

1 Peter-Blessing God in Trials-1 Peter 1:3-9
College Baptist Church
February 14, 2021

I invite you to turn with me to the book of 1 Peter, chapter 1. 1 Peter can be found toward the end of the New Testament, just after the book of James. If you didn't bring a Bible, there are Bibles in the pew racks; I believe you will find 1 Peter 1 on p. 1014. Today's sermon text is also printed in the bulletin along with space for taking notes.

As we said last week, 1 Peter is a letter written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the Apostle Peter—an authorized and authoritative representative of Jesus. Peter's original recipients were Christians described as chosen, scattered sojourners—living in northern Asia Minor in the first century. But as we study this letter together in the coming months, I think you will see that Peter's words are incredibly applicable to Christians living in the 21st Century as well. We too, are chosen, scattered sojourners living in a hostile world.

As we transition from the opening salutation in vv. 1-2, Peter begins the body of the letter with a prayer. And it is not just any prayer—it is a prayer of blessing. It's not a prayer of blessing for food—like we often say at the dinner table, “bless this food to our bodies.” And it's not a prayer of blessing on the recipients of his letter—like the famous blessing from Numbers 6 that begins “the LORD bless you and keep you.” No, this is a prayer of blessing on God himself. To bless is to praise. To praise is to bless.

This morning in the call to worship from Psalm 34 we heard a prayer of blessing. I'd like to read the first two lines of that Psalm again; because it is quite probable that Peter had Psalm 34 in mind as he penned his letter.

*“I will bless the Lord at all times;
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.”*

The Psalmist and Peter call us to bless the Lord “at all times” and “continually”—which includes times of trial. So listen to 1 Peter 1:3-9—a prayer of blessing to God in trials.
Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials,⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

We Bless God Because We Have Been Born Again

Now hopefully you realize that God is worthy of praise for all sorts of things. But here Peter pronounces blessing on God for a very specific reason in verse 3. Peter says, we bless God because we have been born again. Peter is not speaking of physical birth; he is speaking of spiritual birth. Even as our Lord Jesus Christ is the eternal son of God the Father, Christians are children of God the Father. God the Father has brought us to life not only physically, but spiritually.

To say that God the Father “*caused us to be born again*” is another way to highlight God’s merciful initiative in adopting us into his family. He caused our new birth not because we were oh-so worthy or oh-so deserving, but “*according to his great mercy.*”

Think about it this way. Biologically-speaking, children don’t “cause” their own birth, parents “cause” the birth of their children. In the same way, God the Father “conceived” us spiritually-speaking. He gave us new life according to his own merciful character.

And in vv. 3-5, Peter goes on to explain three consequences of this new birth: (1) hope, (2) inheritance, and (3) salvation.

The first consequence of our new birth is **hope**. Now in everyday English the word hope means “wishful thinking.” Like some of you who hope that it will be 75 degrees and sunny tomorrow. Or some of you who hope that you’ll get an A on the exam you didn’t study for. Or hoping that the Lions will win the Super Bowl next year. That’s how we use the word hope in contemporary America—for things that we eagerly desire or wish for, but that we seriously doubt will actually come true.

But biblical hope is different. Biblical hope is certainty. It is absolute confidence that something will come to pass. It is so much more than wishful thinking. And as Peter says, Christians have *living* hope—and this living hope is grounded on the fact that Jesus is living today—as Josh sang in the offertory. In other words, the resurrection of Jesus from the dead secures our hope that we too will one day rise from the dead. As children born into the family of God, we have living hope that we will rise from grave, just like Jesus, our resurrected Lord and elder brother.

And not only do we have hope; we have an **inheritance**—that’s the second consequence of our new birth. God the Father has written us into his will, so-to-speak. But unlike the worldly wealth that you might inherit from your generous relatives, the inheritance from God the Father is described as “*imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.*” It is an inheritance that can’t lose value—like those stocks you received from Uncle Bill that can tank overnight. It is an inheritance that can’t be defiled—like when a flippant father removes you as a beneficiary of his estate. And it is an inheritance that won’t fade—like the paint on Grandma’s house that you inherited at her passing.

Don’t get me wrong, earthly inheritances are nice—but they aren’t secure. In contrast, Peter reminds us that God the Father is keeping guard over your heavenly inheritance—like the precious metals being guarded at the US Bullion Depository at Fort Knox.

Evidently, the nearly 150 million ounces of gold being stored at Fort Knox are securely guarded—behind four fences (two of which are electric), with armed sentinels, behind four-foot-thick granite walls held together by 750 tons of reinforcing steel, behind a maze of locked doors, behind a 22-ton vault door.ⁱ That gold is being kept. It's as secure as something can be on earth. But that gold isn't nearly as safe as the inheritance of God's children being guarded by him in heaven. Our inheritance is safe.

And not only is the *inheritance* safe—God's *children* are safe. Peter goes on to say in verse 5 that God's children are being guarded "*through faith*" by God's power. In other words, our faith is not in ourselves. No, Christians are people who trust in the power of God to guard us and keep us safe until we receive our eternal inheritance.

Which brings us to the third consequence of new birth: **salvation**—specifically, according to the end of verse 5, "*for a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time.*" Salvation is another one of those words—like hope—that needs a little defining for contemporary readers like ourselves. The word salvation means "rescue." So, here Peter is talking about a future rescue—a salvation that is yet to come.

