

Do Not Be Surprised at the Fiery Ordeal Among You

An Expository Journey Through **1 Peter** **1 Peter 1:3-12**

6 Peter's Exultation of Sovereign Grace, Part 1

October 15, 2017

1 Peter 1:3-12

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.

6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials,

7 so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

8 and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory,

9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

10 As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries,

11 seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow.

12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven — things into which angels long to look.

To the Glory of God

We build monuments. We build statues and monuments to people and events that mean something to us. That's why we have the Washington Monument and all the others in our nation's capital city. We want to celebrate and remember important people and events that fashioned our lives and the forged our country and that made us who we are. I was blessed to go to Washington, DC, in the summer of 1993, and I was astonished at the reality that everywhere you look, at almost every building and statue and monument, references to God and Scripture verses were boldly placed where everyone could see them. And this desire to build monuments is not only true of Americans, but of people, in general.

For example, for many years, it was against the law in Europe to build a building that was taller than the main church in town. The people of Europe had been so radically transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ that they wanted the Church to hold a *primary* place in their cities.

And so, all over the world, you will find statues and monuments that tell the story of how God raised up powerful people and used them to win wars and establish nations and create lasting change in the minds and hearts of civilization itself.

And in the center of Geneva, Switzerland, there is a beautiful city park, where people go to have picnics and to play music, and to meet and speak about current events. And on the north side of that park is a huge, massive wall. It's called "The International Monument to the Reformation". And carved into that wall are 16 foot tall likenesses of several key figures of the Protestant Reformation of 500 years ago:

1. William Feral
2. John Calvin
3. Theodore Bezel
4. John Knox

And on either side of these men are the almost 10 foot likenesses of others who play a role in helping to deliver the world from the terrible ignorance of the Bible that Rome had imposed on the world. Among them are:

- ✓ Fredrick William of Brandenburg

- ✓ William the Silent
- ✓ Roger Williams
- ✓ Oliver Cromwell

And over the head of the four main likenesses is the Latin phrase that guided these men through their efforts:

Post Tenebras Lux- After Darkness, Light

Now the reason that monument stands there is because over the centuries that followed the Resurrection, the Roman religious system had *systematically* hidden the Scriptures under a mountain of man-made and unbiblical teachings that emphasized the Sacraments over the Word of God, and that elevated rituals and ceremonies over Divine Truth. And that effort had kept the average believer in "darkness" as to what the Bible actually said, and at the mercy of the local hierarchical priesthood who chose to *control* them rather than *edify* them.

With the advent of several brave men, who paid for their efforts with their lives, that spiritual darkness was lifted when the 66 Books of the Holy Bible were translated and printed in the languages of the common man. We must remember that 500 years ago, it was a capital offense to translate the Bible into English.

But as soon as the people could read the Bible for themselves, they realized that they had been purposefully led astray by very elaborate and complicated rituals and ceremonies that sounded so religious, and yet were complete fabrications. The Bible did not teach these things; the Bible had never taught them. They were the *inventions* of a self-appointed and unaccountable priesthood.

With the Light of Divine Truth now at their fingertips, what the Bible actually taught about issues like the Gospel, and the Grace of God, and Justification were *re-discovered*, and people were literally dancing in the streets as they began to realize that Rome has created an apostate religious system that had isolated itself from the authority of Scripture. And once the people had this light and were now free, the Romans could not drag them back into darkness.

It is very important for everyone to realize that the Reformers, of 500 years ago, didn't create a single new Doctrine. Their goal was *not* the *creation* of a "new religion", but the *reformation* of the existing one.

They called the existing leaders to repent and return to the Authority of Scripture and discard centuries of artificial layers of ecclesiastical nonsense and false teaching. So, this was not *chaos*, but the highest of *godly order*. Theirs was a *reformation*, not a *rebellion*. And through their efforts the original Truth about how lost people are saved and the Sovereignty of God emerged.

