

Peter is writing to a group of Christians who are suffering. They've been persecuted, some may have had to leave their homes. They are living under the hostile government of Nero. Paul either has been, or is about to be beheaded at Rome. This is on top of the ordinary cares and trials they had, that are common to all of us. So this is a book to sufferers and for sufferers. We are all different, but in one way we are all alike – we all know what it is like to suffer, in some way, to some degree. We live in a world of heartbreak and shattered dreams, and suffering of various kinds.

But Peter has a message for us in our suffering. His message is that: We have something that can overshadow our hurts, our disappointments, and even our worst suffering. We have something that can overcome persecution, or being an outcast, or being divorced, or a bad day at the office, or failing in some undertaking in which you really wanted to succeed. **THIS ONE THING, IS OUR SALVATION.** Our salvation is capable of producing such optimism that even in distress we can greatly rejoice.

Right here and now, as believers in Jesus Christ, we experience fellowship with God, the Holy Spirit communes with us, we know the love of God. But the thing Peter focuses on is the **END** of our salvation, the things that are ahead of us: the massive future glory, the spiritual riches we will inherit. **THIS** is the hope that is able to generate present joy. What we taste **NOW** of the goodness and love and riches of Christ is so good, but it is nothing to what is ahead.

Peter wants us to see the outcome of our salvation as the **DOMINANT PERSPECTIVE** of our lives. This glory to come, is to be so big to us. It is not just, I will go to heaven when I die, but it sure is a depressing life now. We are to see all that is ahead of us as so grand, so glorious, that it affects us now! This future hope infuses everything you do **NOW** with joy. It is the fuel for your optimism and joy.

Either **ALL** we can see is that life is a bummer, and salvation seems very unreal and distant, or **WE SEE SUCH RICHES** in our salvation that we rejoice greatly, no matter what we are going through. There is a sense in the heart of the believer that we are on the verge of something so wonderful, that we live in constant anticipation of it. Do you have that? If not I invite you to Christ this morning.

If you are experiencing distress and trials and want to know how you can get your joy back, Peter has solid answers for you this morning. In these first 6 verses he

proclaims quite a number of profound blessings, THEN he says, IN THIS you greatly rejoice.

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He begins his letter by letting them know who it is from, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ”. He let's his readers know this letter comes to them with serious authority behind it. Then he tells them this is written “to God's elect”. Or those chosen by God. Right from the beginning he is giving them something to rejoice in! If you are a Christian, it is because, ultimately from God's perspective, he chose you.

Peter will go on to assure us that we have this massive inheritance ahead of us that can never perish, spoil or fade away...” But he begins with assuring us that God CHOSE us. The certainty of your salvation began in the heart of God before you were born. Your salvation had its beginning in God the father. In your struggles, and hurts in this world, THIS is a foundation for your assurance and your JOY.

When you feel so alone in your trials, when you feel like a reject, when you feel pathetic, and unacceptable, when you wonder how God could love you, when you feel so useless, when you feel so low, here are some very sweet words for you: “You are the elect, those chosen by the Father from the beginning for salvation”. This is one of the greatest wonders of salvation! It is one of the greatest comforts for you in all of scripture. It is one of the sweetest messages you could ever hear. It is our assurance that God is for us! “Who will bring a charge against God's elect?” Being one whom God has chosen is proof that God is for you! IN THIS YOU CAN GREATLY REJOICE!

You may remember a time that you prayed to receive Christ. You believed on him and confessed him as Lord and were baptized. But behind all of that God was the one who was after YOU! As Jesus said, “You did not choose me, but I chose you!” 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, “...from the beginning God chose you to be saved..” You are not who you are today, in the Lord, by just some random chance. God wanted you and came after you.

Peter tells them they were “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father”. This does not mean merely that God knew what you would do in advance, but it means God knew YOU in advance. The father knew you in a personal and intimate way from before time began, and he loved you and chose to make you his child. The first thing God told Jeremiah was “Before you were formed in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart”.

We used to sing a song that said,

I was in His mind before the worlds were made,  
I was in his mind before earth's frame was laid,  
because he knew me, because he loved me!

