

1 Peter 1.1-12 Sermon [COB / 07.07.13]

Introduction

- † **[Slide 1: title page]** [PRAY] When I was in college, my cousin Ray won a trip to the Bahamas. As we were waiting for the boat, the staff offered us Dramamine, but we scoffed at the idea. We were tough young studs, after all, and I had been boating on lakes at least five times. It turned out the boat was rather flat bottomed and the waves were twelve feet in the Atlantic that day, so it was a bit like a roller coaster: you went up and crashed down, you went up and crashed down, for three-plus hours. Every person on the boat got sick, even those who took the Dramamine. I was able to use the bathroom once, because this tough young stud was one of the first to succumb. I felt like a pinball in there, bouncing off the walls, so after that I stuck to the rail. I got sick so many times, that I passed out, clinging to the rail. My straw hat went overboard and out to sea, and I was surprised to find I had not joined it when I awoke a couple of hours later. I cannot tell you I was feeling joyful during this time, but I did have hope, and I think they are related. I didn't really hope I would survive – I think I wanted to die – but I believed in God's promise, so I had a sense of peace because I could hope that God would either see me through this trial or deliver me into his presence in Heaven.
- † Hey, what's the name of this church again? Church of the Open Bible! Well then, please open your Bible! If you brought your Bible, please open to 1 Peter. If you did not bring your Bible, please grab the one in front of you. If you are not sure how to find 1 Peter, this is a great time to learn where it is, so look in the table of contents, at the beginning, and let it guide you.
- † Each New Testament letter was written to solve a specific problem, so there always is a story behind it, which makes it more interesting. As we begin reading 1 Peter, we will discover some of that historical background, even as we apply what Peter had to say to our lives today.
- † I'll tell you up front, today's talk is very theological. Really what we have is a two part sermon, with part one – mostly theology – this week, and part two – mostly action steps in response to that theology – next week. So you will want to be here next week, to see how it all turns out.
- Today, we are going to discuss several really important theological concepts – I am so excited by this! – so I hope you will pay close attention! But, listen, don't be discouraged if you do not understand everything I say, ok? I am going to teach so that each person in the room gets something, but that does not mean everyone will get everything, and that's ok.
 - First of all, God is working in each of us at a unique place, so he will use his Word uniquely for you, and let you understand what you need to understand. Second, I am providing you with a devotional – the pink sheet – that will help you understand more as you study during the week. Third, Peter was a Hebrew fellow, which means he will repeat his themes, so we will learn these same concepts from fresh perspectives as we progress through his letter; and your understanding will grow over time.
- † Ok. You see that my title has to do with experiencing hope and joy. I know that not all of us here today are feeling joyful and hopeful. Some of you are lonely or grieving the loss of a loved one. Others of you are unemployed or need a better job. Some of you are struggling in your marriage or other relationships. Some of you are in constant physical discomfort. Maybe there is something else that is burdening you and robbing you of your hope and joy.
- Peter has a message for you: even though you are suffering or struggling, you can experience hope and joy, because of God's promise of deliverance. Now, I am not talking about prosperity doctrine which says God will make your life wonderful. Oh no! As you will see, I teach the very opposite; but Peter will tell you that you can experience hope and joy even while you suffer.

- We need to understand this for our emotional and spiritual health. When we suffer or struggle, we can get confused about how to live, so we turn to the world's ways of coping instead of God's ways of persevering; and we can be tempted to doubt God's goodness or faithfulness. If we can understand why we suffer and how we can have hope and joy even amidst our suffering, then we will be empowered to remain firm in faith and firmly on the path of obedience.

