

Dear people scattered around the world, loved by God wherever you are, hear God's words from a letter written by St. Peter:

### 1 Peter 1:3-9

**<sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade—kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup> These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.**

When I read what Christian writers say about the Bible verse we are going to study today, I thought, "This is an amazing passage." One scholar says, "There is perhaps no paragraph in all of scripture that can give more comfort."<sup>1</sup> "In this [paragraph], you see a truly apostolic speech... These are genuinely good news words. They must be proclaimed."<sup>2</sup> I hope we can appreciate *what* God says here by understanding *why* he says it.

A moment ago, I called you "people scattered around the world" because that's true. Except for our little production crew, everyone watching this is scattered throughout the world, not gathered together at church. Guess who Peter's letter was first addressed to: "To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered." (1 Peter 1:1) In the past, the Lord God has looked at people scattered throughout the world, perhaps feeling alone, possibly feeling overwhelmed, perhaps feeling annoyed, and he thought, "These people could use a reason to rejoice. These people could use some hope." Doesn't that just blow your mind? God inspired these words so that you might live, wherever you live, in hope.

## Hope Defined

Let's define hope this way: Hope is an inside reason to rejoice. That means no matter what's going on outside of you, you can be joyful. You have a reason to rejoice even if

<sup>1</sup> Jeske, Mark A. *The General Epistles*. Concordia Pub. House, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Luther, Martin *Luther's Works* vol. 30. Concordia Pub. House, 1967.

things are going poorly because your reason is on the inside. You have hope. There's a great example of hope when Jesus appears to the disciples on the first Easter night. Their outside situation is terrifying. They are locked inside for fear of the Jews. The Jewish leaders had killed their leader, and they did not like the disciples either. Terrifying. And then Jesus showed up, alive. He talked and ate with them. He encouraged them. When he left, Jews leaders still hated the disciples. Their situation was even terrifying—on the outside. But they had an inside reason to rejoice. They had hope.

Whether you are feeling cooped up like the disciples, or isolated like the scattered people Peter wrote to, live in hope. If you're working from home, if you're overwhelmed by too many people in your house or not enough people in your house, live in hope. And here's the excellent news: **"In his great mercy [God] has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."** When you are born, your life starts. When God gives you a new birth, you get a new life, a life with a living hope.

What is our hope? What is our inside reason to rejoice? Well, let's think of three things God says. 1. You have an out of this world inheritance. 2. God is guarding you. 3. Your pain is purifying.

## An Out-of-this-World Inheritance

You have an out of this world inheritance. When God gave you a new birth, you were born into **"an inheritance that can never perish spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you."**

At your first birth, from your parents, you inherited some things. They gave you life. Isn't it great? Yeah, until your life starts to decay- disease, depression, death. But at your new birth, God willed to you an eternal life that can never perish. No disease, no depression, no death. From your Heavenly Father, you inherited his immortality, and that's what waiting for you in heaven.

At your first birth, you inherited wonderful attributes from your parents. Maybe you're super smart, or naturally beautiful, or a personality that can be a blessing to everyone you meet. But think about how you've used your natural gifts. Have you used your mind, your body, your skills in ways that you wouldn't want other people to know? You also inherited your parents' sin, which spoils every good gift. But at your new birth, God willed you a life untouched by sin, an eternity of all your best qualities with no drawbacks. From your heavenly Father, you inherited his perfection, and that's what's waiting for you in heaven.

You may have inherited some neat artifacts from your parents, a pot your grandma used, or a ring your great-grandpa bought. Do you own anything that belonged to your

grandparents? Is there something that's been in your family for a hundred years? Two hundred? Five hundred? A thousand years? Why does that sound a little crazy? Because time makes things fade. A ring that your great-great-grandmother adored faded in importance until someone didn't think to pass it down. A Bible that your ancestors prized, the binding wore out, the pages grew thin, the ink faded until it wasn't worth passing down. Time makes everything fade, except the inheritance, kept for you in heaven. The joy you feel on day one in heaven will not fade by year one thousand. From your heavenly Father, you inherited an unfading brilliance, and that's what's waiting for you in heaven.