This is not just a theological point. It is to be one of your richest spiritual blessings! Psalm 65:4 “How blessed is the one whom you choose and bring near to you”. You say well I can't understand how that can be. Or I can't understand how that works with the other verses in the Bible. Believe me, no one has ever been able to figure it all out. Even those who think they have! IT IS SOMETHING YOU TAKE IN WONDER AND FAITH AND LET IT BLESS YOUR SOUL!

Verse 2 goes on, “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, THROUGH the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood”. The Father chooses you, the Spirit goes and gets you, he sets you apart FROM the world, FOR God, and the end result is that you become obedient to Jesus Christ and your sins are covered by his blood.

This does not eliminate your responsibility to repent of your sins and believe. But it does mean that God chose you for these things. Jesus said, “No one comes to me unless the Father draws him”.

If you do not know this relationship with God the invitation to you this morning is to come! Whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Jesus said, All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will not cast out! If you want to come to him today, come and believe. Then someday you will see that God the Father was the one drawing you, and saved you.

I once saw an illustration that helped me with this. There is this great door or gateway into the Kingdom of God. On the outside of the door it says, “Whosoever will may come”. But when you go through the door and look back the sign over the door says, “Chosen before the foundation of the world”.

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Right after Peter address us as God's elect, he addresses us as “strangers in the world”. The flip side of being God's elect, is being “strangers in the world”. To be chosen by God inherently puts you in an awkward position with this world. You feel strangely out of place. You feel that you are not at home. You find yourself drawn to another world, another kingdom. IF you have these feelings, it

is a confirmation that you are God's elect. Being strangers in the world is a condition that comes to us by the extreme privilege of being chosen by God for salvation.

The believers Peter wrote to were “scattered throughout” these various Roman provinces, all in and around modern day Turkey. There were a few here and a few over in this place. They were NOT in the majority. They did not dominate the culture. No they are scattered in among these different places like aliens and strangers. But they belong to God. They are the elect of God! And that is reason to rejoice, no matter how uncomfortable they were in this world.

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Next Peter writes, “Grace and peace be yours in abundance!” As an outcome of being chosen by the Father, you are in a position of grace and peace. You have the favor of God, and complete peace with God. This greeting is a wish that you would know and experience the grace and peace of God in the fullest possible way.

Maybe we should re-think how we greet other Christians. Do we remind each other that we are chosen of God? Do we bless each other with grace and peace in the fullest measure? I think we could learn something from Peter and the other writers of scripture. Jude's wrote, “To those who have been CALLED, who are loved by God the Father and kept by Jesus Christ: Mercy, peace and love be yours in abundance”. Or consider John's greeting in 2<sup>nd</sup> John, “To the CHOSEN lady and her children, whom I love in the truth...”

These greetings point us to the blessedness of our standing with the Father. They immediately increase our joy. Let's find a way to increase each others joy by the way we greet.

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Now Peter continues on with reasons to rejoice in our salvation. Verse 3 begins, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Doesn't it seem insensitive to tell people who are suffering to Praise God? He does that because he knows that whatever they have lost in their suffering, is SO SMALL in comparison to all that they have in salvation! We deeply empathize with one another in our trials, we weep with one another but we have more to offer than pity or sympathy. We have hope!

Spurgeon said, " . . . to lead the mind to praise God is one of the surest ways of uplifting it from depression. The wild beasts of anxiety and discontent which

surround our [camp ground] in the wilderness, will be driven away by the fire of our gratitude and the song of our praise."

He goes on to more about our salvation that we can rejoice in:

\*You received the Father's mercy. ".....IN HIS GREAT MERCY he has given us new birth..." In our sin, in our separation and isolation from God, in our spiritual deadness, in our hopelessness, GOD SHOWED US MERCY. Instead of getting what we did deserve, we got mercy! IN THIS YOU GREATLY REJOICE!

\*You were given New Birth.

".....In his great mercy he has given us NEW BIRTH.." Or "caused us to be born again". What God does, when he saves you, is so dramatic, so utterly new, it results in SUCH a different life and different relationship, and different future, it can only be described as being born a second time.

Being born again is a tremendous gift of God. God puts his own life in you. He puts his Spirit in you. The new birth alone qualifies you to enter the kingdom of God. John 3 Jesus said, "unless one is born of God he cannot see the kingdom of God." God caused you to be born again. IN THIS YOU GREATLY REJOICE! If you are not sure you have this, ask God to save you and give you new life today.

