

1:1* ¶ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen^{2*} according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. 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.

It will help us to review some of what we have already learned concerning Peter's letter. He was writing to encourage the church in view of a difficult time of persecution that was coming. In this we must always be identifying with the early church because persecution of the saints is occurring today and will continue to occur until Jesus come and puts all of His enemies beneath Him. Peter is echoing what he was taught by Jesus.

Mt 5:11* "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me and Joh 15:20* "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

Peter is preparing the dispersed people of Christ to be ready. But he sounds like Jesus again when he tells them that even though they are aliens in the land, they are to live like good citizens. This to me is Jesus saying be salt and light in the world. Where ever true Christians living the world is a better place whether or not the world knows it or appreciates it.

But Peter also does what Jesus did when He was preparing the disciples for difficulties ahead. He encourages them with truths about God and God's sovereign love and divine purposes. Obedience to Christ is the reason we are God's chosen. Heaven is a benefit that comes because we are chosen it is NOT the reason we are saved by grace.

Brethren how blessed we are to be found in Christ who is our New Covenant and to partake in all the blessings that God has for us in Him. Peter's audience understood

these benefits and they knew the doctrines of grace and now Peter is using them to encourage them as persecution is increasing.

He reminds them that the blood of the New Covenant is Jesus' blood and because of this we have multiplied grace and mercies in our lives. Therefore, all of our worship, all of our prayer and all of our desires must be rooted in God Himself.

Now what truth, what great reality brought Peter to this worship? If we limit our answer just to verses 3 and 4 for now, there are five great realities about God that filled Peter's mind and heart. What gripped his mind and moved his heart and opened his mouth to say, "Blessed be God"? The answer is:

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

We should never be at a loss for true worship of God.

Now let us move on to a more in depth consideration of the truth of vs. 3.

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

We must remind ourselves that Peter said he is reminding the believers of what they already knew and understood. They were not confused about what it meant to be "born again". It is tragic that we do not have the same situation today.

All the apostles who wrote in the New Testament understood the same truth without any variance. Peter is reminding them of they have been taught by Paul and who or anyone else who would have visited them or had been their elders before this dispersal of the saints.

This begs the question, "do we really know what it means to be born again to a living hope?" What did Jesus teach, what did the apostles teach?

We have record of the teaching in the Gospel of John and in 1st John that is very direct in defining what it means to be born again.

Jesus taught the truth to Nicodemus:

3:1* ¶ Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews;**2*** this man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You have come from God as a teacher; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."**3*** Jesus answered and said to 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? He cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born, can he?"**5*** Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into 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 be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'**8*** "The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but do not know where it comes from and where it is going; so is everyone who is born of the Spirit."

First of all, Nicodemus recognizes the God given authority of Christ and His teaching. Then, Jesus proceeds to tell Nicodemus how a person enters the kingdom of heaven. Contrary to what some teach, Jesus is not commanding Nicodemus to be born again, but is stating a fact, "you must be born again".

This confuses Nicodemus as it is clear that he is reasoning without the opening of his ears and heart by God, at least not yet. His question is one of the natural man not the spiritual man. Jesus' answer raises much consternation for some who try to attach too much meaning to Jesus' words. Water is a significant part of the Old Covenant ceremonies for purification and cleansing. Remember at this time in anticipation of Messiah many Jews are experiencing the baptism of John, a baptism by water for the purpose of repentance. The external pictures given to us in Old Covenant ceremonies are fulfilled spiritually by the work of the Christ on the cross and in His resurrection and then are given to us through the word of truth and the application of it by the Spirit to our hearts. This is what the OT scriptures were continually pointing to, Christ, the fulfillment of all things that are redemptive.

Jesus is speaking to a Jewish leader who should know better. This truth that Jesus is teaching existed in the Old Covenant scripture.

"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. "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. "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. (Ezekiel 36:25-27, NAS95).

Ezekiel is pointing to the day of the New Covenant of, in and by Christ.

Jesus is using the natural wind and its nature and man not knowing from where it comes as a parallel to the work of God in the spiritual realm. A man cannot direct the wind of God's creation any more that he can direct his own spiritual condition or direct God. The new birthing process is a sovereign act of God. Being born again is being born from above. Only God can initiate the cleansing and the bringing of the Holy Spirit into the life of a person who will become a believer. We are regenerated, born again by God and then we repent and believe and are converted. We are not born again after we are converted. The process initiates our conversion.

Jeremiah echoes the same truth:

Jer.29:31 "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah,32 not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.33 "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.34 "They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them," declares the LORD, "for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."

And John the apostle fully understood the nature of being born again when he wrote earlier in the Gospel:

Jn.1:11* He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. 12* But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,13* who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

There can be no doubt that Peter and those to whom he was writing understood that being born again is a matter of the grace of God and that being so they could be encouraged that even their present circumstances and the oncoming persecution were also in the sovereign purposes of God for them.