And so, the emphasis moved *away* from the Table of the Communion Service to the Pulpit where the correct and full exposition of God's Word would take place. Trinket and relics and statues were removed and Bible studies began. When an astonished bishop asked Martin Luther what he planned to replace all the images and statues with, he simply replied:

"... with Scripture".

Now you may think I am simply waxing romantically about the Protestant Reformation. I'm not. My point in bringing all this up is to say that the Protestant Reformation was so important an event and made such a lasting impact on the world that in 1909, over 300 years later, the city of Geneva remembered it by creating the Reformation Wall. So, whatever you may think about the events of this time frame, the majority of those around the world realize that this was a real big deal. And my feeble efforts in this Church are to bring all this to your attention so that it is a real big deal in your mind and heart and life as well.

Now one of the main tenets of the Protestant Reformation that the Bible has always taught and that was rediscovered by the Reformers through their intense study of Scripture was the issue that Peter brings up here in verses 3-5 of his amazing Epistle, so let's read those verses again together:

1 Peter 1:3-5

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.

Now if you will notice, the first twelve verses of **1 Peter** contain no command for us to do anything. There are no instructions for God's people to do anything in the first twelve verses. There is only Peter's introduction of who he is and to whom he is writing this Epistle, and then, beginning with verse 3 and going all the way down to verse 12 we have what is called "Peter's Exultation". Peter is magnifying and extolling God and all that God has done, *sovereignly*, all by Himself, without any consultation with anyone, and without anybody cooperating with God in it. So, here, Peter is blessing God, He is rejoicing, He is marveling at God, He is exulting in the Wisdom and Power and Grace of God in saving unworthy rebels and of *guaranteeing* their eternal reward based on *nothing* more than what God alone has done for them. Look at verse 3 again:

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,

Here Peter is blessing God, Who has "**caused us to be born again**". Do you see that? Peter says here that it is God, all by Himself, without any cooperation from us at all, Who has decisively "**caused us**" to be born again.

And this refers back to last week as we discovered a very important Spiritual Principle that governs *everything* that God does in the earth. Because it is God's white-hot Passion to be known and loved and feared and worshipped and obeyed, God does *everything* that He does "for His Own Glory". *That* is what motivates God to do what He does.

And the only way that God can receive all Glory for all that is carried out through His created Universe, is if this Principle is followed:

God always *initiates*, we always *respond*.

God is the one and only Creator. And so, nobody creates except God. Now, it is true that humans can be *creative*, we can be *like* the

Creator, and we can *resemble* the Creator and take something that already exists and make something else from it. For example, we can take iron ore from the ground and add other ingredients (that also already exist) and we can fabricate steel. But no human or angel has the power to create "*ex-nihilo*". We cannot create "something out of nothing". We simply do not have the power to speak reality into existence like God can. That Power is reserved solely for God, and those various false teachings that originated from the cult of "Christian Science" (that, sadly, the Full-Gospel, Charismatic, and Pentecostal, groups have adopted) that says we can are blasphemous.

So, because God is the only Creator, God is the One Who is Prime. And that means that God alone is always First and Foremost. And so, God is the One Who always *initiates* everything that is done. God begins, God starts, and God initiates everything. God is the First Source of all things.

Human beings simply *take* or *receive* that which God begins or originates, and we *respond* to what God has authoritatively said or what God has sovereignly done. And that is true, whether we are talking about physical healing or material blessings or even Salvation.

It is so important to understand, dear friends, that God can never, in any way, be *obligated* to us. God never "owes" the creature anything. And we can never, in any way, *deserve* or *earn* what we get from God. We are never entitled to receive from God's hand. Everything that God does *for* us and *to* us and *through* us and *in* us, is *always* "by" His Grace and it is always "through" the gift of Faith.

And that always keeps God in the *superior* position as the Sovereign of the Universe, and that keep us in the *inferior* position as fallen and needy people. The notion that we can "do" something to *earn* or *deserve* physical healing or material blessings is just as wrong and just as ungodly and just as unbiblical as the notion that sinful humans can do something to *earn* or *deserve* Salvation. And, conversely, the notion that God is somehow *obligated* to bless us or heal us or even save us is outright blasphemy.

