

NEW BIRTH INTO A LIVING HOPE

1 Peter 1:1-12

Key Verse: 1:3

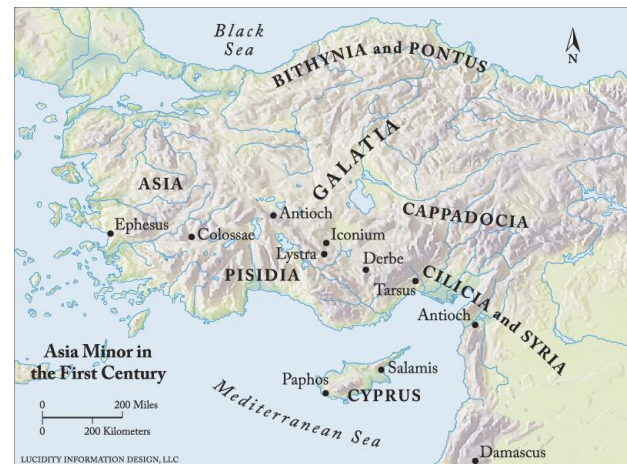
Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ...

Thank God for blessing us to study 1 and 2 Peter this summer! These two letters by St. Peter are full of hope in God. So he is often called “an apostle of hope.” In today’s passage, Peter reminds us that we have a living hope in the kingdom of God. We can overcome all our hardships arising in our life of faith and mission, knowing that Jesus is coming back to take us to the kingdom of God. May the Holy Spirit strengthen and encourage each of us as we study this passage!

I. FROM AN APOSTLE OF JESUS TO GOD’S ELECT (1-2)

Look at verse 1. *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, ... St. Peter introduces himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ.”* Christians in the first century

no doubt knew who Peter was. After all, he was the top disciple of Jesus. So this greeting was like Bill Gates writing to Microsoft workers, saying, “Hi, I am Bill Gates. I am the founder of this company.” Peter’s introduction did not seem necessary. But as we look closely, this identification had a deeper meaning. This was the time when if anyone was identified as a Christian, he would be tortured, burned at stake and fed to hungry lions in coliseum by the forces of the Empire. So this was akin to identifying yourself as a Christian in Sudan or Pakistan today.



Immediately you would be marked as a target of unfriendly forces. But the first thing Peter said to the believers was that he was an apostle of Jesus Christ. Peter had a clear identity as a disciple of Jesus. He was telling them, “I am an apostle of Jesus Christ. I am here to endure sufferings together with you. Don’t feel alone in your sufferings.”

Peter wasn’t a courageous leader from the beginning. In fact, we remember how he denied Jesus three times before a little servant girl. He even used swearing words when he said, “What the heck are you talking about? I told you I don’t know this man from Galilee!” Jesus had been arrested by the temple police and taken to the house of the chief priest. Peter knew that the situation was very serious. He didn’t know what would happen to Jesus. In his fear, he denied knowing Jesus, his Lord. After denying Jesus three times, he broke into tears, because he remembered how, only a short while

ago at the Last Supper, he had bragged that he would never disown him. "I would die before I disown you," he had said.

Peter used to be an impulsive and unstable young man when he and Jesus first met. His name originally was Simon, meaning, "sand." But Jesus had a great hope for him and changed his name to Peter, which means, "rock." Jesus trained him to be a man of faith for three and half years, by feeding him the word of God, showing him the power of God through his miracles and teaching the compassionate heart of God by healing a man with leprosy and a woman with a chronic bleeding problem.

At times, Peter showed why he was a leadership material. After catching a large number of fish with the help of Jesus, he knelt down before him and said, "Go away from me, Lord. I am a sinful man." When Jesus asked the question, "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." Other times, Peter showed why he needed much training. When Jesus began to teach the disciples about his upcoming crucifixion and resurrection after his confession of faith, Peter rebuked Jesus for talking about suffering. Peter wanted glory without suffering. When Jesus showed his glorious image as the Son of God on the mount of transfiguration, Peter exclaimed, "Lord, it is so nice to be here. I don't want to go back down. Can we build some bungalows and stay here forever?"