But Peter is not just rejoicing in the fact of being born again. Being born again brings along a hope for these aliens who are facing persecution. Paul taught the early church that all men were once alienated from God, separated from God without hope and without help in this present world. But now as aliens in the world who are joined to

God by adoption, in Christ, we have hope. We have a hope that is absolute and certain, a hope that is the blessed hope, a hope that is grounded in the person of Christ and it is the promise of everlasting life in the kingdom of God. No longer do we have to muse about what the purpose of life is, no longer do we have to search for meaning about life where there is none.

We have the blessed hope, we have the promise of God in Christ that we are His and He is ours and that Christ is coming again to consummate His kingdom, to bring the kingdom to its completion and fullness for eternity and we are the members of that kingdom if we have been born again to this hope. But not just a hope, but a living hope through the resurrection of Christ.

Our Christ lived as the God-man and suffered and died but He rose again and all of our hope is alive in Him, the breathing living Redeemer of our souls, our Savior, our precious New Covenant, our Lord and the King of our lives Jesus Christ.

He lives He lives Christ Jesus lives today and because He lives we can face tomorrow and all the seeming uncertainties it will bring. But they are only uncertain for us, they are not uncertain for our all wise and omniscient God who has, according to his foreknowledge, chosen us for the purpose of obedience unto Christ.

It is in Christ through whom we live and breathe and have our being:

"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. (Galatians 2:20, NAS95).

They and we who are the true children of God have living hope that cannot in anyway ever be any less than what God has promised it to be.

It is absolute and certain that we will be delivered from death and sin:

1 Cor.15:12* Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? **13*** But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; **14*** and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. **15*** Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. **16*** For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; **17*** and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. **18*** Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. **19*** If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.

But we know that this is not so:

I Cor.15:20But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

And we shall follow after Him at the consummation of the kingdom.

I Cor.15:51* Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52* in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53* For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. 54* But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. 55* "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 56* The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; 57* but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.58* Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not *in vain* in the Lord.

So not only do we have hope in the finality of all things but this hope is an encouragement for us in the midst of every circumstance and trial that God has in His providence for every one of us.

As I said before, Peter and here we see it with Paul, not only speaks of the hard truth of difficulties that will come but they both as Jesus did, also bring encouragement that is rooted and grounded in the truths and person of Christ.

Our lives are meant to be moving forward with the anticipation and the expectation of the glorious end of all things because of the resurrection of Christ and the victory it brings us as His kingdom people.

We are not to be a short-sighted people but a people with a vision that sees as far as the day that Christ will return. There is no stopping in our tracks and succumbing to defeat. The resurrection is a victory guarantee for the people of God.

Will times be hard, frustrating, wearying and almost unbearable? Yes. In the midst of these times will there be joy inexpressible, peace, multiplied grace and mercies, an ability to endure and an absolute hope that all will, in the end, be as God has purposed for us? The answer is YES! YES! YES! Praise God.

The Scripture is filled with the purpose of god for His people to be completed.

He who began a good work in you is faithful to complete it and God is working to will and to do of His good pleasure in our lives, and so work out the salvation that God has provided by obedience unto Christ.

How we need to meditate on these things that are all there for us because of Christ and His resurrection. As Christ is at the throne of the Father we are already seated in the heavenly places. Every spiritual blessing that God has for us is there for us in Christ. Paul knew these things so well that he could write:

Rom.8:22* For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. **23*** And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for *our* adoption as sons, the redemption of our body. **24*** For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he *already* sees? **25*** But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it.

And as we wait we reflect on the love of God for His precious adopted sons:

35* Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? **36*** Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED." **37*** But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. **38*** For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, **39*** nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

These were the truths of Peter and Paul, the other apostles and the early church.

These are the truths that encouraged the heart in times of difficulty. These are the things that are embodied in the fact of being born again unto a blessed hope because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

True Christianity or true religion as the Puritans and others would have called it is a living, breathing organic thing. It is not an external obedience to laws written on tablets of stone. It is not mere obedience without any purpose beyond some physical blessing in this life.

The Christian life is life, with all of its uncertainties, difficulties, good times and unsettling times, yet having at its core and foundation, an explicit and certain and absolute hope in the promises of God as brought to us in Jesus Christ our Lord. As we grow in the sure and pure word of God, in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, our resolve to no longer linger in the world but to live in the delight of Christ and the beauty of His holiness becomes so real to us that it can almost be other-worldly at times.

These truths of God's word cannot just be seen as doctrine or dogma but must become integrated into the way we look at everything in this world and how we act or respond to it.

Peter was reminding the saints of these glorious truths at a time when persecution was on the horizon. These are the never changing truths for Christ's true people in every generation. Each generation brings us closer to the day of the consummated kingdom. We may or may not experience the consummation before the grave, but we will experience nevertheless because we will be summoned from out of the tomb and stand before our precious Savior Jesus on that great day.

This is guaranteed as are the difficulties of life before that time comes.

The question is, how well do I live in and with the blessed hope now?

The song was not written yet but the truth expressed in the song was being lived in Peter's day - Blessed assurance Jesus is mine, O what a foretaste of glory divine.