\*You were born into a living hope. You were born "into a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...". You were born into a life with a magnificent future. Like baby being born into a family of royalty or great privilege. As soon as you were born again, you were immediately given a grand and glorious destiny. Because Christ is raised from the dead, our hope is a living hope! It is not a dead hope. Jesus lives and so will we.

The Bible uses the word hope in two different ways. Hope is a attitude of your heart. Paul said, "now remain faith, hope and love". Hope is one of the three most important qualities of the Christian life. You cannot live well, without living in hope. The riches person in the world without hope is miserable. But if you are in the most humble or hard circumstances, WITH hope, you really have everything.

Hope is not wishing that something good my happen. It is KNOWING AND REJOICING that something good is ahead. It is confidence that things are heading toward a good and glorious end for you. It is spiritual optimism. No matter what is going on today, you expect something so wonderful is ahead that it

affects your emotional outlook today.

But hope is not only an attitude of your heart, it is an objective reality. Our hope is something we have that is not affected by our feelings. It is that great and wonderful reality ahead of us. Christ is our hope. The salvation to be revealed is our hope. It is as real as the earth and the sky and the sun around you.

Without being born again, you were without hope. “Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”. Ephesians 2:12. Without Christ you may not have even known how hopeless you were. BUT you were born into a living hope. Rejoice in this!

\*You were born into an inheritance.

Peter says you are born “into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” God put your name in his will!! And that will never change. You are included. Romans 8:16,17 “The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ. What do you inherit? The very glory that the Father gives to Jesus. If we suffer with him now, we will be glorified with him later.

You have this massive inheritance, and amazing glory ahead of you, and Peter says, “It can never perish, spoil or fade away – it is kept in heaven for you”. It is not going to disappoint you. You will never say, “Is that all there is?” It will be more than you can imagine, not less. It is not going to deteriorate. It is not going to lose its value. You might receive a house as part of an inheritance, but it could burn down or the housing market could diminish its value. Nothing like that can happen to what God has for you.

And you are shielded by God's power until the coming of salvation....” IE God won't let anything happen to you that would keep you from your inheritance.

Then verse 6 is really the application for us...IN THIS YOU GREATLY REJOICE...EVEN THOUGH your present experience may not be pretty rough right now. Verse 6 “In this your greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials”. Peter acknowledges the severity of our trials, but OUR SALVATION HAS SUFFICIENT GLORY TO

## MAKE US GREATLY REJOICE.

Key: You must view your suffering in the context of the greatness of your salvation and future glory. You can either go through life thinking: Yes, I am saved BUT...my car is broke down and in the shop, my marriage is struggling, I didn't get that promotion I wanted, the weather is lousy, and I didn't get to do what I wanted to today.

OR your perspective can be: I am suffering in some real ways, in my family and at work, BUT I am on my way to heaven!! I have this unbelievable inheritance waiting for me. It is so grand and glorious! When I stop to consider all God has in store for me, I can only count my present suffering as light and small in view of this surpassing weight of glory that is ahead.

Your perspective either magnifies the present trials and minimizes the glory of salvation.. OR it magnifies the glory of salvation TO SUCH A DEGREE, that joy is the result.

We must see that our suffering is only FOR A LITTLE WHILE, our GLORY IS FOR EVER.

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It is possible that you may have all the blessings we have talked about, out in front of you but not be living in the joy and expectation that Peter talks about. You may even be able to list off these things, mercy, new birth, chosen by God, inheritance.. But knowing about all these things without rejoicing in them is NOT really to know them the way God wants you to. Hope is not knowing...it is knowing and rejoicing.

To live in this spiritual optimism, Your future inheritance must be regarded as your most valuable possession. You must begin to regard it as a prize beyond all prizes, a treasure beyond all treasures. May God give us eyes to see this. May God give you revelation this morning.

If there was an envelope for each person here this morning with a million dollars, and it was yours to take home. It might not remove your present trials, you might still have a fussy baby, or a difficult situation at work, but with that million dollars, you might be able to rejoice even though you had your trials. Now what needs to happen is, we need to see these things that Peter tells us about as FAR greater blessing than that million dollars. We should have this sense of wonder

that we are on the verge of glory. We are on our way to heaven. What is out in front of us is so glorious, and in this we rejoice.