
The Glorious Joy of a Proven Faith

1 Peter 1:1-12

Beginnings are delicate times. In them are the seeds from which the story's tree grows. Who knows what beginnings have really been? Who knows what beginnings have yet to be? Yet here we are at a beginning. So know this. We are at a beginning, but not of a story, not of fiction, but of a letter. This letter penned in the 1st century after the death of Jesus Christ the Messiah was written by one of the three disciples in the inner circle, Peter. Carried along by the Holy Spirit, he wrote what is known to us and is presented to us as the book of 1st Peter. This book is a part of the *apostolic deposit of truth*, which is the foundation on which the church is built. We have all of that deposit compiled together as the Bible.

The *AUTHOR IDENTIFIES HIMSELF* in the opening of the letter. "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." This opening sentence is common to the way letters were written in that day. He has not only identified himself personally but also officially. He is the Peter of the disciples and an apostle. He writes with authority and responsibility. He comes as a man with a story. His life with Jesus and in the beginning of the church is woven through the gospels and the book of Acts. What kind of man is Peter?

The gospels show us a Peter struggling to come to grips with who Jesus is. Over and over again Peter thought he grasped it. Then he made some declaration or carried out some deed that exposed his misunderstanding.

The gospels show us a Peter alternating between brashness and cowardice. He could speak up when asked, drew the sword when needed, engaged sinners when confronted. But then he sank in the swells, denied Christ thrice and ended up cowering nowhere near the cross.

Acts shows us a Peter, filled with the Spirit, preaching the New Covenant and leading the Jerusalem community of faith alongside the other apostles and elders. His messages are deep and astute readings and expositions of the Old Testament seeing the centrality of Christ and the glory of the cross. Over several weeks under his preaching, the church at Jerusalem grows from around 500 to over 9,000 converted and baptized souls.

The New Testament shows us a Peter often at the center of controversy and sometimes embarrassingly so. Ah, he feared a group from his home church, did not act according to the gospel and was publicly confronted and corrected by Paul. But he came to the end of his life and honor Paul as one to be heard and heeded, yet with carefulness over the hard things Paul taught.

So, all of us are learning how to live in a way that is pleasing to the Lord and that recognizes we are all in the process of maturing. Leaders need to grow and change. People need to grow and change. People in the midst of all different kinds of difficulties need a view of life that guides them to glory and guards them here in this world. Out of a life of faith and struggle, Peter then writes and calls for faith in the midst of struggle.

To whom is he writing? *THE RECIPIENTS* are identified in two ways. They are identified within their earthly situations and from the heavenly status. We'll consider the heavenly status in a moment. Let's focus on the words here and in 1 Peter 5:13 that help us to locate ourselves in their own story. To whom is Peter writing this book? To strangers, scattered and suffering.

The recipients of this letter are identified *BY THEIR CIRCUMSTANCES*. These are initial people receiving the letter as it was copied and distributed. They are described as the chosen exiles of the dispersion [who are now living] in a list of Roman districts. Rome of Peter's day had adopted a strategy of the forced relocating of people both to lessen their influence in one area and to "Romanize" another. We know that persecution had caused flight from Jerusalem (Acts 8:1-3). We also know from history that Christians left other cities and settled along the trade and mail routes. So their physical circumstance of being away from home and strangers in another place is being alluded to. They would all smile and nod, "Yes, we are scattered and strangers, sometimes suffering."

