

Born Again to a Living Hope

SERMON

By

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TEXT: 1 Peter 1:3-12

PROP: Because we are born again by the power of God we are different from the world and have a right to privileges and benefits not available to those who are unconverted.

1 Peter 1:1-12 (ESV) – **1** Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, **2** according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. **3** 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. **6** In 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. **10** Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, **11** inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. **12** It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

It was some thirty years after the death of the Lord that Peter undertook the strengthening of his brothers by means of this epistle. He addressed himself to new Christian churches confused and discouraged by the persecution they encountered because of their faith in Christ. And the newness of life engendered by their conversion was very different from the pagan society in which they lived. The churches he mentions were all located in the Roman provinces of Asia Minor and their faith was based on a relationship to the Triune God. According to our text, **God the Father** chose them and set them apart by **the Holy Spirit** in order that they would live a life of obedience to **Jesus Christ** being cleansed by his blood. Whereas the typical greeting in such letters was,

"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ," Peter's greeting to these elect exiles is enlarged in that they might experience God-given grace and peace in abundance. "May grace and peace be multiplied to you." The Greek word translated grace is not the usual Greek greeting *charai* meaning *cheers!* but *charis* referring to God's favor which is profoundly expressed in God's sovereign election of his people and his continuing providence supplied to them.

The peace mentioned in the greeting is not merely the peace seen in freedom from warfare or tyranny but given that Peter was a Jew, it must be understood as the Hebrew concept of shalom. Such peace consists in a right relation to God. It is understood as completeness, contentment or well-being that issues from the blessing of God. The concept of Shalom is profoundly more than a casual Jewish greeting or departing formality. This is seen for example in the name Gideon gave to the altar at Ophrah,

Judges 6:24 (ESV) – 24 Then Gideon built an altar there to the Lord and called it, The Lord Is Peace. (YAHWEH IS Shalom) To this day it still stands at Ophrah, which belongs to the Abiezrites.

All covenant blessings come to us from YAHWEH who is peace. Similarly, Isaiah wrote that the Messiah would bear the name "Prince of Shalom." Therefore it is also true that Jesus is Shalom. **Apart from being the elect of God; apart from a right relation to the Triune God there is no possibility of our personal experience of Shalom.** To the grace of God is added the peace of God to show that we inherit all of God's covenant blessings.

Peter's greeting as we can see is addressed to elect or chosen exiles in Asia Minor and he informs them of several consequences of their election. There is a great difference between those who are the elect of God and world of unbelief and human autonomy (self-sufficiency) and it is clearly seen in the text before us. The people addressed by Peter are said to be *staying* for a while in a strange place, *strangers, exiles, sojourners, resident aliens* or Christians, who are not at home in this world. A great proof of this is seen in the hatred of the unbelieving world for the things of Christ. Speaking of his disciples Jesus said,

John 15:18-20 (ESV) – 18 "If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. **19** If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. **20** Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.

The question is, of course, does Jesus speak only of his twelve disciples? All of them were persecuted and put to death by the enemies of Christ. But as you see, Jesus goes on to speak in general terms that apply to all who are his servants. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you, because a servant is not greater than his master.

Our tendency is to fit into the world of unbelievers; to tolerate their false religions and ungodly philosophies and viewpoints. In spite of what the Bible says we tend to hold the views of great world scholars and scientists. Our first inclination is to accept statements as true because they are published by reputable scholars. We are inclined to accept uncritically statements such as, "Peering at the 7 million-year-old skull is almost like seeing a reflection of our earlier selves." To accept such a statement as true, however, requires the presupposition that the physical universe proceeds independently from God; that all facts are controlled by chance and depend on laws that do not rest in God. If we accept biological evolution as true we must also accept as truth that living things did not necessarily come from a Creator God. The problem here is that our presuppositions are false but natural man will accept no other.

We must see from our text that conversion brings a change in our presuppositions.

1 Peter 1:3 (ESV) – 3 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,

3 Εὐλογητὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὁ κατὰ τὸ πολὺ αὐτοῦ ἔλεος **ἀναγεννήσας ἡμᾶς** εἰς ἐλπίδα ζῶσαν δι' ἀναστάσεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐκ νεκρῶν

When we are born again, we accept the presupposition that God exists and that he is infinitely powerful. It is not beyond credibility to us that God is able to create the universe, and all that is in it, in any state he wishes and with any initial conditions. We now accept the fact that God the Son died for our sins, was raised from the dead, and ever lives to govern the universe he created. Such a presupposition is utter foolishness to us before we are converted. Before conversion we believe that even though a living cell appears to be irreducibly complex and therefore to exist it must have a designer, it simply cannot be that way. According to our natural presuppositions all things came into existence by random physical processes. This changes dramatically when we are born again by the mercy of God. Our new presupposition is that THE TRUE AND LIVING GOD exists and that he is powerful beyond our ability to conceive of it. Therefore we accept as truth the statement of the Psalmist,

Psalm 33:6-9 (ESV) – 6 By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host. **7** He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap; he puts the deeps in storehouses. **8** Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! **9** For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.

