

OUR INDESCRIBABLE SALVATION

1 Peter 1:3–12

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1 Peter 1:3–12 (NIV)

“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—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. In 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 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. 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 goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 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 message today is “Our Indescribable Salvation.” In this letter we find Peter counseling Christians who are going through severe trials. At the outset of the letter, in verses 1 and 2, we’re

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introduced to the counselor, Peter; the counselees, the scattered elect of God; and we've also been introduced to the counselor's attitude, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance."

As we open today's letter we find Peter focusing not upon the hardship that is being experienced by those to whom he is writing. He's not focusing upon their trials or their painful external circumstances. Instead, he is focusing on spiritual realities which do not change. When we find ourselves in a trial the temptation is to look at the enormity of it and to be panicked by it. Peter's doing the opposite of that by focusing our attention first upon the Lord. And the real key to getting through any trial is to do this exact same thing—focus in upon the Lord. Peter's saying to believers who are looking down on their circumstance, "Look up to the Lord. Look up to the salvation which you enjoy in Him." The key is not to focus on the problem but to focus on the promise. Not to focus on the crisis but to focus on the Christ.

Peter begins with praise. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:3).

The word for "praise" in the Greek is the word "eulogy." It is something we associate as being delivered at funerals. In its root meaning it means "to speak well of." And, literally translated, this phrase would read something like this: "Let the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be eulogized." When we're in a struggle, one of the things we can immediately begin to do is complain to God for letting us in that situation. Peter says let Him instead be eulogized.

Notice he says, "Let the Father be eulogized." I have found in ministering to people on a one-on-one basis that many persons have not had a pleasant home experience with a father. When, therefore, the term "God the Father" is used, they don't know exactly how to relate to that because perhaps their earthly model would have been not what would have been desired.

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Peter's word here, though, is "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." No matter who your earthly father was, good or bad, the Lord Jesus Christ had a good Father. He has the same Father we may enjoy together. Let Him be eulogized. When we give praise to God, we eulogize Him. Peter is eulogizing God for the great salvation which we enjoy. In this passage he says four things about our salvation.

I. First, salvation gives us a living hope.

In His great mercy, He, the Father, has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The salvation which we have is not the result of our own seeking or our own effort. God has already made provision for us, and His salvation flows from His grace, as Peter says in verse 2, and His mercy, as he says in verse 3. Sometimes we have difficulty making distinction between God's grace and God's mercy. Perhaps this would be helpful. Grace has been called God's kindness to the worthless. And mercy has been called God's kindness to the helpless.

Or maybe a *Peanuts* cartoon puts it best of all: "If you're kind to Lucy, that's grace. If you're kind, to Charlie Brown, that's mercy."

The origin of our new birth is in God and His mercy. This new birth which we experience results in a living hope. Peter goes beyond the phrase "hope" to add the adjective, "living hope." He does this because he would have us in our own minds contrast it with hopes that are dead or hopes that are not reliable or attainable. There are hopes we may have had which are no longer viable, attainable. But this is a hope not in the sense of an ordinary hope. This is a hope that is so sure it is a guaranteed hope. It is a living hope. It's living because it's assured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Through the resurrection.

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We know that salvation is ours because of what Christ has done. Therefore the first thing salvation does, our first eulogy to God for salvation, is because of the hope He has given.

II. Secondly, Peter tells us that salvation guarantees us an inheritance.

God has given us “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven” for us (verse 4). An inheritance.

That is the simplicity of God’s grace to us. We don’t work for it. All we do is line up before God and we confess the Lord Jesus as our Savior and say, “We want to receive the estate which He has promised, the gift of salvation.” Peter says we’re heirs of salvation. He talks about an inheritance that has three descriptions to it.

A. First, the inheritance is not subject to destruction. It can never perish. Jewish Christians knew a great deal about the word “inheritance” because it is a word used throughout the Old Testament to describe Canaan. Canaan was the Promised Land. God had an inheritance for them there. But we know that that inheritance perished. In fact, the word that Peter here employs that we translate “perish” can also be translated as “a territory,” an inheritance that is unrivaled by an invading army. The Holy Land was time and again ravaged by invading armies. Peter here is saying, as the Spirit inspires him, that God’s new Israel, the Church, has an inheritance kept for it which can never be destroyed and which never perishes.