The recipients of this letter are identified *BY THEIR CONNECTIONS*. These are all who will read or hear this book all over the world and down through time. The language is evocative of Abraham in his sojourn in the land as the owner but still a pilgrim. Peter uses words and phrases here that connect us to the exile of the Jews to Babylon during the 6th Century BC. The top and tail of 1 Peter, the beginning and end of the book, I believe, are clearly making this connection. Notice 1 Peter 5:13, "She who is at Babylon, who is likewise chosen, greets you." Elect and scattered exiles are greeted by those in Babylon, also elect. Now, these are not just Jewish Christians. 1 Peter 2:9-10 make this clear. New Covenant believers are described in Old Covenant language. Then, right at the center of the book, the core appeal is made in 1 Peter 2:11-12. "*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.*" [ESV]

So, here it is for us. We are connected to this text and through it, to the Old Testament. When Israel went into exile, the prophets told them that it would last a long time. Yes, they would long for Jerusalem and for their homeland. But while they were settling in Babylon, God would be there among them and speaking to them (Ezekiel 1-3). They were to settle in and build homes, farm lands, trade in the cities, start and rear families. But they were to never lose their identity as God's people. That identity would be maintained by holy living arising from God's Word. They would be scattered; they would be strangers; they would sometimes suffer. But they were to never lose hope.

And so are we. We are living away from our homeland, heaven. We are strangers and citizens of the heavenly city. We are a new nation, a new race, a new people group. We will be scattered all over this world. We will be strangers in the world. And sometimes we will suffer at the hands of the world. But we must never lose hope. We must rely on the true grace of God. We must live holy in all circumstances as a witness to the world. We do so because we live by faith in the future hope of heaven by which the enabling grace of God actually flows into our lives.

So, my fellow exiles, what is the true grace of God for us pilgrims? How do we hope here?

In the Process of Our Salvation

(v.1b-2)

There is a glorious joy as we magnify the God of our salvation and in the process of our salvation. Notice the God-centeredness of Peter's view of salvation which begins in verses 1-2 and is sustained throughout. It is intentionally centered around the Trinity. So, we see the particular role each person of the Godhead has in our salvation.

God the Father

We are chosen according to or in God the Father's foreknowledge. This Greek word does not refer to "having a prior knowledge of". It refers to a special, particular knowledge equated with intimate love. Every time the Greek translators of the Old Testament came across the phrase "[a man] knew [his wife] and she conceived", they used this word to translate "knew". So, we are chosen, not because God knew ahead of time we would choose Him, but because He took note of us to enter into an intimate loving relationship with us.

We are chosen exiles. God the Father not only chose us to be His, but chose our situations for us. Our Father God chose first our general situation in which we live from our conversion to our death still in this fallen world. Our Father God also has chosen the particular situations of who we are, where we live and when we came into being. God has thus chosen by His love and intimate knowledge to our present and particular situations.

Thus, election, our being chosen by God the Father, is a key doctrine to sustain us when it seems like providence has abandoned us. The grace of God lifting our hope flows through believing that God has chosen us for Himself and chosen these circumstances we are now in for us. To reject either is to cut us off from the very truths designed to most comfort our souls and strengthen hope in difficult times.

God the Spirit

We are chosen by God the Father in the setting apart work by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is sent to those so chosen and sets them apart for salvation. This word "sanctification" simply means to set apart from and to set apart unto. The Holy Spirit's work in the believer is to actually set us apart from the old realm, the old creation, the old man we were and to place us into the new realm, the new creation, the new man we are becoming. It is a one time act the Spirit does at our conversion. Many terms and types are used to describe this grand work, this sanctification by the Spirit. It is called spiritual circumcision, spiritual baptism, spiritual death and resurrection, spiritual transference from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light.

So, our hope surges in the midst of suffering and sin for the Spirit has made all things new. The old creation is passing away because we are now in Christ. We have been set apart in our salvation so that while we live in this old fallen world, we are in fact not of this old creation. We have life from heaven given to sustain us in all the doing and dying around us. We may be exiles where the bodies of this flesh may fade and fail, but we have the life of Christ through the Spirit renewing and refreshing the inner man.

God the Son

We are chosen by the Father to be set apart by the Spirit for who Christ is and what He has done. See the two primary phrases here. Those chosen are Spirit enabled for submit-

ting to Christ's authority and for receiving Christ's benefits. The Father chose us, and the Spirit sets us apart for Christ as our ruler and as our redeemer. He is seen by those chosen as both Sovereign and Savior. Salvation consists of faith obeying and obtaining. What God has done then is to bring us to obeying the Lord Jesus Christ by faith and to receive the application of the His work on the cross.