Before conversion such a statement is pure myth to us. It is no different than the ancient story of Ulysses and the Cyclops. Cornelius Van Til wrote, 'To be sure, there is a sense in which it must be said that all men have facts "in common." Saint and sinner alike are face to face with God and universe of God. But the sinner is like the man with colored glasses on his nose. The Scriptures tell us that the facts speak plainly of God (Rom. 2:14, 15). But all is yellow to the jaundiced eye. As the sinner speaks of the facts, he reports them to himself and others as "yellow." There are no exceptions to this. It is the facts as reported to him by himself, as distorted by his own subjective condition, which he assumes to be the facts as they really are.'

No one can accept the presupposition, and its ramifications, that THE GOD OF THE BIBLE exists and is eternally powerful apart from conversion. According to his great mercy God has caused us to be born again to a living hope. That living hope is YAHWEH the Messiah. It is Jesus Christ, raised from the dead and because he lives we shall live also. We have never seen Jesus and yet we love him. Though we do not now see him, we believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory. How is this possible? It is only possible because God has caused us to be born again! Apart from conversion we believe in ideas and concepts that are utterly impossible but we do so because we cannot and will not accept any other possibilities. We do not have open minds but our minds are in bondage to sin. Apart from conversion we are not only slaves to sin but we do everything we can to suppress the truth.

Many claim to be born again. Many who are known enemies of God lay claim to rebirth. To many we are born again by what we do. The evangelist invites us to come down the aisle to accept Christ, believe the gospel and confess our sins and when we do we are born again. But that is not what our text says. According to his great mercy God causes us to be born again and having been born again we accept Christ, believe the gospel and confess our sins. Apart from conversion no one will ever repent of sin and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Peter uses one Greek word to express the truth that God causes us to be born again such that we could translate, God begets us again to a living hope. Jesus taught this great truth to Nicodemus,

John 3:3-7 (ESV) – 3 Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." **4** Nicodemus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and

be born?” **5** Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **6** That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. **7** Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

3 ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ, Ἀμὴν ἀμὴν λέγω σοι, ἐὰν μὴ τις γεννηθῆ ἄνωθεν, οὐ δύναται ἰδεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ.

In this text Jesus uses two words to express the truth that we must be born again to see the kingdom of God. He says that we must be born *anōthen*. That is to say we must be born from above. *Anōthen* can mean either *again* or *above* depending of the context but here it bears both meanings for the Lord is deliberately ambiguous. The disciples understood the term as a second physical birth but the Lord corrects their understanding by noting that the rebirth he spoke of was a spiritual birth brought to pass by the Holy Spirit. They were born from above by a power outside themselves. Therefore we understand that conversion is necessary in order to exhibit saving faith and repentance unto life. Furthermore, our faith having been the inevitable result of conversion can be no other than genuine faith. And God tests genuine faith with the result that it brings praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

We have considered that conversion results in significant changes to our presuppositions and consequently to the way in which we think and reason. And very importantly the new birth changes the way in which we live. Our whole world and life view is changed dramatically. But Peter tells us that conversion brings with it the **trial of our faith**. We must remember that Peter is addressing the **elect exiles of the dispersion**. He is addressing those who have been converted and who consequently have been discouraged by the persecution they face. It is this persecution that tries the faith of God's people. In many places the persecution is physical. Many are tortured and many are put to death for the sake of Christ. Millions of God's elect have died for the cause of Christ in China and Africa and other places of the world. The blood of the martyrs runs deep indeed. Paul refers to this sort of persecution in texts like,

Hebrews 11:32-38 (ESV) – 32 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— **33** who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, **34** quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. **35** Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. **36** Others suffered mocking

and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. **37** They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— **38** of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

It is due to this great cloud of witnesses that we are to

Hebrews 12:1-2 (ESV) – 1 -- lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, **2** looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Not many if any of us have had to face persecution like this. But our faith is tried none-the-less. Peter tells us that the trial of our faith may be necessary,

1 Peter 1:6-7 (ESV) – 6 In 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.

When God's elect are tested, it is to see if their faith is genuine, and to strengthen the faith that has been given to them through conversion. When God causes his elect to be born again, genuine faith is the inevitable result. How could it be otherwise given that the Holy Spirit who works faith in us is infinitely powerful? Apart from conversion no one will believe that YAHWEH is the true and living God and no one will believe that he is the creator of all things. And apart from conversion no one will have genuine faith in Jesus Christ. No one will rest in Christ alone for salvation. Apart from conversion no one will believe the Bible teaching about God and the duty he requires of us. So the faith produced by God who causes us to be born again is always and necessarily genuine. Why then does God test the faith of his elect? He does so because it results in the praise, honor and glory of Jesus Christ.

