for other people's entertainment. But they all maintained to the end that Jesus had risen from the dead. Furthermore, all of the prophecies in the Old Testament, written hundreds of

years before Jesus was even born give evidence that it is true.

Folks, it is true. You can put your trust in it. Hope in it. That's what our hope is in. God raised Jesus from the dead, and He will raise us from the dead too. Those who believe and trust in him, he will raise to everlasting life. Those who don't believe are condemned.

In verse 4 it tells us that we have been born into a lasting, imperishable inheritance in heaven because of the death and resurrection of Jesus. ***("... to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,")

My earthly home is fading. My parents raised me in a home in Winona Lake, Indiana. When I think of home it is usually there. But that house has been sold to three different people since my parents passed away. It has been changed and remodeled. And most of all, my parents don't live there anymore. It is just a shell of what it used to be to me. It isn't my home anymore. But heaven is eternal.

As a child of God you have an inheritance. It is everlasting. Our lives on this earth are fading away. Every day you live, you are closer to the day you will leave this life. Later in this chapter, verses 24 and 25, it tells it like it is. ***("All flesh is as grass, And the all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, And its flower falls away, But the word of the Lord endures forever.") It is a quote from the Old Testament, Isaiah 40:6-8

We are like grass. We live for a short time on this earth. We may bloom like a pretty flower, but we will fade and die away. But God's Word will endure forever. And his Word is that there is eternal life for those who trust in him.

Verse 5 tells us we are kept by God himself. ***("who are **kept by the power of God** through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.")

Not only is your inheritance preserved by God for you in heaven, He is preserving you. If you are in him, He will keep you. I grew up in church. My parents took me from when I was just a baby. It was a great thing for me. It spared me a lot of grief and trouble. Yet I am just as much in need of Christ's forgiveness as the person who robbed a bank or killed people.

The thing is, growing up in the church I heard a lot about accepting Jesus as my savior, and then being a good little boy. They went together. Accept Jesus and be good. So when I had problems, when I disobeyed my father, or when I said mean things to someone, or stole something that wasn't mine, did that mean I wasn't a good little boy? Did that mean I wasn't saved? I wrestled with this a lot in my conscience for many years. But then my eyes were opened up to this passage and others like it. I am kept by God. It isn't a matter of how good I am. It is a matter of God making me his son and keeping me in his family. I don't have to worry. I try to honor him and obey him. But if I slip I haven't lost my salvation. I need to go to him and confess, and believe me I want to confess when I sin. And part of that is making right what you did wrong as much as possible, giving back what you stole, asking the person you were mean to for forgiveness and so on.

But it's not a matter of not being lost and saved again. It is a matter of restoring the good relationship with him. I am accepted by him as his son and that's the way it is. If my son does something wrong, I don't throw him out of the family. I don't go to court and change his name. He is still my son. I may have to discipline him. I may need to take away privileges, or use some sort of discipline on him. But I do it in love. He is my son and what I do is for his good. I'm keeping or protecting him, as best I can.

We are kept by God's power through faith. Faith is necessary. Where does the faith come from? Well, ultimately it comes from God. He is the one who gives it to us. But there are things we as his children do that help to build up our faith. For instance, reading the Bible and meditating on what it says. Praying to him, talking to him daily. Coming to church and learning together, and worshiping together, and spending time with other Christians.

In verse 6 it tells us that we rejoice in our suffering or grief. ***("In this you **greatly rejoice**, though now for a little while, if need be, you **have been grieved** by manifold temptations,")

It uses the word temptations in this version, but many other versions say trials. The word trial is closer in meaning to the original Greek in this passage. In verse 8 it says we will rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory. ***(... Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with **joy unspeakable** and full of glory,")

What does the Bible mean when it says "joy"? Exuberance, happiness, laughter, warm fuzzy happy feelings? Joy is kind of the opposite of grief. It's a peace and satisfaction that things are working out alright, that good is coming and things will be right in the end. Joy is not the same as happiness, or prosperity, or good humor. It is a deep sense that things will work out, and then looking forward to that. No matter what happens, things will end up well. It may be an overused example, but think of a woman who is looking forward to holding her baby. But first she has to suffer a lot delivering the baby. Even though it hurts and she's tired, she presses on for the joy of holding her child. She knows when it is finished she will have that! For Christians this life can be like the pain of having a child, only spread out and maybe not so intense all at once. Romans says we groan in travail, waiting for the revealing of the Son of God. We are groaning in our spirit as we wait for heaven.

Often times we don't realize what God is doing in us until much later. God uses things in people's lives even before they are Christians to get them to believe in him. So even before that person knows she will be a Christian, God in his election and foreknowledge is using the trials for good.

God is using the events of your lives for his glory and your good. You can look forward to subsequent joy. That means joy that will come later as a result of the present suffering. Some of you have parents who are ill. Some of you have lost people you love very much. Some of you are dealing with heavy burdens in your family or in your work. Some of you may be dealing with doubt about spiritual matters.