A. Background: The situation of the readers and of ourselves [1.1-2]

- † **[Slide 2: vv.1-2]** We begin in 1 Peter 1.1-2. I will be reading from the 2011 edition of the NIV. This differs a little from the 1984 edition, which is in the chairs in front of you. That should make it twice as interesting as you follow along.
- † In our day, we sign our names at the end of letters. In Peter's day, they stated who was writing at the beginning, which makes a lot of sense. So he wrote...
 - *1 Peter 1.1-2 NIV2011: Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.*
- † Imagine getting a letter from the apostle Peter! An apostle is a messenger. The apostles of Jesus were a select few men whom Jesus chose to guide the early church after he ascended to Heaven. Peter had been one of the people closest to Jesus and now was a top leader in the early church. He ministered in Jerusalem and throughout the holy land, but also in Antioch in what is now Syria, Corinth in Greece, and Rome. We think he wrote this letter from Rome.
- † **[Slide 3: elect]** We know Peter's original readers are Christians, because Peter calls them "God's elect." This was standard terminology for the apostles: if you believed, then God had chosen you. These readers have been "scattered" into what is now northern Turkey, probably from Rome.
 - The Romans would deport troublemakers out of Rome and into remote areas needing colonists. Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia were all areas in which we know the Romans were establishing new cities at this time. The volcano in my slides is located in Cappadocia.
 - We know from Acts 18.1 that the Romans deported Jews out of Rome in the first century, and it seems they did the same to Christians. The Romans were offended by evangelism that converted Romans and by expressions of morality uncommon to their culture, a lot like in the US today.
- † Still in v.1, Peter called the Christians "exiles." The Greek word means "to be residing somewhere temporarily," and was used of people who did not have citizenship and were seen as foreigners.
 - Just like today, the natives often resented and felt threatened by the newcomers, and therefore persecuted or at least isolated them. The Christians had a strange religion and would not participate in the religious customs of the rest of the community. They had different traditions, different morals, and this would isolate them even if the natives were not hostile.
 - In a stroke of literary genius, Peter will use their situation as exiles in Turkey to say later in this letter that all Christians should see themselves as exiles on Earth. We are citizens of Heaven who are temporarily residing in a sinful culture that works against Christian values and truth. Peter's letter encourages us, by saying that God will empower us to live out our Christian values, and that suffering from being ostracized or persecuted is not shameful, but a reason to rejoice.

- † **[Slide 4: chosen]** I like that in v.2 Peter identifies a triune or Trinitarian God: he mentions God the Father, Jesus Christ the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
- But Peter’s emphasis is on reminding the readers of their identity: they are God’s chosen people whom the Holy Spirit has consecrated or sanctified – which means set apart from the world – for the purposes of both salvation and obedience. All this implies that they have great value to God, even though they are suffering.
 - Being God’s chosen people is what makes all of us who believe into exiles here on Earth. Even if our non-believing culture does not treat us badly, we will never fit in, because we learn to live by the Spirit instead of by the flesh. We stop pirating movies and cheating on our taxes; we turn against abortion, divorce, and sex outside of marriage; we start to give up some things for ourselves so we can give generously to charities; and we learn to serve others instead of serving ourselves. If we learn to live like Christ, like the people of Christ, we will become distinct from those who do not believe.
- † In the Bible, there are several covenants, or contracts, between God and mankind. In Luke 22.20, Jesus said he was inaugurating a New Covenant with his blood, and here Peter reminds us that we were consecrated by the Holy Spirit for the sprinkling of Christ’s blood, which means that all of you, if you believe, are in a covenant relationship with God as his saved people.
- The Old Testament prophets foretold that this New Covenant would include God’s provision for cleansing, forgiving, and restoring people into right relationship with God and empowerment to obey. Peter will echo all those ideas in this letter.
 - **[Slide 5: God’s love]** So here is the main point I think Peter is making in his introduction: Because God chose us, because Christ died for us, because the Holy Spirit set us apart, we can know – regardless of what is going on in our lives – that God loves us and values us. Hardship should not cause us to doubt these truths. Let me say it again: Because God chose us, because Christ died for us, because the Holy Spirit set us apart, we can know – regardless of what we are suffering through – that God loves us and values us. Let’s read on...

B. Our ultimate deliverance

[Slide 6: vv.3-5] *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ~~and~~ into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 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.*

- † My favorite gift was a trip to Europe. When I was in college, my grandparents gave me a budget and told me to find a tour I liked. I went for six weeks, all over western Europe and even into a few of what were then communist countries. My first day, in Amsterdam, I came two inches from getting run over by a bus. Literally, the bus pushed my hand up to my nose. Later, when an East German border guard was screaming and pointing his machine gun at my face, I began to question the value of this gift, but it worked out, and I remember the trip today as one of the best gifts I ever received.
- † **[Slide 7: new birth]** In v.3, Peter says God has given believers an even better gift: a new birth.
- If you are new to Christianity, this might sound strange, but this is what Jesus taught. Every person is born physically alive, but spiritually dead in sin. An act of sin is anything against the character or will of God, and we are all guilty of committing sins. We also are born with a corrupted spiritual nature, which is called inherited sin. And all of mankind is held accountable

by God for when we first went astray, which is called imputed sin. So we have three kinds of sin and guilt keeping us from God, causing us to deserve his condemnation and punishment.