You have an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. That sounds great, but could it possibly be true for you? You know your shortcomings, your embarrassments, your secret sins. Could someone like you—or me—have an inheritance like that? Not based on our lives. What you and I have earned is an inheritance spoiled by sin, fading away and perishing forever in hell. But our inheritance is not based on our lives. It's based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. You and I can make a mess of this life, but you know what you *cannot* do? You cannot travel back 1,987 years and prevent Jesus from walking out of his grave. You cannot cancel Easter. That means you can't cancel the inheritance waiting for you in heaven. What a reason to rejoice even in this craziness! What a hope! Live in that hope.

## God is Guarding You

And in all this chaos, God is guarding you. That's a second reason for hope. You are **“shielded by God's power until the coming of salvation.” (1 Peter 1:5)** In the Pixar movie, *The Incredibles* Violet is one of the superheroes. Her power is to create force fields. When there is a missile shooting toward the family, she will use her power and *zoom!* A massive purple shield protects them. Violet is not in charge of keeping me safe until I get to that out of this world inheritance, but God is. Every day God says, “This far coronavirus can go and no farther.” *Zoom!* He shields billions of people from disease. God has promised to turn every disaster inside out and use it to work something good. Perhaps he is using days of fear to show us that we can't depend on human ingenuity to protect us. Instead, we put our faith in a God who shields us until we reach salvation.

When you see the terrible things in this world, it is easy to doubt God's power. In those moments, remember the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Hundreds of people knew he was dead, killed by professional executioners who verified his death.<sup>3</sup> And hundreds of people saw him alive after that.<sup>4</sup> God used his power to raise Jesus from

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 24:18

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:6

the dead- it's a fact of history. He will use that same power to keep you safe. What a reason to rejoice, even in this craziness! What a hope! Live in that hope.

## Your Pain Is Purifying

But perhaps you're wondering why God doesn't protect you from *all* sadness. Because he doesn't. Peter wrote a letter to give scattered people hope, and then they put the letter down, and they faced enemies and loneliness and suffering. Jesus appeared on Easter night to give his disciples hope, and then they went out and were killed for preaching about him. God has never promised to shield us from all pain. He's promised that our pain is purifying.

Peter says your faith is like gold. If you mine one pound of high-quality gold ore from the earth, do you know how much it's worth? 75¢<sup>5</sup> But let's say you have one pound of pure gold. How much is that worth? \$26,000.<sup>6</sup> What's the difference? It is purified. Gold ore has to be heated to 1,100 degrees Fahrenheit to refine it, but when it comes out of the flames, it's worth a lot! God says your faith is of greater worth than gold. After all, gold is like one of those inheritances that fade away. But your faith—your faith is going to last for eternity. So how hot does God have to heat you to purify something that valuable? Has God given you more than you can handle on your own so that you learn to trust him? Has God taken away some of the things you love in this life so that you are forced to treasure his promises? It takes some heat to burn off self-reliance, and misplaced priorities. But that pain is purifying, making you shine more brilliantly for the people around you and more brilliantly forever in heaven. What a reason to rejoice in the middle of your pain! What hope? Live in hope.

## Live in Hope

The joy of Easter came at a good time this year. Seeing positive messages, eating a little chocolate, and hearing about Jesus in the middle of a crisis is precisely what we need. But it also comes with a danger. It is so easy to have one morning of Easter joy and then go back to living in sadness. But today we want to live in hope. Jesus did that for his disciples by showing up in their living room on Easter night. And then a week later, he needed to do it again! You're going to need a Jesus reminder tomorrow and the next day and the next day, and he's not going to walk through your front door. So let's meet Jesus where he told us we can find him. Open up your Bible to 1 Peter chapter 1 tomorrow and the next day, and the next day. Someone once said, "There is perhaps no paragraph in all of scripture that can give more comfort."<sup>7</sup> I'm going to challenge you to read this paragraph every day of the coming week. Because **"even though you have not**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.goldrushnuggets.com/goldorevalues.html>

<sup>6</sup> <https://goldprice.org/live-gold-price.html> (Updated: 4/18/2020)

<sup>7</sup> Jeske, Mark A. *The General Epistles*. Concordia Pub. House, 2005.

**seen Jesus, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.” (1 Peter 1:8-9)**

It's a joy that doesn't depend on your outside circumstances. It's an inside reason for rejoicing. Friends, live in that hope. Amen.