Our salvation is into being obedient to Christ. No suffering, no hardship, no opposition, no physical ailment or debilitation, no persecution, nothing in this world excuses us from obedience. This is our chosen lot. We do not grudgingly bow to it. We joy in delight in this our privilege, to obey our Lord.

This phrase the "sprinkling of His blood" is meant to convey the *application* of what He has purchased for us. John Owen famously wrote, "We are saved by the blood as shed; we are sanctified by the blood as sprinkled." The work on the cross is on the behalf of you who are chosen by God. It is applied to you in your salvation as surely as it was purchased for you at the cross.

So, our hope rises in difficulty as grace enables us as chosen exiles to obey our risen Lord. Our joy rises in hardship as grace enables us to realize in our persons and in our providences the application of all the benefits of our salvation.

Peter wants us to understand that salvation is God's initiative, begun in eternity past to bring about in time and history all that He had purposed for His pleasure and glory. It is in this grace and hope that we rejoice even when distressing trials come. It is in this that grace and peace are not just added, but are multiplied in us and to us.

In the Privileges of Our Salvation

(v.3-5)

There is a glorious joy in a proven faith when we always maintain a doxological view of our salvation. Notice how this opens with praise. "Blessed be God!" This praise is not just in general terms, but is focused, intentional, purposeful and informed. Praise be to God for three grand benefits in the privileges of our salvation.

God's Regenerating Mercy

(v.3)

In a massive exercise and expression of mercy, God simply inserts His very life into dead and depraved sinners causing us to have the life of God, eternal life, in our inner man. This is the new birth or regeneration. God is the effective cause both in principle and in practice. He is its cause in principle through the resurrection of Christ. He is its principle in practice through the regeneration of the dead sinner. It is His mercy, His doing, His quickening, His working, His choosing.

In the midst of all the darkness and deadness all around us, we have now a living hope. It might be better translated, a lively hope. But for many, this hope seems to sag and fade. O, chosen exile, set apart by the Spirit, receiving the benefits of our salvation, lift up your hope through the regenerating life of our risen Lord. Blessed be the God of mercy who brought us to life through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

God's Reserved Inheritance**(v.4)**

We have been born again to life as God's children in order to receive an inheritance. Our lively hope is in a living Lord who bestows upon us all the benefice He has designated for His Son. We are joint-heirs. We are born again to receive what God has promised Jesus. Thus our hope is for our heavenly reward.

Now look at the kind of inheritance it is. It is imperishable, undefiled and unfading. That is, it cannot be corrupted by time and decay. It is decidedly permanent and pure. It is not threatened at all by our being strangers, by our being scattered, by our being away from home. It is not at risk from all the fallenness and frailty of this world. It will not perish in this world. It is undefiled by sin. It is unfading by the growing darkness of night. No rather it is eternal in heaven. It precious and pure. It is illuminated ever more brightly by grace through faith. It is set aside, reserved in heaven. There it guarded over and kept safe until all the children arrive at home. Then, that inheritance will be opened for us all and it will be both Christ and all that Christ has been promised.

These characteristics are meant to draw our hearts away from all we value which is decaying, defiled and fading so that, like Abraham, we are looking forward for what God has promised in His Word, purchased by His Son and provided by His Spirit. Blessed be God who has reserved our inheritance in heaven for us.

God's Preserving Power**(v.5)**

Until that day, we are being protected by God's power until that day when the kind of salvation we have chosen to and set apart for is brought fully to light. We are not there yet. In the Old Testament, that salvation was revealed by the shape of shadows. In the New Testament, that salvation is revealed by the substance of Christ, yet still dimly seen and understood. But there will come a day when the fullness of all that salvation means and provides will be fully illumined by the face of Christ.