We cannot *earn* our material blessings any more than we can *earn* Salvation. We don't *deserve* physical healing any more than we *deserve* material blessings. And God is no more *obligated* to save us than He is to bless or heal us.

So, there is no formula for us to follow, no series of special prayers, no chants or incantations that will move God to heal or bless you. God is Good, and He blesses and heals and saves unworthy sinners all the time. But He always does so at His Own discretion, based on His Own Divine Prerogative, and according to His Own Will, and *not* because He is *responding* to something that we did first.

For example, Salvation was God's idea. Man didn't invent Salvation, God did. Salvation was created in the Mind of God and brought about by what God did, all by Himself in the three Persons of the Trinity. Therefore, if Salvation is to be real and genuine, it must be carried out in the way that God has prescribed.

So, there aren't seventeen different ways or paths or roads or methods that people can choose between that will result in their Salvation. There is one. And so, we are told what Salvation is and how it works and what it involves on the pages of Scripture. We cannot create our *own way* for people to be saved, we simply don't have that kind of Authority.

So, it is incumbent upon the creature to read and study and learn what the Creator has already said Salvation is and how we are to carry it out, so that two things will happen:

1. God will receive all the Glory.
2. The arrogance and sinful self-righteousness of Man will be broken and abased.

And so, as far as Salvation is concerned, God *initiates* Salvation for every person and we simply *respond* to what God originates. God acts *decisively*, and we *respond* to what God has already done.

And this very same Principle is true if we are talking about physical healing or miracles or material blessings. We don't initiate our own blessings by what we do first, and then God responds to what we do by blessing us. No. God desires to bless us more than we are willing to receive it. God's desire to bless us with material or financial things begins in the Mind and Heart of God. And He acts *first*, always. And we simply *respond* to what God has already done.

The same holds true with physical healing. God doesn't sit in Heaven waiting for us to "rise up in faith" to "bind the devil" or "cast the infirmity away from us" and then He responds to our faith by rushing

in, like the 7th Calvary, to heal us. That is nonsense. We don't initiate our own healing. God does. So physical healing has much more to do with God's Will and God's Plan in our lives than it does whatever amount of faith we think we might have.

And this is the point that the Apostle Peter is making here in verse 3 with this profound statement:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again...

Now the original Greek wording here is very similar to another dynamic statement that the Prophet Ezekiel made originally in Hebrew back in **Ezekiel 36:25-27**, when the Prophet was moved along by God the Holy Spirit to say:

25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

So, the fact that we be careful to observe God's Ordinances is a *response* to the fact that God decisively *caused* us to walk in His Statues. So, our love for God and our obedience to God is not something that caused God to respond by saving us. No, it is God moving on us *first*, to decisively change us, by what He alone did for us, that was the *catalyst* as to *why* we now love and obey God. So, God *initiated* our Salvation by what He did, all by Himself, and we *respond* to what God did by loving and obeying Him.

And Peter himself said the same thing over in **The Acts 2** when he said:

The Acts 2:22-24

22 "Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know —

23 this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.
24 "But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Look closely at what Peter says here. In verse 23, he says:

this *Man*, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put *Him* to death.

So, Peter is saying here that the only reason that godless men were able to nail the Prince of Life to the Cross and put Him to death was because of the...

... by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God...

So, even at this point, when Jesus was at His weakest, He was in complete charge of the situation. The evil Jews, who wanted Jesus dead, and the evil Romans, who carried out the death sentence, were not in charge. These people were not *initiating* the crucifixion of Jesus. No, God *originated* the crucifixion of Jesus, way back in "Eternity Past", before He ever made the world. And the Sanhedrin and the crowds and the Gentile soldiers were simply *responding* to what was already in their hearts to do. God didn't *force* them to kill Jesus. They were *already* evil and they manifested their evil by first, hating, and then, secondly, killing Jesus. And, because it was God's Will for Jesus to die, God passively stepped aside and sovereignly allowed evil men to murder His Son.