God gets no glory from his word planted on stony ground hearts that takes no root and produces no fruit. He gets no glory from his word when it falls on rocky ground hearts where it springs to life for a short while until trials of persecution and tribulation come on account of the word and the plant falls away and dies fruitless. Neither is God glorified by his word falling on thorny ground hearts because, springing up, the plant is choked to lifelessness and fruitlessness by the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches. God is only glorified by good ground hearts that bear fruit, some a hundredfold, some sixty and some thirty. He does not test false faith. He only tests faith that derives from the work of the Holy Spirit because such faith alone will give God glory.

There is obviously such faith. The word of God planted on rocky and thorny ground hearts does spring up but it perishes with the normal vicissitudes of life. If one's faith cannot endure the worries and cares of this world, that everyone is subjected to, how will it ever endure trials from God? It cannot, and God will get no glory from it.

On the other hand God does indeed get glory from the trial of genuine faith. True gold when heated does not disintegrate as fool's gold does. Even so, gold like all things in the physical universe is temporal and will perish in the end. But those with genuine faith are not like gold. They are not destroyed by trials from God, and they remain forever and receive an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for them. So we also see in this text that conversion brings faith that certainly results in the **salvation of our souls**.

1 Peter 1:8-9 (ESV) – 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**.

The whole point of salvation is achieving our chief end which is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. This is the outcome of salvation, is it not? Apart from conversion we will spend our eternity in hell with the devil and his angels where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. This is the inevitable end of self-sufficient man with all his independency from God and self-determination. His end is to fall into the hands of the living God which, without the blood of Christ, is a fearful thing indeed. God is the righteous judge who as our creator demands moral perfection from us. We are to be perfect even as God is perfect, but we are not and cannot be perfect apart from the righteousness of Christ imputed to us by God who justifies his elect in his great mercy. Apart from conversion our presuppositions will invariably be wrong. The cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches will inevitably choke out whatever faith we come to possess. And apart from conversion we can never be saved from the guilt of our sin. It is only by the sovereign mercy of God who causes his elect to be born again to a living hope that anyone is saved.

What a salvation this is! It was brought about by the sufferings of Christ and his subsequent glories. The Spirit of Christ revealed the death of Jesus and his resurrection to the prophets of old. Mind you, it is the **Spirit of Christ** who revealed the basis for the salvation of all God's people through the shedding of his own blood; good news of things into which angels long to look.

It is no wonder that Peter cries out, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." It is joy to have heaven. It is joy to be converted and to be made

acceptable to God so that we shall certainly see the kingdom of heaven. But the greatest joy of all is to have the God and Father of our Savior as our own. John writes;

Revelation 21:3-4 (ESV) – 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. **4** He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

God has not merely given us earth and heaven but he has given us himself. Herod would give the daughter of Herodias half of his kingdom because she pleased him with her dance, but the Lord gives his elect not merely half his kingdom or all of it but he has covenanted to give **himself** to us. Will this not make you rejoice? Will you continue to be discouraged and confused by persecution or trial? I should think that you would rejoice before God with a joy that knows no bound: “Sing unto God, sing praise,” sing, unto God, sing praises! Rejoice in the Lord always and again I say, Rejoice.”

Spurgeon writes, "show your gratitude and your joy by blessing God. You can bless him with your voices. Sing more than you do. Singing is heaven's work, practice it here. At your work, do if you can, quietly raise a hymn and bless the Lord. But oh! keep the fire on the altar of your hearts always burning. Praise him, bless him. His mercy endures forever, so let your praises endure. Bless him also with your substance. He is a blessed God. Do not give him mere words; they are but air, and tongues but clay. Give him the best you have. -- Let us be generous at all times, and count it our joy to sacrifice unto our God. Let us give him our efforts, our time, our talents."

With the psalmist let us say,

Psalm 103:1-5 (ESV) – 1 Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name! **2** Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, **3** who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, **4** who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, **5** who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.