This is the idea of a safe-guarding convoy; a VIP surrounded by body-guards, a general by his shield-bearers. We, His heaven-bound saints are protected by God's power—His saving, sanctifying, sustaining and glorifying power. This protecting, warding power of God is granted by faith. All that God grants He gives through faith. He protects and preserves His people by continuing to give them faith to believe Him in an obeying way. So it is all of God – the faith He gives and the protection He provides.

Why does Peter need to say all this? Because the glories of the future arise from the afflictions of the present.

In the Proving of Our Faith

(v.6-9)

So why do we need protecting by God's power? What are the so threatening trials doing? If our circumstances are being chosen by God for us His chosen people, then what is He doing? Here is the glad mixing of the bitter and the sweet—affliction and adoration, grief and glory, trial and triumph.

Rejoicing in Affliction

(v.6)

The proving of our faith is experienced as rejoicing in the midst of affliction. Notice that Peter says "*In this*" rejoice, even though "*by this*" distressed. We rejoice in this, all that Peter has talked about in verses 3-5 even though we are distressed by this, all that is going on as trials and temptations. So it is a matter of focus, of faith, in the midst of our present hardships.

WE BELIEVE WHAT GOD SAYS IN SUCH A WAY THE JOY FLOWS AND HOPE GROWS. We choose to set our thoughts and our wants on what is true in such a way that it looks like rejoicing. No dour, resigned, fatalistic, doomed, grudging acceptance of the inevitable. Rather, we choose a lively hope and joyful belief in the midst of hardship.

WE RECOGNIZE THAT THE PRESENT TROUBLES ARE NECESSARY AND TEMPORARY. This is how our hope is lively and our belief joyful. What we are going through is necessary. It is what God has chosen for us. The sovereignty of God is a blessing in our salvation and in our trials. What we are going through is temporary. At worst, it can only last the rest of our life.

WE MAY BE GRIEVED BY THEM BUT NOT EXCESSIVELY SO. We are really grieved in the hardness of our troubles. No fake happiness, no phony silliness. This is our mixed lot now. So, the bitter and the sweet are mixed for us by our sovereign, good and wise God.

WE TREAT OUR TROUBLES AS TRIALS. This is the Biblical evaluation of our hardships. They are trials, testings. They come so as to test whether we are real. All that comes to us, whether it is testing of our mental or physical state or testing of our moral fiber all at bottom test our satisfaction in God.

Refining by Affliction

(v.7)

So if we are being refined by affliction, then what is it that God is testing? The way you respond to the really hard things of life demonstrates whether the belief you say you have is faith or it is feigned. Two simple questions illuminate what Peter is saying.

IS OUR FAITH GENUINE? We can only know by the refining. Genuine faith expresses itself no matter how hard the trial, how distressing the trouble. The acid of our trials both purifies away the dross and proves the quality of the gold of our faith. True faith will hold fast to Christ during even the most terrible of trials.

IS OUR FAITH GLORIFYING? We can only offer that by the rejoicing. Now here is the end effect of our tested faith; it magnifies God. It is intended to show how glorious God is, not how great we are. True faith so holds fast to Christ that it spotlights the worth, weight and greatness of God.

It is a genuine faith, a proven treasuring of God for all that He is in Christ to us that results in praising, glorifying and honoring Christ at His revelation. Because of the word honor literally means *to value* and the word revelation means *to uncover*, we might understand this to say this. A genuine treasuring of God in Christ, a whole hearted embracing of Him in the midst of affliction, has the effect of revealing, showing, (literally: *uncovering*) Christ in such a way that He is praised, gloriously magnified, and prized (literally: *valued*).

Responding to Affliction

(v.8)

What is the great challenge in how we are responding in affliction? Troubles are visible and present while we often feel that Christ is neither. We have never seen Him with our earthly eyes. We do not see Him now with our earthly eyes. We see Him by the eyes of the soul, that is, by faith. Yet, we love Him. Our hearts move toward Him whom we have not seen. How?