But these men were not *causing* Jesus to die. They were *not* the "First Cause" or the Originators of Jesus' Death. God moved *first*. Jesus Himself said in **John 10:17-18:**

17 "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again.

18 "No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

And Peter says here that God *predetermined* to take on human flesh and live down here among men for 33-1/2 years, without ever sinning, before Adam ever fell in the Garden. And then God *determined* to impute all of the sins of all of God's elect on Jesus, and then pour out the fury of His Righteous Wrath against those sins on Jesus, before He formed Adam in the dust. Now look again at verse 24:

But God raised Him up again, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.

Who helped God raise Jesus from the dead? Who assisted God in that Effort? What contribution did anybody make to God raising Jesus from the dead? In what way did anybody cooperate with God in the raising of His Son? No, God raised Jesus from the dead, *sovereignly*, or all by Himself. God made that happen. All by Himself. In other words, God *sovereignly caused* it.

And this is the identical wording that we find in **1 Peter 1:3** when we read that, *sovereignly*, or all by Himself, without any help or assistance or cooperation on our part, God:

... caused us to be born again ...

Now instead of debating this issue or of denying it, the Apostle simply states it matter-of-factly. God did this. God has *sovereignly caused* every single human, who is saved, to experience the miracle of the New Birth. So, God is the Originator of the New Birth. God moved first. God initiated our Redemption. God was the sole Cause of the Salvation of His people.

And what is our *response* to that amazing Act of God? What do we now "do" because God has caused us to be born again? We can't *add* anything to our Salvation. We can't *contribute* to our own Salvation. We certainly can't *initiate* our own Salvation. All we can do is *respond* to what God has already done. So, just what should our response *be* to the fact that God has *sovereignly caused* us to be born again?

Well, Peter says our response should be to "bless the Lord". Look what he says in verse 3:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...

Peter rejoiced. Peter exulted in God! Peter blesses the Lord! But *why* should we Bless God? Well, he lists three reasons right here. The Apostle blesses the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ:

1. Because God has sovereignly caused us to be born again.
2. Because God has sovereignly made us able to obtain an eternal inheritance.
3. Because we are sovereignly protected.

Look again at verses 3-5:

3 ...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.

So, Peter's *response* to God's *causing* His people to be born again, and raising His Son Jesus from the dead, and giving us a living hope, and providing us an imperishable Inheritance in Heaven, and sovereignly protecting us, is to bless God. "Blessed be God!" And if that is *his* response, it should be our response as well.

What God the Holy Spirit has moved upon Peter to write here in this Epistle makes him exult and bless God. *That* is his response. Now keep in mind that Peter didn't have to tell us all this. He did not have to begin this theological masterpiece by putting his own personal emotions on display. He could have begun in a cool, collected, dispassionate, unemotional way. He could have said:

"My lecture topic today is Regeneration. And I have several related doctrines upon which I wish to discourse. Let me list them: (1) God; (2) Regeneration; (3) Hope; (4) the Resurrection of Jesus; (5) Inheritance; (6) Heaven. Let us give close attention to these things."

He *could* have begun that way. But he didn't. And the fact that he didn't speaks volumes to me. It brings conviction to my own heart and

it does great damage to my own self-righteousness, and my own luke-warmness, and my own arrogance. Because I probably wouldn't have started out this way. In fact, there are several people, within the Reformed camp that teach that emotions are negative aspects that should be either greatly *minimized* or outright *ignored*. And I find that not only impossible to do, I find it wholly unbiblical and counter-productive to obeying Jesus Christ.

Now, probably more than most people in this room this morning, I am well aware how that many groups *within* modern Evangelicalism have promoted "emotional ecstasy" and "personal experience" way more than God or Scripture desires. And, probably more than most, I routinely condemn that. However, we have to guard ourselves from over-reacting to their over-reaction by going too far the other way and acting like unemotional stoics or Gnostics. Because *that* dysfunction doesn't fix *their* dysfunction.