After denying Jesus and seeing how Jesus died on the cross, Peter was saddened, dejected and in despair. He didn't know what to do. He went back to his old job as a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee. But even fish in the sea seemed to laugh at him for his failure, saying, "Peter, you loser!" He returned from the night of fishing empty-handed and with even deeper sense of despair. That was when the Risen Christ appeared to him and fed him breakfast. Jesus restored their love relationship by asking the question, "Simon Son of John, do you truly love me?" Jesus also commissioned him with the words, "Take care of my sheep." Finally, Jesus restored him by sending the promised Holy Spirit at Pentecost. From then on, Peter was a different man. He boldly preached the gospel of Jesus Christ to the crowds in Jerusalem and in one day, 3,000 people repented and accepted Jesus as their Savior. Now in this letter, Peter made it clear that in the grace of Jesus Christ he was an apostle. He was writing to the Christians as their leader, as an apostle of Christ Jesus, to encourage them to endure sufferings to the end.

Look at verse 1b. *To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,...* St. Peter called the Christians "God's elect." They were exiled throughout the Roman provinces in Asia Minor (today's Turkey). They were scattered because of the severe persecutions of Nero and his evil empire. Some of them were separated from their family members. They had to learn new languages to survive in the foreign lands. All of them were undergoing many sufferings just because they believed in God. They suffered because they carried the gospel of Jesus with them to the provinces. In human eyes, they were second class citizens in the foreign lands, like illegal immigrants in the U.S. But Peter called them "God's elect." He was saying to them, "You know, you are not losers. You are very special

because you have been chosen by God. You have been elected as God's ambassadors with all the privileges!"

Pat Toomey and Bob Casey, Jr. are our senators, elected by Pennsylvanians, to represent us in Congress. They have many responsibilities and privileges. They have power and prestige. They enjoy all kinds of perks. But their benefits are temporary, lasting only during their terms. Their glory will end sooner or later. In comparison, God's elect are chosen by God for eternal life as royal citizens in his heavenly kingdom. We have no term limits. We will reign with Christ forever in the eternal kingdom of God.

Look at verse 2. ... *who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.* Peter told the Christians that God knew about their current situations. He assured them that there was nothing random or accidental about their scattering through the provinces. The Father God had chosen them and was using them according to his own salvation plan. When God chose them, he gave them his Spirit, who worked in their hearts to purify their desires. God saved them from their sins through the blood of Jesus. He chose them to obey Jesus Christ by growing in his image and spreading his gospel to the world. God loved them and us so much that he gave his precious Son Jesus for us. Since the Triune God was with them, they could have overflowing grace and peace, and so can we. We don't have to be stressed out by human circumstances. Grace and peace can be ours in abundance.

II. A LIVING HOPE IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD (3-4)

Let us read together verses 3-4. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ...* Peter was keenly aware of the sufferings that the early Christians were going through. But he didn't begin his letter with an expression of sympathy. Instead, he had something wonderful to share with them. It was such a great and wonderful thing that he began by praising God. What was this great thing? He said, *In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...*

First, Peter says that God, in his great mercy, has given us new birth. Why is this great mercy for us? Well, God gave us new birth when we were dead. We were dead in our sins (Eph 2:4). We fell down and couldn't get up. We were cut off from the love God. We were cut off from the source of life, like cut flowers. We were condemned to spiritual death which is kind of living, but living in eternity in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. Don't try this at home, but it is like turning your oven at 7,000 degrees and going inside to live. We had no way of getting out of this eternal condemnation until God sent his one and only Son Jesus to pay for the price of our sins. Jesus died on the cross, shedding his precious blood to wash away our sin-stained blood. On the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Jesus died as the Lamb of God

who takes away the sin of the world. This is how God gave us new birth. It's not because we did anything to deserve it. It was 100% the work of God. So Peter says, "in his great mercy, God has given us new birth." I confess that I was dead in my sins. I thought I was alive when I roamed around the dark alleys of my hometown. But I was dead until Jesus reached out his hand of mercy to me through the word of God. I was so happy to read what St. Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" This was my real birthday. The great mercy of God had come to me!

