

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

The Great Mercy of God in Regeneration 1 Peter 1:3

It is important to me that we maintain a sense of continuity, of connectedness, as we get further and further into the book of 1 Peter. To that end a little review from week to week is appropriate.

I have preached five sermons so far in this series. In the first sermon from **verse 1**, I introduced you to the purpose of the book as expressed by Peter himself in **5:12**: *Through Silvanus, our faithful brother I have written to you briefly, exhorting and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand firm in it!* The Christian communities in northern Asia Minor were being ostracized and subjected to various kinds of abuse. 1 Peter was written to encourage these Christians, to remind them of their true status in Christ, “to help them find meaning in their sufferings, to urge them to stay together in mutual support” (Craddock, *First and Second Peter and Jude*, p. 14-15), and to renew their hope.

In the second, third, and fourth sermons, I spoke to three major themes that emerge as one studies the book – hope, hardship, and holiness. In the sermon on **hope**, I argued that Biblical hope is always the expectation, the happy anticipation of God’s grace. Christian hope is not a groundless wish for good

fortune or pious optimism that everything will turn out right in the end. Rather, Christian hope is “a patient, disciplined, confident waiting for and expectation of” (Colin Brown, *DoNTT*, p.243) the blessings promised in the gospel. In the sermon on **hardship** I argued that our hardship and suffering approximates that suffering with and for Christ envisioned in 1 Peter as we more and more (1) freely choose the path of obedience, (2) as we search out and earnestly pursue God’s call upon our lives, and (3) as we expend our lives for the salvation of others. In the sermon on **holiness** I argued that the degree to which you pursue and maintain a holy life is directly related to the vitality of your hope in the promises of God in the gospel. All three of these themes find expression in the big idea for the book. *The lively hope (confident expectation) of salvation (gospel promises) sustains the believer (in both faith and godliness) in times of suffering (trial, hardship, difficulties met with in the path of obedience).*

In the fifth sermon, from **verse 2**, we saw that salvation is a work of all three persons in the Godhead. We rejoiced together as we considered why Peter should begin his letter with an appeal to the work of the Trinity in our redemption. In **1 Peter 1:2** the Spirit of God lifts us to the elevated heights of the great mercy of the triune God in salvation. He transports us above the clouds of time and circumstances into the deep counsels of eternity where we can, at last, get a glimpse of spiritual realities. Although we may be objects of the derision of men, we are, at the same time, objects of the delight of God. Although we may be rejected by men, we are, at the same time, elected by God (**1:1**). Although we may be acquainted with grief and distress on earth, we are, at the same time, recipients of grace and peace in fullest measure from God (**1:2**). The Spirit of God wants us to know the extraordinary privilege that is ours; the extraordinary eternal purposes behind all that is happening in our lives. The Holy Spirit

reminds us of our status, our identity, our standing as the elect people of God (2:9-10). Indeed, this is the theme of the entire first section of the letter (1:3 – 2:10) in which Peter exalts the glory of the promises of God in the gospel of Christ.

This morning we move into the body of Peter's correspondence. That which is determined in the deep counsels of eternity (1:2) and accomplished on the cross of Christ is applied to us in time and in our human experience. Basically in verses 3-5 Peter supplies a summary of the Christian life. In **verse 3** its beginning in the new birth; in **verse 4** its end in our taking possession of our eternal inheritance; and in **verse 5** our earthly pilgrimage in which we are kept by the power of God.

1 Peter 1:1-5 ... *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure. ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

Verse 3 begins with a doxology. ***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** This is not an unusual way to begin a letter. Two of Paul's letters begin this way as well. **2 Corinthians 1:3**, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.* **Ephesians 1:3**, *Blessed be the God*

and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Achtemeier notes, “that the letter begins with such praise to God indicates the theocentric nature of [Peter’s] thought” (*1 Peter*, p. 94). Peter does not move immediately to address their circumstances. Indeed, he deals with the matter of suffering *last* in his letter. We are upbeat or downcast in large measure depending upon the temporal cares with which we are burdened. In this verse we are called to God-centered lives; lives saturated with the truth of the gospel. Peter is absolutely convinced that life begins with; life is shaped by; life is given its dominant tone by the contemplation of the glory of God in the person and work of Christ.

Because blessedness is the essence of God, blessing is to be ascribed to God by His people. **Psalm 68:34-35**, *Ascribe strength to God; His majesty is over Israel, and His strength is in the skies.* ³⁵ *O God, Thou art awesome from Thy sanctuary. The God of Israel Himself gives strength and power to the people. **Blessed be God!*** In Psalm 68 God is blessed for His strength, His majesty, and His awesomeness. What prompts the blessing ascribed to God in **1 Peter 1:3**? Here God is blessed for His great mercy. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who according to His great mercy.***

A. W. Tozer suggests that mercy is that “attribute of God ... which disposes [Him] to be actively compassionate” (*Knowledge*, pp. 96-97). Arthur Pink says mercy “denotes the ready inclination of God to relieve the misery of fallen creatures” (p.72). Berkhof defines mercy as “the goodness or love of God shown to those who are in misery or distress, irrespective of their deserts” (*Systematic Theology*, p. 72). We are well acquainted with divine mercy as compassionate treatment. However, it is not enough to limit God’s mercy to the performance of deeds of kindness to unfortunate people.