Peter begins with exultation and blessing and wonder because that's what these amazing Realities have produced in his mind and in his heart. When he considers these things, he does not coolly say:

"There, I have taught the Truth clearly and now my job is done. Do with it what you will."

... no, he says, *"Blessed be God!"* He does that right here. But he also does it again over in 4:11, when he, once again, interrupted his teaching to say:

... to whom belongs the glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

.. and then he does it again in 5:11:

To Him be dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

So, all throughout this Epistle, Peter breaks out again and again in praise and blessing. So, he writes about the greatest Realities in the universe with a worshipful spirit that is genuinely amazed. He writes with exultation and wonder and awe and marvel and heartfelt gratitude. And this is very important for us because this Epistle is not

merely teaching us what to believe, but also how to *respond* to what we believe. So, Peter is saying two things:

1. This is what God has sovereignly done.
2. This is how believers should respond to what God has done.

... and it is also teaching me, as a Pastor, how I should teach these great Realities. And when I consider what it is to preach on these Realities, here's what I come up with:

Preaching is worshipful exposition.

Preaching is worshipful exposition of glorious biblical Truth. And that means that Preaching is not merely the mechanical delineation of Truth. It is the clear and precise heralding of Divine Truth from a man who has been personally overwhelmed by the enormity and wonder and magnificence of the Reality he is talking about. So, if anyone thinks that what we do here on the Lord's Day is half worship and half preaching, you're wrong. It's *all* worship. Lord's Day Services here is comprised of worshipful greeting, and then worshipful reading, and then worshipful singing, and then worshipful praying and instruction, and then worshipful preaching, and then worshipful reflecting. It's *all* worship.

I think one of the biggest failures of the modern Church has been to *exalt* the music while *de-emphasizing* all of the other things we do in the Service, including Preaching. It has caused people to think that worship is all about singing or watching other people sing. And that isn't true. Everything done here on each Lord's Day is worship, including the heralding of the Gospel.

But even as we try to worship God in all that we do each Lord's day, we must understand we can and we do fail. For example, we can sing without worshiping. We can sit back and watch others perform, and then grade their performance. As fallen humans, we can go through the motions while our hearts are somewhere else. And no matter how we dim the lights to try to artificially get people "in the mood", and no matter how much smoke or special effects we produce, and no matter how skilled our musicians or singers might be, that isn't worship unless we are actually worshipping the Lord. And I can preach

without worshiping. That's professionalism and formalism. But that isn't our goal. Our goal is to worship from beginning to end.

Worship is when God the Holy Spirit illumines the mind to apprehend great Truths about God. But it doesn't stop there. Not according to Peter. Once the mind has been illumined with Truth, the heart kicks in with deep feelings of brokenness and wonder and gladness and admiration and gratitude. But it doesn't even stop there. Because once the heart is enraptured by the magnificence of this great God, the mouth will open and say something like:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...

Now I'm not simply promoting exuberance this morning. No, I seek to be biblical. And part of being biblical is that not only our minds, but our hearts and mouths become engaged in worship. Not so we can be emotional people, but so that we may obey the Scriptures that say:

Psalm 16:11

You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

So, our goal is to worship God, to see God's great Reality with our minds, and then to feel God's Beauty and magnificence with our hearts, and then respond to God's greatness by speaking and singing and rejoicing about God's Greatness with our mouths. That's what Peter did when he wrote about the New Birth. He said:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

... that's what we should do. There's the goal.

Now which Truths, which amazing Realities brought Peter to this exultation? There are many, but if we limit our answer just to verses 3 and 4 we see at least five great Truths or Realities about God that gripped Peter's mind and heart:

1. God's great Mercy
2. God's Sovereign Work in the New Birth
3. God's Sovereign Work in Raising Jesus From the Dead

4. God's Promise of Our Inheritance
5. God's Protection

1. God's Great Mercy

1 Peter 1:3a

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

If you have ever wondered if there is a Mercy with God, the answer is that there is a "great" mercy. "According to his *great* mercy." Peter is moved by that. So, our new birth is not a response by God to us doing something first. No, our new birth was decisively *caused* by God's issuing us Mercy.