B. Not only that, it’s not subject to defilement or spoil. We know a lot in Southern California about pollution. The kind of pollution that’s being described here is in contrast again to an Old Testament term. For example, the temple in God’s Promised Land was time and again defiled by heathens that came and desecrated it. Peter is saying God’s new Israel has a place that can never be trampled on and turned into something that’s impure and that will in any way defile its luster and glory.

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C. Not only that, the inheritance that's waiting for us is not subject to decay. It will not fade.

Flowers fade, but not our inheritance.

Why is there no destruction, defilement or decay? Because God keeps it for us. It is kept in heaven for you.

We all know the importance of traveling with reservations. We wouldn't think about taking a trip without reservations. How much less should we think about our eternity without making preparation. Kept in heaven.

III. Our salvation is the crown of all our trials.

Peter goes on to say that our salvation is not only giving us a living hope, it's not only guaranteeing us our inheritance, but our salvation crowns—it's at the apex—of all of our trials (verses 5–9). In Matthew's Gospel salvation involves at least these four things. Deliverance from danger. Deliverance from disease. It involves deliverance from God's condemnation. And it involves deliverance from sin. The fact is, that as the New Testament further talks about salvation, salvation is talked about in the past tense—we *have been* saved. It's talked about in the present sense—we *are being* saved. And it's also talked about in the future sense—we *shall be* saved.

Part of our deliverance and salvation, while it has been partially realized, is not yet totally realized. For example, deliverance from danger. The believers Peter's writing to are not out of danger. Sometimes in bodily illness we are delivered and we are healed. Sometimes we are not. There's kind of a partial work that looks for a future completion of the resurrection of the body. Peter is in this passage looking forward to the final moment, salvation in the future tense, and saying that salvation in its final and complete revelation crowns all of our trials. This is a hope to us as we cope with trials. It gives us some room to cope with the trials. Peter says these things as

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we're coping with trials and awaiting our salvation. First, he tells us that God guards us in those trials "who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:5).

One of the things that's happening in a trial is you feel like everything on deck is loose and nothing's got a hold of it. But this passage is clearly telling us that God has hold of us when we think nothing is tied down. God shields us. The term here is a military term. It means,

"continually guarded." God may guard us *from* our trials. Or God may guard us *in* our trials.

Hebrews 11:33–39 is a moving passage which, in the first few verses, the writer of Hebrews talks about God's people who stopped the mouths of lions, who did incredible exploits in His name, who were granted great deliverances. Then he goes right on to say, "But others..." and then he talks about people who were sawn in two. He talks about people who were killed for their faith. Then he says, the bottom line, these all obtained salvation and were rewarded for their faith. Both the person who is delivered from the trials and the person who is delivered, in an inward sense, while he is in the trial. Peter is saying faith here in God activates our realization that God is guarding us in that trial and will keep us.

The fact that God guards us produces this exaltation: "In this you greatly rejoice" (1 Peter 1:6).

So Peter is saying to us not only is your inheritance kept in the heavens, but you are kept while you are here fighting through the hell that you may be going through on earth. God has not only got a place and a salvation kept for you, but He's got you kept in the present moment.

God guards us in our trials. And Peter also says trials do not last forever. "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." A little while. A little while in reference to what?

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The trial of the Christians Peter was writing to probably lasted for a number of years. Probably “the little while” here compares to the vast expanse of eternity that is waiting. Trial is only a little while. It came to pass. It didn’t come to stay. That’s what Peter is saying, a little while. Peter says, further, the trials may cause grief. This is also said in verse 6. He talks about all kinds of trials. The word is literally “many-colored trials.” There are some of a darker hue than others. Some more painful than others. What Peter is saying is that there is no color in our human situation which the grace of God or the strength of God cannot match. Peter does not tell the early Christians when they’re going through trials that “it doesn’t hurt.” Peter very explicitly says, you may suffer grief. Anxiety, emotional anxiety and pain that is felt intense and deep within. Peter says this may be the experience and the lot of Christians. Trials may cause this. We as believers know the same kind of buffeting of those who are not believers, but with Christ we hurt good.