Now this can be a bit confusing, because Christians often refer to themselves as "saved," right? So, haven't we *already* received our salvation. Well, yes...and no. You see, the Bible speaks of our "salvation" as past, present, and future. We *have been saved*—that is our justification, made right with God when we believed in Jesus. You could call that our past salvation. We *are being saved*—that is our sanctification, being progressively made holy by the Holy Spirit, like we mentioned last week. You could call this our present salvation. And we *will be saved*—that is our glorification, when we will be finally and forever rescued when Jesus returns and is revealed at the end of the age. You could call that our future salvation. And that is what Peter is talking about here. He is reminding Christians that ultimate salvation from the presence of sin and the trials of this world..

So, when you think about it—the three consequences are mutually interpretive. That is, living hope, heavenly inheritance, and future salvation are overlapping and interrelated—all secured for Christians who have been born again into God the Father's family. And it is incredibly important for Christians to keep their ultimate identity in mind while living in this world as resident aliens/exiles/sojourners. Because as Peter goes on to say in verses 6-9, the Christian experience here on earth is often marked by trials.

We Bless God Because Trials Have Purpose

But Peter makes it abundantly clear that trials are not pointless in the Christian life. To the contrary, we bless God because trials have purpose. Christians are not fatalists—there is purpose—and even praise—in the pain of trials. Peter was no stranger to trials. I've been reading through Acts in my daily devotions, and I was reminded that Peter was imprisoned multiple times for his faith. And according to extra-biblical history and tradition, he would die by crucifixion for his allegiance to Jesus. So, he writes with an empathy to his fellow believers who are facing trials. Notice Peter's description of trials in verse 6. He says that trials are various, grievous, temporary, and necessary.

To say that trials are various is to say they come in all different shapes and sizes. That means that trials include the temptations of living in a world filled with sin. That means that trials include the hardship of human suffering, sickness, and death. That means that trials include the frustrations of relational strife. And that means that trials include the reality of persecution for faith in Jesus. The trials are various—not everyone will die a martyr, but some will. Not all will lose their job for their allegiance to Jesus, but some will. Trials are various.

Trials are also grievous. To be sure, Peter was tough. He endured many hardships as a Christian, but he did not live in denial. He was grieved by trials; and he knows that the recipients of his letter had experienced real suffering. Even though trials have purpose in the Christian life, that doesn't mean we don't lament. And I think Peter is reminding us to lament grievous trials with one another.

And thankfully, trials are temporary. Peter is not making light of trials when he says that they only occur "*for a little while*." Rather, he is putting trials into an eternal perspective. This is something we need to remind ourselves when we are in the midst of a trial. Because when you are battling cancer—it doesn't feel temporary. When you are arguing with your child or parent month after month—it doesn't feel like "a little while." And when you are sitting in prison in Turkey like Andrew Brunson the Christian missionary and pastor who was incarcerated for two years before his release in 2018, it doesn't feel temporary. Peter is reminding us that these trials do not last forever, only a little while.

But the Christian is not simply waiting for trials to pass. Because, as I said trials have a purpose. In fact, Peter dares to say that trials are necessary. This is bold language. To say that trials are necessary is to say that our sovereign Father God himself determines that trials are beneficial for his children. He does not lead us into trial and temptation that we may fail—as we ask him NOT to do in the Lord's Prayer. Instead, according to his loving, fatherly will he determines when it is necessary for his children to face trials—trials with a purpose. Trials that produce the valuable virtues of faith, love, and joy as we see in vv. 7-9.

First of all, we see that trials prove faith. Precious metals are "proven" in fires. Gold was the most valuable metal in the ancient world; and gold was refined and proven in a fiery furnace that burnt off the dross leaving behind pure gold. Using this example from everyday life, Peter is saying that the refinement of genuine faith is so valuable to God that the he orchestrates trials so that our trust in him will be found pure and authentic. God has always worked this way. Proverbs 17:3 puts it this way:

*The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold,
and the Lord tests hearts.*

If you look back at your own life, I suspect that it was the most difficult times of testing when your heart-felt faith in Jesus really grew. And at the revelation of Jesus—that is, when Jesus returns once and for all for that future salvation—the tested and tried faith of authentic believers will result in praise and glory and honor to God, who sustained his children through various, grievous, temporary, and necessary trials.

Second of all, we see that trials cultivate love—love for Jesus, that is. Unlike the Apostle Peter, the recipients of Peter’s letter had never seen Jesus with their own eyes. They lived far away from Galilee and Judea, where Jesus lived and ministered. But that didn’t mean that they didn’t love him. Love is “covenant” language. They had been loved by Jesus—having been “sprinkled” with his blood as members of his new covenant people. And they expressed their covenant allegiance to their King—Jesus Christ who had promised to come again and rescue them from this world of trials. The trials of this life cause Christians who have not yet seen Jesus to love and long for his return.

Like the original recipients of Peter’s letter, you have never seen Jesus. But I see that you love him. And I pray that the hardships of this world would make you love him all the more as you await that day when he will lovingly come to *“wipe away every tear from [your] eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”* (Revelation 21:4)

And finally, we see that trials perpetuate joy. Christians are people of joy—even in, and especially in—the midst of trials. Peter says in verse 6—*“in this you rejoice.”* Now we rejoice in the midst of trials not because the trials are enjoyable. No, they are grievous. But we rejoice because trials produce greater love for and trust in Jesus. We rejoice because God orchestrates trials which produce faith and love in his people. And we rejoice because the suffering and grief of trials do not get the last word—there is deliverance, rescue, salvation to come. Listen again to verses 8-9.

⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹ obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Brothers and sisters, we are people of faith, love, and joy because we have hope, inheritance, and salvation. And for all of this we say, blessed be God, who has given us new birth and who has brought purpose out of our trials.

Benediction—1 Peter 5:10-11

[May] the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, ...restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you. ¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen.

¹ <https://www.mentalfloss.com/article/66409/9-worlds-most-ridiculously-secure-safes-and-vaults>