Notice the movement of the soul here: Loves because believes with inexpressible and glorious joy. This is the proven faith that God is refining in affliction. It is a faith and joy united. We believe and rejoice in the One who is presented as the object of faith. This joy is not mere happiness – it is inexpressible and full of glory. It is an experience and expression of the soul that is a God magnifying gladness flowing from the union of loving— that is, giving ourselves to— and believing— that is, embracing for ourselves, God. Thus, Christ is revealed, in such a way as to be praised, magnified and valued, by our loving and believing in Him, though invisible in the midst of our visible trials, so that we are captured by an inexpressible and glorious joy.

In affliction, we are to be captivated with glorifying Christ so that our hearts are caught up by His gladness.

Results of Affliction

(v.9)

The ultimate outcome is the salvation of our very selves. Is not the intimation here that we see our whole selves as being saved, sanctified and glorified beginning now and ending then? Is not the ultimate end of our salvation the inestimable treasure of magnifying Christ? Are the as yet unrevealed treasures of our inheritance all that we can rejoice in as God for us in Christ?

Our response to God is experiential and emotional. I am not pleading here for *emotionalism*, emotions for their own sake. What God takes pleasure in are experiences and emotions that are appropriate to truth, passions shaped by the Word, the soul singing over the Scripture. Is it not easy just to say, “I am an unemotional person, and that’s the way God made me.” In my own life, I have had to confess simple hard-heartedness and coldness toward God and plead for a heart that is open and soft to embrace Him, to prize Him, to have a soul-consuming passion for Him, to so love and believe Him that I am captured by an inexpressible and glorious joy.

In the Pattern of Our Lord

(v.10-12)

So, why does it work this way? Why in our bit of life must suffering, trials and hardships always come before gladness and glory? This paragraph opens that for us. The key is in verse 11. First, there was the suffering of Christ and then glories to follow.

Prophesied of Grace to Come

(v.10)

Those to whom was revealed the marvels of this grace we now enjoy, sought carefully among the shadows of the words they were receiving trying to understand it. The greatness of our salvation was hinted at in the shapes of shadows and the shades of the words. So the Old Testament speaks of the grace we enjoy, even this grace that enables a lively hope in the fullness of salvation. But it does so by pointing to a person.

Predicted of the Glory to Follow

(v.11)

They wanted to know who this was going to be. What was predicted did not fit into their categories. In the midst of their own suffering they were anticipating glory, not more suffering than glory. They knew it was centered on a certain person and a certain time. The prophesies they were giving were enabled by the very Spirit of Christ in them. So, the predictions followed God's design: suffering first, glory follows.

Preached in the Gospel Now

(v.12)

So here is a Biblical hermeneutic necessary for a proven faith, a lively hope and God glorifying joy. In essence, Peter is saying, "The Scriptures say so." He says that *they* were serving a future generation; *we* are speaking to the current generation. The gospel, served by them for us, preached to us by the apostles, and sealed by the Holy Spirit from heaven is so grand even the angels in heaven are dazzled by it and long to look into it. The gospel is about the glory of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit who designed suffering first and glory to follow. The gospel is about how Jesus suffered and then entered into His glory. So, the gospel then means that we now will suffer and glory will follow at our resurrection.

We are living in the dawning of the age of Christ's glory. But it is arising both out of His finished suffering and our continuing affliction. This is a thing of such great glory that even the heavenly hosts, who have a clear and undimmed view of the Godhead, seek to peer earnestly into the depths of this mystery.

Conclusion Many of you are suffering...

How are you responding?

How firm your faith?

How lively your hope?

How great your joy?

Do you believe the gospel?

In the provision of our salvation...

In the process of our salvation...

In the prospect of our salvation

In the product of our salvation...

So may the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though test by fire, be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. In the midst of necessary but temporary trials, may you have a lively hope by a genuine faith with an inexpressible and full of glory joy.

Notes