2. God's Work of New Birth

1 Peter 1:3b

... who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again ...

God is the One Who caused us to be born again. So, the New Birth is God's Work. His Mercy, not our work, produces a new being called a "child of God" and an "alien" in this world.

3. God's Work of Raising Jesus from the Dead

1 Peter 1:3c

... has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

The third reality about God that gripped Peter mind and heart was that God raised Jesus from the dead. Verse 21 makes it even more explicit:

1 Peter 1:21

who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

The Resurrection is all about God. God did it. All by Himself. So, we trust God. We hope in God. And Peter says, "Blessed be God!"

4. God's Promise of an Inheritance

1 Peter 1:4a

to *obtain* an inheritance *which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away...*

The fourth Reality about God that gripped Peter's mind and heart was that God promises an inheritance to His newborns. God is the begetting Father and God is the Source of their Inheritance. Fathers leave an inheritance to their children, not vice versa. God is the Giver here. All the way through this passage, God is seen as the Source, the Fountain. God is the One Who is overflowing. We are receivers at every point: mercy, new birth, resurrection, and inheritance.

5. God's Work of Keeping (Protection of) Our Inheritance

1 Peter 1:4b

... [The inheritance is] **reserved** [literally: "kept"] **in heaven for you.**

... so, Who is keeping our Inheritance? God is.

So, if you just take verses 3 and 4 there are five answers to the question: *What great Reality brought Peter to worship this way? What gripped his mind and moved his heart and opened his mouth to say, "Blessed be God"? The answer is:*

- ✓ God is great in mercy.
- ✓ God causes us to be born again to a living hope.
- ✓ God raised Jesus Christ from the dead.
- ✓ God promises an inheritance to those whom he fathers.
- ✓ (And) God is keeping that inheritance so that it will never, ever perish or soil or fade.

Now what is the main thing that God is doing here? The main thing is that God has *caused* new birth. And His great Mercy is the Source of that New Birth. His raising Jesus from the dead is the historical triumph over death that makes the New Birth possible. And

our living hope in a great inheritance flows out from that. So, all of these are connected. But the main Work of God that Peter focused on here is the New Birth. So, let's focus on that:

God caused us to be born again.

Now one possible reason as to why we don't exult in this amazing fact, like Peter did, is because we really don't understand it. Another would be that we really don't believe it. Let the phrase sink in,

"God caused us to be born again."

God fathered us into second being as children of God. We had no prior existence as His children. Jesus said in **John 3:6**:

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

All that we can produce by anything that we initiate is more flesh. Flesh cannot produce spirit. Only that which is born again can produce spirit. And God is the only One Who can cause us to be born again.

As lost sinners, we had no living spiritual existence. We were what a human father and mother and common grace could make of us. But then God came on us and caused us to be born again. He awakened a new life, the life of faith and hope in God, the life of the Spirit in us. But most of us have been taught one way or the other that God did not do the decisive work in the New Birth. Many of us have been taught that we did the work ourselves, or that we initiated this work by something we did first, like "take the first step" or "make a decision" or "to exercise faith". So, it is no wonder that we do not respond like Peter:

"Blessed be God, blessed be God who by *his great mercy* did it!"

Now please allow me to make a point with a provocative question: If I asked you, "*How do you know that you were born from your mother's womb?*" what would you answer? You would answer, "*I'm alive! I exist outside my mother's womb. I'm here.*" And that's right. And that is all the answer needed.