Let us read verses 3-4 again. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ...* Peter says that God has given us new birth into a living hope. What is hope? What is a living hope? What is a dead hope? We sometimes use the term "hope" casually, like "I hope Steelers win," "I hope it doesn't rain on my graduation day," or "Hopefully I will see you next week." This is more of wishful thinking than real hope. This is not the kind of hope St. Peter is talking about. Hope in the Bible is more about believing what God will do for us rather than what we vaguely wish in our minds. For example, St. Paul says the following about Abraham's hope and faith: "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.' Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why 'it was credited to him as righteousness'" (Ro 4:18-22). God had promised Abraham that he would bless him to be the father of many nations. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed the promise, meaning, humanly there was no hope but he believed in God that he would keep his promise. Abraham was about 100 years old and his wife Sarah was in her 90's. Biologically, there was no way they could have a son. But against all hope, Abraham in hope believed in God. This is what it means to have a hope in God. It is not about our wishful thinking, but about God's faithfulness in keeping his promise.

So God gave us new birth into a living hope. By implication, there is also a dead hope. What is a dead hope? It is a hope for things that will eventually perish, spoil or fade. Many of our hopes in this world are dead hopes, including a nice car, a beautiful house, a lucrative career, and so on. These are dead hopes because once we have them, we get disappointed. Most of all, they don't last for long. We cannot take them with us when we die. Some of our hopes are not easily attainable, such as winning a Nobel Prize or becoming a world class ballerina. To most of us, they are just pie in the sky.

A living hope in God is different. This hope was given to us through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the dead. This hope comes with an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for us. The kingdom of God is our living hope. Jesus gave us this promise in John 14:2: "My Father's house has

many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” We have a heavenly mansion reserved in our Father’s kingdom. This house will be much more glorious than any mansions that some super rich people have today. It will be much more splendid than 5-star resorts. There will be no termite problem or plumbing problems in this house. In addition, Jesus promises to give each of us a new spiritual body in his kingdom. Our bodies in this world are subject to all kinds of problems including allergies, wrinkles, hearing loss, vision problems, and so on. Ultimately they wear out and we die. But our new bodies will be imperishable, glorious, powerful and spiritual. Women will all be beautiful beyond imagination and all men will be strong and handsome forever. The kingdom of God is so beautiful and wonderful. It is where we live forever with our loving heavenly Father and his dear children, including our own loved ones. Revelation 21:4 tells us that “He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” This is our living hope and it is our true and everlasting hope. We have this hope on the basis of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Jesus’ resurrection proved God’s final victory over sin and death. It is a prelude to the resurrection of all people when Jesus comes again in great power and glory. Let’s read verses 3-4 together once more. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, ...*

III. SECURITY, JOY AND LOVE (5-12)

There are many wonderful blessings we have in Christ when we experience new birth into the living hope in the kingdom of God. Let us focus on three of them.

First, security (5). We live in an insecure world. We don’t know when and where next 9/11, Sandy Hook or Boston might happen. How can we have a sense of security? Look at verse 5. ... *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.* Peter assures us that when we have faith in God, he protects us with a mighty shield of his power. No one or nothing can harm us without his permission until we arrive safely before him in his heavenly kingdom. God is our true security.

Second, wonderful joy (6-9). St. Peter says in verse 6: “So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while” (NLT). We can rejoice greatly when we think about our living hope in the kingdom of God. Of course, we are not there yet. Our reality is that we have to endure many trials in our life of faith and mission. But there is a silver lining. We become stronger as we go through our trials. Our faith is refined through trials, just as gold is purified by fire until it is pure. When our faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring us much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world (7b).

Third, genuine love (8). We do not see Jesus in the flesh today, as Peter and the other disciples did. Still, we know in our hearts what Jesus did for us on the cross. We know how he loves us. We experienced his love personally. So we love him. We trust him. We commit our lives to him. And when we have love for Jesus in our own hearts, we can love others, even the selfish and self-centered young people of our time. The cross of Jesus has a vertical bar and a horizontal bar, symbolizing our love relationship with God vertically and our love relationship with one another horizontally. Let us continue to pray that we may be a fellowship of believers who love the Lord and love one another.

In verses 10-12, Peter tells us how we, who have the living hope in the kingdom of God, are the envy of the universe. The salvation of our souls through Jesus' crucifixion was something even the prophets did not clearly understand (10-11). God told them that their messages were not for themselves but for the future generations, including us. The great prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah were given a mission by God to serve us with their messages (12). The Good News of Jesus Christ is so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching the unfolding mystery. Even the angels envy us.

In today's passage, we learned that in his great mercy, God has given us new birth into a living hope in the kingdom of God. We have an inheritance that will never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for us. May God help us to endure our hardships as we serve the young people of our time with the gospel of Jesus Christ, keeping this hope closely to our hearts!