- But God mercifully is willing to forgive all this sin and give us a new birth into spiritual life! God the Father sent Christ the Son to be born as Jesus, a unique man who was also divine. Jesus lived the only pure and perfect human life, and then he willingly died on the cross to take the penalty for all our sin. He was a worthy sacrifice as a pure man, he was capable of taking our penalty because he was Christ the Son of God.
- Ever since mankind first strayed from God, as recorded in Genesis 3, God has promised to provide a way of salvation. Throughout the Bible, throughout history, the only requirement for salvation has been to believe in the known details of that promise. Today we know, from Old Testament prophecies and New Testament revelation, that the promise centers on Jesus as the deliverer who took our penalty on the cross and then was resurrected from the dead on the third day. When we believe these truths and believe this promise applies to us, we are given new birth spiritually, as a gift of grace and mercy from God.
- Now is the time to ask yourself whether you really believe this gospel and have experienced this new birth. You would know. And if not, is this something you want to investigate? If you have any questions about the gospel, or want to talk about it, please come find me after the service.

† Still in v.3, Peter says we are born again into a living – or life giving – hope through Christ’s resurrection from the dead.

- Christ’s miraculous resurrection from the dead gives us hope because it proves his identity as the Son of God, proves the acceptance of his sacrifice by God the Father, and proves his victory over death and sin. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15.17, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is useless; you are still in your sins.” It is the resurrection that proves Christ’s identity and accomplishment so we can have new life.
- Christ’s resurrection also gives us hope because Jesus promised that his people would be raised from the dead to everlasting life, so his resurrection gives us hope for our resurrection. In John 6.40 [NET], Jesus said, “For this is the will of my Father– for everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him to have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.” So whatever we struggle through in this life, we can have hope and joy by looking forward to our ultimate deliverance, of being resurrected from the dead to spend eternity with God.

† **[Slide 8: inheritance]** I chose to use the NIV 2011 for today’s sermon, because I thought it did the best job of translating the Greek text for this passage, but there is one word I don’t like. Where it says, “he has given us new birth into a living hope ... and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade,” the word “and” is not in the Greek text; the living hope we have is this inheritance.

- It would not be very good to be resurrected from the dead to find out we had no inheritance from God, right? That would stink! But in fact, we are promised an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. This is source a of hope for us: that what awaits us is very, very, good, and it is guaranteed to be there waiting for us, in Heaven.

† **[Slide 9: shielded]** If it would stink to be resurrected to find no inheritance, it would also stink to know the inheritance was there but we failed to be resurrected! But we have no worries about that. As Christians, we can welcome death, because we are assured of our salvation.

- Look at v.5 with me: Peter says we are “shielded by God’s power.” When we put our faith in Christ and experience our new spiritual birth, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside us, and he

protects us and preserves our faith, so that the salvation we receive in that moment is permanent, and we cannot lose it.

- The apostle Paul said it this way in Ephesians 1.13-14 [NET], “when you heard the word of truth (the gospel of your salvation)– when you believed in Christ– you were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, who is the down payment of our inheritance, until the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of his glory.”
- So even when we suffer right now, we never need to worry that God has stopped loving us: he promises that, if we have faith in Christ, then we are forgiven and saved, we are his chosen people, and we will someday be with him in Heaven. We don’t have hope because things are going well; we have hope – even when things are disastrous – because we have this promise of future deliverance, a deliverance from suffering and death, into a wonderful inheritance.

† **[Slide 10: stages of salvation]** That is a lot to digest! But there is one more thing. In that Ephesians verse, Paul said the Holy Spirit was the down payment of our inheritance until our *future* redemption and, in v.5 of our text, Peter said we were protected by God’s power until our *future* salvation when Christ returns, and that might confuse you. So let me explain. In one sense, we are saved in a moment, in another sense, we are saved over time, and in yet another sense, we are awaiting a future salvation. But don’t worry, I can make sense of that for you!