This is not something that just happens to you for no purpose. Make no mistake, it is all part of what God is doing in you. He does not bring evil things, but He uses all things to accomplish his will. We just can't see it very well from our vantage point. In Pilgrims Progress John Bunyan writes about visiting the house of the interpreter. The Interpreter helps him understand how God works. The interpreter took the pilgrim, Christian is his name, out to the garden where a fire is burning from under the wall. The fire is the work of God in a man's heart. The devil is there throwing water, (grief, temptation, persecution, hardships, etc.) on the fire, but it won't go out. No matter how much water the devil throws on the fire, it keeps burning. How is this happening? Then the interpreter takes Christian around to the other side of the wall and there is the Spirit of Christ pouring the oil of grace into a hole that goes under the wall. The oil feeds the fire, so that even all the water in the world can't put it out. Christian, it is the same for you today. You may be going through hard times. The devil or circumstances around you may be pouring water on the fire that is the work of God in you, but the Spirit of God is on the other side of the wall, unseen, yet faithfully feeding the flames of his work.

Verses 10 and 11 tell us that the prophets were inquiring as to what time it was that Christ would suffer and have subsequent glory! *** (10 "Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you,
11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the **sufferings of Christ** and the **glories that would follow.**")

Suffering leading to glory! It is almost a formula. Not just any suffering, but suffering for righteousness. Hebrews 12:2 tells us to look at Jesus who suffered the cross and its pain for the joy that was set before him. This is joy! Christian, you may be going through a time of suffering now. If you aren't going through it now, you almost certainly will go through it. Look to Jesus! Look how He suffered.

When you become a Christian you are born anew. You have a new nature. You are no longer under the sin nature, but under grace. In God's sight you are innocent and pure. You are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus Christ. It is as if Jesus changes places with you. All the wrong and bad things you have done, He takes as if they were his. The penalty is death. God made the world beautiful and perfect. But along the way, we humans have filled it with pain and sin and death. God loves people, but He will not tolerate evil. It is impossible for evil to exist in God's presence. So the penalty for committing evil is death. Jesus took the responsibility for our evil on himself and died for us.

We watched an old war movie a week ago, based on a true story. It was about a prisoner of war camp. The prisoners were all standing outside for inspection. Just then, the guard who is in charge of the tools reported

that a shovel was missing. The captain of the prison demanded that the prisoner who took the shovel come forward. No one came. He then said that if the guilty person didn't come forward he would punish the whole camp. Finally one man stepped out. The captain was so furious with the man for keeping one of the shovels that he began to beat him with a shovel. The man was down on the ground and the captain was yelling and beating him. Just then the guard in charge of the tools came out and said there was a mistake. All of the shovels were there. He had counted wrong. The prisoner that was beaten lived, but his back was broken and from then on he couldn't walk. He was an innocent man suffering for the others. He took it on himself voluntarily because of his love for his fellow prisoners.

That is a little like what Jesus did. Only we are guilty of breaking God's law. We are guilty of doing evil things, of hate, pride, jealousy, wrath, bitterness, gossip, envy and the like. And Jesus took the penalty for everyone who comes to him for forgiveness.

Then He gives you his goodness and righteousness. The Bible tells us that Jesus never sinned. He never disobeyed his Father, God the Father. So what happens after the change? In return He gave us his place as God's son. We are children of God. If you wonder about this, read Romans, chapter 8. You are a child of God if you are in Christ.

This is such a great thing that the prophets looked forward to it, but were told it was for later, not for them, but us now. Verse 12 tells us two things about it. *****(To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things which angels desired to look into.)**

God in his glorious wisdom prepared all of this for us. The prophets of old were ministering to us. That is kind of humbling to think about. As you read through the Old Testament you see God's hand of blessing on people who served him, and especially on the Jewish people. They were God's chosen people. But God had an even bigger plan than that. His plan included sending Jesus his Son, born to a Jewish woman, to be the savior of the whole world. Now God's chosen people are not just a Semitic tribe living in the middle east, but his chosen people are everywhere. In China, in Sudan, in Malaysia, in Canada, in Egypt, in Hungary, in Osaka, everywhere!

Verse 12 also tells us angels desire to look into these things. Don't take being His child for granted. It is special. How would you like to be an angel? You can't be, God made us as humans and we won't become angels. But just think for a minute how cool that would be. You could pass through walls. You could pop into a room and no one would know you were there, unless you showed yourself. You could zap things, you could save people from danger. You would be super. Now we know from the Bible that the angels serve God and are sent by him. They must obey him. But even with all that coolness and power, there is something that we have that they just can't understand. They long to look into, to understand, the salvation story. How we were lost in sin. We were destined to die and suffer in hell, but God in his mercy rescued us. They can see so much, they are so powerful, but they can't feel what we feel, the lost ones saved by Jesus. It is so awesome that the angels want to look into it.

So if you are a Christian remember,

- you are born anew, by God.
- He is keeping an inheritance for you. He has a place in heaven for you.
- In fact, He is keeping you.
- In this world you may suffer, but God is using it for his glory and your good.
- In the end there will be great joy. You can look forward to that now, and have joy.
- Be thankful for what God has done for you.

And if you are not a Christian, please consider these things. I stand before you and say, this is God's truth. Pray that He will help you to understand the truth and power of it.

Let's pray. I'll pray and then leave some time for you to pray where you are, either silently or out loud. Take your burdens, questions and rejoicings to God.

Pray.