Mercy is the divine response to our desperate condition brought about by sin. Berkhof says “the mercy of God contemplates [man] as one who is bearing the **consequences of sin**, who is in a pitiable condition, and who therefore needs help” (p. 72). Indeed, it is our desperate condition that calls forth God’s mercy. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks the question, **Into what estate did the fall bring mankind (Q.17)? Answer?** The fall brought mankind into an estate [or condition] of sin and misery.

The Bible portrays this condition as spiritual death. **Ephesians 2:1** says, *you were dead in your trespasses and sins* (see Col. 2:13). What characterizes this condition of spiritual death? In general, the man who is spiritually dead is numb, unresponsive, deaf, and callous to spiritual things. His ideas of Jesus Christ, for example, are the product of his own imagination. He has no concept of **Jesus** as *revealed* to men in the gospel. He knows nothing of Jesus as his Savior, his Sin-bearer, his Sacrifice, his Substitute, his Shepherd, or his Sovereign King.

This man is careless about his own **soul** and spiritual things in general. He never seriously reflects upon his spiritual state or the condition of his eternal soul. He never seriously “*considers his ways.*” He never seriously studies God’s Word with a view to what it says about what man is to believe concerning God and what duty God requires of man.

This man is never seriously convicted of his **sin** nor does he desire deliverance from it. He never struggles with sin. His acknowledgement of sin is slight and a mere formality. The thought that he is under a sentence of death and condemnation of God’s law has never entered his mind.

This man is unconcerned about his relationship with the **community** of faith, the church. While he may be a nice guy he has no particular regard for Christians; no particular need or desire to be with them.

This man has no concept of overcoming the **world**. His heart is attached *to* earthly things. His actions are governed *by* worldly maxims. He goes where the world goes. He acts like the world acts. The rules of the world are his rules.

Well ... so what? What shall be your end if you physically die in such a spiritually dead state? **Revelation 14:11** describes the destiny of such men, "*And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever, and they have no rest day and night.*" Question #19 of the Shorter Catechism asks, **What is the misery of that estate where into man fell? Answer?** All mankind by their fall lost communion with God, are under his wrath and curse, and so made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and to the pains of hell forever.

Beloved, this is the condition answered by the great mercy of God in the new birth. In **John 3:7** Jesus said to Nicodemus, "*You MUST be born again.*" This imperative was spoken to one of the most religious men of the day. Jesus makes it very plain that if you are not born of God you "*cannot see the kingdom of God*", you "*cannot enter the kingdom of God*", and that you "*cannot please God.*"

In **Ephesians 2:4-5** Paul goes on to say, *But God, being rich in mercy ... even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ.* Here in **1 Peter 1:3** the richness and greatness of God's mercy is seen in his taking dead and guilty sinners and making us alive and exalting us with Christ. *Who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again.* We call this new birth

regeneration. Regeneration is the *gracious* work of God that conquers spiritual death. Regeneration is the *creative* work of God in which He makes men otherwise dead in transgressions and sin alive to spiritual things. Regeneration is the *sovereign* work of God by which new life is communicated to the soul. Regeneration is the *necessary* work of God without which it is impossible to believe the gospel.

Indeed, **verse 3** says that God *has caused us to be born again*. Man is unable to give himself spiritual life. If man is ever to live he is to be acted upon from outside himself. If he is ever to live it must be an unconditional event. It must be an act of free grace and mercy sovereignly bestowed. It is God who must give life to men because, as we learn from **Romans 8:7**, *the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so*. **John 1:13** speaks of those *who [are] born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*.

What are the evidences of God's having performed this creative work in our hearts? In a word, all things become new (**II Cor. 5:17**). The newness is more dramatic in some than in others. Nevertheless, there is a very great change in regeneration.

One's relationship to **Jesus Christ** is changed. **1 John 5:1**, *Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God; and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him*. There is a new apprehension of Christ. The man born of God savingly believes in Jesus as He is offered in the Gospel. If you are "*born of God*" you have embraced Jesus as the Savior who was sent as a grace-gift from God, as the Sin-bearer who "*bore your sins in His body on the cross*", as the Sacrifice whose blood

was “*poured out for the forgiveness of sins*”, as the Substitute who died in your place, as the Shepherd who “*leads,*” “*guides,*” “and “*restores*”, and as the Sovereign to whom your knee bows and will bow in reverent adoration.