- When you put your faith in Christ and his work on the cross, you experience the new spiritual birth from God, and, in that moment, you are what we call “justified.” To be justified means to be declared righteous in God’s sight. When you believe the gospel, God the Father, in that moment, chooses to apply to you the righteousness of Christ, because you are trusting that Christ paid the penalty for your sins. So you are saved in that moment, and that salvation is permanent and cannot be lost.
- But what’s the problem with every Christian you have ever met? They still mess up, right? Even after this rebirth, you still have a corrupted human nature and a lot of bad habits and thought patterns. So the Holy Spirit begins the work of what we call “progressive sanctification.” Progressive sanctification is a big term, but simply it is a process of cleansing you, purifying you, so that you become more like Christ, more like the image of God you were created to be. In this sense, you are being “saved” over time, as you progressively become more godly and less sinful.
- If you physically die before Christ returns, you instantly will be “glorified,” which is to complete the process of purifying your character; but you will be in Heaven without a body. When Christ returns to Earth, however, your body will be resurrected and purified, and you will be whole again, and this will be the completion of your redemption or salvation.
- So that is why Peter says you are protected by God’s power until this moment of complete salvation, which will occur when Christ returns. If you believe in Christ and his work on the cross for you, then you are justified, saved, right now, and because you are saved right now you will experience ongoing purification, and all that is guaranteed to bring you, when Christ returns, to completion so you become the real you which God designed you to be.

† All this should inspire in us great hope and joy and cause us to sing God’s praises! No matter what is going on in our lives, no matter what struggles we are facing, we can trust that when Christ comes back, we will be delivered.

- Some of you are thinking, that’s great, but what about getting delivered right now?! It is true, we might receive deliverance from our specific troubles right now, and we should pray for that. But whether God delivers us from our troubles now or decides to deliver us through them instead, we always can have hope, knowing that ultimately we will be in God’s presence and experience the

full blessings associated with being saved, with being his people. And that means we will be free from sickness, sadness, struggle, and death; we will no longer be exiles, but will be at home among the family of God. So we praise and thank God now! Let's read on...

C. Rejoicing while suffering

[Slide 11: vv.6-7] *In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.* **[Slide 12: vv.8-9]** *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, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

- † Already this year, I have grieved the deaths of an uncle, a friend, and three seminary professors, and my family nearly had a disaster since my niece and nephew go to school in Newtown, CT, where the mass shooting occurred.

- † **[Slide 13: suffer]** We are so blessed by God, but we can still hurt in this life, can't we? In v.6, Peter says we will suffer in this life, and all of us have experienced that. If you are hurting today, you are not alone. Please let us know if you need someone to pray with you, cry with you, or otherwise help you. We are the body of Christ: this is what we do.
 - Many people are deceived into thinking that they should not suffer after coming to Christ. This is not promised in the Bible. In fact, the overwhelming teaching of the New Testament is that believers will suffer more, as the culture rejects and persecutes us, as Satan and his demons come against us, and as we sacrifice to live up to a higher standard set by God. Peter mentions all these issues in his letter, and says suffering is the will of God for believers, it is part of Christian life.
 - Those who think they should not suffer after coming to Christ often begin to doubt God's goodness, faithfulness, or even reality when they do suffer. But – if this is you, please understand – that is based on false assumptions: the Bible says we will suffer, but God will get us through it and ultimately will deliver us out of our troubles through death, into his presence.
 - You see, God does not always take our troubles away, more often he will help us persevere through them if we depend on him, but we can always trust that he will deliver us ultimately through death into our inheritance in Heaven.
 - How we react to suffering is determined by what we believe. Peter says we should rejoice even when suffering, because we know our salvation includes eventual deliverance out of these problems. Our problems are real and painful, but they are temporary, whereas our salvation is assured and our deliverance will be permanent. Thus, we can love and believe in Christ and rejoice in him even when we suffer in this life.

- † **[Slide 14: precious]** In v.7, Peter says the genuineness of our faith is precious, even more so than refined gold. Such gold will still be destroyed in the end, but the genuineness of our faith, refined in our suffering, will last.
 - And what proves the genuineness of our faith? It is that we do exult in God and our salvation while we are suffering. Sure, we feel sadness, frustration, discouragement, but we don't give in, we don't give in to despair, we don't give up on shining God's light in our community, we don't give up hope about our future deliverance, and we don't give up our transcendent joy at knowing we are chosen, loved, forgiven, saved, redeemed, cleansed, and reconciled into the family of God.
 - Our sense of identity and purpose is shaped by being people chosen for salvation and obedience. Rather than adopt the world's thinking or give up our hope, joy, and faith, we can continue to

persevere in our beliefs and in obedience to those beliefs, because we understand who we are as God's people, and we trust that in the end God will deliver us from the sorrows of this life.

- As we persevere, our faith grows stronger and proves itself genuine. If we learn to live like this, to be joyful and hopeful no matter what life throws at us, then for our genuine faith we will receive praise, glory, and honor when Christ returns. Let's finish our text...