You would not answer, *"I know I was born because I've got a birth certificate at home."* Or, *"I know I was born because I did some historical research at a hospital in Gulfport and found a document with a little footprint on it that matches the curly lines on the bottom of my foot."* Or, *"I collected signed affidavits of three or four witnesses that saw my mother pregnant and soon after saw me in her arms."*

You would simply say, *"I know I was born because I am alive."* But now suppose I asked the average evangelical churchgoer today, *"How do you know you were born again?"* How many would answer, *"Because I am alive to God. I have a living hope. I have a living faith. I once had no spiritual life and now I am alive spiritually, with spiritual appetites and spiritual enjoyments. Once I was dead and now I am alive in God. I know Him, I love Him, I trust Him. I hope in Him. I follow Him. The proof that I was born again is my life today!"*

How many, rather, would answer, *"I know I was born again because I did what you must do to be born again: I asked Jesus into my heart, I prayed to receive Christ, I walked down an aisle and accepted Jesus, I have a card here in my wallet that I signed on June 25, 1971, where I pledged that Jesus is my Lord."*

Now why would there be such a vast difference in answering how we know if we were physically born and how we know if we are spiritually born?

One reason is that we know beyond the shadow of a doubt that we had nothing to do with our physical birth. It was done *to* us. We did not *cause* it. We did not *choose* it. It happened to us and all we can do is be thankful for it or resent it. So it doesn't even occur to us to prove we were born by appealing to things that we did to "get born". Because there isn't anything we did. We didn't cause it. It caused us.

But when it comes to our spiritual birth, or second birth, millions of people in the modern church don't believe that. They don't believe that their "second birth" was caused by God, and that they did not choose it or cause it. We have been taught in hundreds of ways that we ourselves bring about our new birth. That we choose it and that we caused it.

So, when we are asked, *"How do you know it happened?"* we tend to answer, *"Because I did the things I was taught you must do to be born again."* We don't say, with reality and authenticity, *"Because I am*

alive to God." We infer our new birth from the things we did to cause it, not from the things that it causes in us.

It is not surprising, then, that a kind of Christianity grows up around that self-understanding, that self-made Christian existence, which does not explode with praise over our new birth, and say with Peter: "Blessed be God, blessed and praised and thanked and loved be God, and God alone, *who by his great mercy* caused us to be born again."

God did it. All by Himself. And that is why God alone will get the glory for it. This is the New Testament picture of what happened to us.

Ephesians 2:5

Even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

I did not raise myself from the dead. God raised me. I was spiritually non-existent. I was a no-thing. Not even created. But then God sovereignly caused me to be born again and I became a new creation in Christ (**Ephesians 4:24; Galatians 6:15; 2 Corinthians 5:17**). I did not create *myself*. God created me.

I was blind to spiritual things. Flesh and blood could not help me. But the Father in heaven mercifully and sovereignly opened my eyes to see that Jesus is the Christ the Son of the living God (**Matthew 16:17; cf. 11:27; The Acts 16:14**). God sovereignly *caused* me to see and acknowledge His Truth.

I was in utter spiritual darkness, like the darkness over the deep before God made light. And then "**God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' shone in my heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ**" (**2 Corinthians 4:6**)

I was self-willed, rebellious, proud, going my own way, a slave to sin, and would never in a hundred years have come to Jesus on my own. But God drew me:

John 6:44

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will Braise him up on the last day.

I had no repentance in my heart, no sorrow for my sin or passion to change, but God graciously *granted* me repentance and lead me to a knowledge of the Truth (**2 Timothy 2:25**).

I had no faith, no desire to look like a weakling and depend on another. But God, in His great Mercy, *granted* me to believe (**Philippians 1:29**) and saved me by faith. But this was not my own doing, it was the gift of God (**Ephesians 2:8**). I believed, yes! It was my choice to believe. But my choice was the gift of God, it was the response and not the cause of new birth. I was born, as **John 1:13** says:

“not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

And Peter says:

“God, in his great mercy, caused us to be born again.”

God did it, lest we should ever boast and fail to bless the God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and proclaim the excellencies of the One Who called us out of darkness into His marvelous Light.

So, let us bless God this morning with all our hearts that He has caused us to be born into His family and given us living Hope. Some of you are being drawn and wakened by the Spirit of God this morning. Do not resist. Verse 23 says that we are **“born again through the living and abiding word of God.”** May God make my words live with life-awakening power in your lives. Come, believe, and bless the Lord with us for this great saving work of New Birth.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.