One’s relationship to **sin** is changed. **1 John 2:29**, *you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him*. The unregenerate man hates the light of the gospel. He despises anything and everything that exposes his sin and guilt. This is the reason he runs with lost folks all the time. The regenerate, on the other hand, “*hates every false way*” (**Ps. 119:104**). Sin is now his enemy and sinners are no longer his closest companions. He sometimes cannot even explain why he is now sensitive to what he says, where he is seen, what he listens to, the company he keeps, and what he reads.

One’s relationship to the **world** is changed. **1 John 5:4**, *for whatever is born of God overcomes the world*. His “*citizenship is in heaven*” (**Phil. 3:20**). He has been “*crucified to the world*” (**Gal. 6:14**) and is characterized by an eternal perspective in his affairs. His goal is heaven and his soul has been quickened to desire it. So he “*lays up his treasure in heaven*” (**Matt. 6:20**).

One’s relationship to **Christians** is changed. **1 John 3:14**, *we know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren*. This law is written upon his heart by the Holy Spirit, *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself* (**Matt. 22:37-39**). Love of God is the prevailing affection in his heart. This love of God spills over into love for the brethren. This is a most obvious evidence of our having been “*born of God*.” **John 13:34-35**, *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another,*

even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.

One's relationship to **spiritual** things in general is changed. **1 John 5:18**, *we know that no one who is born of God sins*. The regenerate is not careless as the lost. He is diligent to maintain a watch over his example, his speech, and his devotion. He is in a fight of faith. He does not always win but he engages in the struggle to keep himself pure. His spiritual life is not one of many interests but rather the core around which all other interests orbit.

Born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. It may surprise you that Peter's emphasis here has not been on the doctrine of regeneration as such. The emphasis is on the newness of life. You see, beloved, by the new birth we are now *in Christ*. Look over at **5:14**, the last verse in the letter, *Peace be to you all who are in Christ*. **2 Corinthians 5:17** says, *Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold new things have come*. Peter says again in **1:23**, *for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God*. We have been born into a new family (**1 Peter 1:14**). We enjoy a new sphere of existence. **1 Peter 1:18**, *knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers*. By the new birth we enjoy a new status. **1 Peter 2:9-10**, *but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God*. We have been born to a new destiny. Our destiny is forever tied to that of Jesus Christ. Our ultimate destiny is determined by our relationship to Jesus Christ, not by our

circumstances.

We were ruined in Adam. Adam as our representative fell and we fell in Him. We are restored in Christ, the Second Adam. Christ as our representative paid the penalty for sin and fulfilled the just demands of the law and we are declared righteous as we are *in Him*. Christ is our Representative. We are identified *with Him*. We are *in Him*. That means that His fortunes are our fortunes. When Christ died we died to that terrible penalty of sin. And *as Christ was raised* we were raised that *we too might walk in the newness of life (Rom. 6:4)*. Our hope is *living* because Jesus Christ our Head is alive. Our hope is *living* because it is in; it is tied to the One who ever lives.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

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FIRST PETER

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1 Peter 1:3

Review of first five sermons

In the first sermon (1:1) I introduced you to the _____ of the book as expressed by Peter himself (5:12).

In the second, third, and fourth sermons, I spoke to three major _____ that emerge as one studies the book – *hope*, *hardship*, and *holiness*.

The big idea for the book

The lively hope (confident expectation) of *salvation* (gospel promises) *sustains the believer* (in both faith and godliness) *in times of suffering* (trial, hardship, difficulties met with in the path of obedience).

In the fifth sermon we saw that salvation is a work of all three persons in the Godhead.

Today's sermon (#6)

That which is determined in the deep counsels of eternity (1:2) and _____ on the cross of Christ is _____ to us in time and in our human experience.

1 Peter 1:1-5 ... *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen* ² *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure.* ³ ***Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*** ⁴ *to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,* ⁵ *who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

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Achtemeier notes, "that the letter begins with such praise to God indicates the _____ nature of [Peter's] thought" (1 Peter, p. 94).

What prompts the blessing ascribed to God in 1 Peter 1:3?

Here God is blessed for His _____.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who according to His great mercy*

Mercy is the divine response to the condition brought about by _____.

The Bible portrays this condition as spiritual _____ (Eph. 2:1).

What characterizes this condition of spiritual death?

Well ... so what? What shall be your end if you physically die in such a spiritually dead state?

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Who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again

We call this new birth _____.

God has caused us to be born again

What are the evidences of God's having performed this creative work in our hearts?

*Born again to a living hope
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*

The emphasis is on the _____ of life.

We have been born into a new family (1 Peter 1:14).

We enjoy a new sphere of existence (1 Peter 1:18).

We enjoy a new _____ (1 Peter 2:9-10).

We have been born to a new _____.

Our ultimate destiny is determined by our _____ to Jesus Christ, not by our circumstances.