D. How wondrous is the gospel and our salvation

[Slide 15: vv.10-11] ¹⁰ *Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. **[Slide 16: vv.12]** ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.*

- † The Old Testament prophets tried to understand who would be the Messiah [which means Christ] and when he would come. They predicted a lot, including that Christ would suffer for our sins and thereby provide healing and peace to his people.
 - God revealed that their message would help us understand who Christ is and what he has done, and to confirm that Jesus indeed is the promised Christ, since he fulfilled so many of their prophecies and gave signs for future fulfillment of the others. Peter's readers, like people today, might have wondered how a poor man who was crucified by the government could be their savior, but the prophecies of the Old Testament predicted this horrible death and thus illuminated the gospel message of Christ dying to pay the penalty for our sins.
 - Peter's original readers received these prophecies and the gospel from the apostles and their envoys, who – like the prophets – were inspired by the Holy Spirit. We have received these prophecies in the Old Testament, and we have received what the apostles and their envoys wrote in the New Testament.
- † The last point is that this gospel is so wondrous, even angels desire to understand it.
 - While the prophets had to look forward hopefully to the day Christ would come, and the angels seek to understand our salvation, we benefit from knowing Christ has come and has completed the sacrifice that makes our salvation possible.
 - Because of our beliefs, we might lose status in our society, as Peter's readers had, we might lose status in the workplace, at school, or even within our families, but we can be encouraged to know we have a high status in God's eyes, because we have greater privileges than either the Old Testament believers or the angels, in that we get to experience first hand what it is like to be certain of salvation and to be empowered to obedient life.

Summary and Conclusion

- † **[Slide 17: points]** I want to tell you about my friend, Helen. One day, her liver suddenly failed. When she had her transplant, the doctors told her she would have one to five years to live, but that was seven years ago. Even before this problem, she had suffered, such as when one of her two sons died as a young man; that's hard on any parent. For the past seven years, she has been dealing with continual pain and discomfort, frequent hospitalizations, dozens of daily medications, and many invasive procedures. The day before Christmas and again just before the New Year, she had to have a needle stuck in her back to remove liquid from around her lungs. In early January, she died. But through all of this, Helen has shined like a light for God by living out her faith with hope and joy. Before her illness, she ministered to homeless people. Throughout her illness, she has stayed joyful

and brave. And Helen faced death with the same hope and joy with which she faced life. So that we can all live with the same victory as Helen, let me reiterate the main points from this passage.

- First, expect to suffer. It is God's will for us, and he will use it to strengthen our faith. As we persevere in faith and obedience, it will prove our faith's genuineness. Remember always that suffering in the New Covenant does not mean you are shameful, it does not mean God has abandoned you.
- Second, trust always that God loves you. God chose you for salvation, Christ took your penalty and redeemed you from sin, and the Holy Spirit set you apart for God's purposes, proving you are valuable to God. That will never change, so don't let doubt creep in when you are suffering.
- Third, experience hope and joy even when struggling. If you believe in Christ and his work on the cross for you, then you know you have your salvation which includes, not only deliverance from death and punishment, but deliverance into a wonderful eternal inheritance. Look forward!
- Fourth, understand how fortunate you are to live after Christ has already come. We enjoy privileges of which Old Testament believers could only dream and angels seek to understand.

† **[Slide 18: title page]** If you are a Christian – whether you are young in the faith or more mature – I ask you to commit to changing your attitude about suffering and how to respond to it. Commit to persevering in faith and obedience, to shining God's light even when the world has you beaten. Commit also to experiencing God's blessing even as you suffer, to focus on your assurance of God's love and to look forward hopefully to your time of deliverance.

- If you are not sure what to think about Christ and Christianity, I hope you will continue to join us the next few weeks, as we study 1 Peter, and I challenge you to read the New Testament, so you can make a thoughtful assessment for yourself. Ask God to open your eyes to the truth, whatever that might be.
- If right now you want to become a Christian, all you have to do is believe in Christ and his work on the cross. But come talk to me or one of the other elders who will be up here for communion, so we can pray with you, ensure you have the true gospel, and give get you set up to learn about your new faith.
- Let's pray...

The following will be given as a benediction at the end of the service:

† **[Slide 19: benediction]** I want to leave you with greeting Peter gave his original readers. Say this with me in Greek: χάρις ὑμῶν καὶ εἰρήνη. In word order, it says, "Grace to you and peace." In English, we would say, "Grace and peace to you." This hopeful greeting is so theologically important to God, that it appears in thirteen New Testament letters. χάρις ὑμῶν καὶ εἰρήνη: Grace and peace from God to you... amen.