Peter says one additional thing about the trials which are crowned by our salvation. That is, trials are not to be wasted. One thing that trials do, Peter says, is they establish the genuineness of our faith and they result in reward.

“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. 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 goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (verses 7–9, NIV).

Peter is saying that trials cause us to evaluate our commitment to the Lord and make us really determine whether we’re serving the Lord from a sense of convenience or from a sense of real commitment. The fire of trial refines our faith. Establishes its genuineness. Just as fire is used to

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distinguish true gold from counterfeit gold, so God uses trials to distinguish genuine faith from superficial profession.

Then trials have this beautiful way of happening although we don't like them and they're not easy to bear but we know as we go through trials that trials are the development of character in our lives. Paul says this in Romans 5:3-4: "Suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character produces hope." It's a process at work in our life.

Dr. DeHaan several years ago used this illustration. Take a \$5 bar of steel, and that's all it's worth. But make that same bar of steel into horseshoes, and it's then worth \$10. Make it into needles, and it's worth \$350. Make it into delicate springs for expensive watches, and that \$5 bar of steel is worth \$250,000. It all depends on what you want to do with that bar of steel. The original bar is more valuable by being cut to its proper size, passed through the heat again and again, hammered, manipulated, beaten, punished, finished, and polished until it's ready to do its delicate task.

Peter here is saying that your trials are of more value even than gold. Focus in on a trial you've had. How much would you have paid at the beginning to have had that trial? Probably not a dime. Yet Peter says it's more valuable than gold. If you've had a hundred-pound trial, to get that on God's commodities market you would have had to have plunked down at least \$800,000 in advance. But He's given you the trial without any down payment at all. And, simply said, when it's over, look back. It's more valuable than gold.

And reward. Not only do trials establish our faith, but God's looking out for us and as we travel through these trials and with God's grace achieve victories then a reward is given to us. You may be proved genuine and result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. The praise, glory and honor is not praise, honor, and glory given to Jesus. That of course happens

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when He comes. But here the praise, honor, and glory is being given to us from the Lord. What Peter is saying here as a counselor is we can endure an awful lot if we have something to look forward to. There is a tremendous amount to look forward to because the Lord plans to review His troops and give them the rewards of their service. He's going to find a reward that fits the service that we've given. Our salvation is not dependent upon what we do, but there is this aspect of Christian life where there are rewards for serving the Lord. I don't know how the Lord is going to do that and what all is involved in that, but I just know the Scriptures teach that He is. Salvation gives us a living hope. It gives us an inheritance, it guarantees it. It crowns us in all our trials. And that makes Peter marvel so much because we have not even seen the Lord. Peter had seen the Lord, but we have not even caught a glimpse of Him—yet we have believed.

IV. Salvation invites a sense of privilege.

Peter then goes on to give us a fourth description of salvation. That salvation invites in us a sense of privilege.

“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 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” (10–12, NIV).

Peter is saying to us here that with all of our trials we must remember there are people or beings that would change places with us if they could. Here now are Christians in the first century that are being evicted from their homes, being persecuted, some of them to their death. And he's

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saying there are others, though, who would gladly trade places. You are in a position of privilege in respect to salvation. He says the Old Testament prophets would trade with you. They diligently searched, and this word means to look and to look and to look. Seek out the times when the Messiah would come. It didn't happen with them. He says even the angels long to look in, but they're on the outside looking in at the salvation you possess.

If I had a chance, I'd like to look through the window and see what the angels are doing. But Peter says the angels are at earth's window looking in, seeing what we're doing and what God has done for us. And if they could, they'd trade places with us. We're in a place of privilege because you know God's great salvation in Christ.

A lot of people who long for that moment but have not had it. He's saying to these Christians, "In your trials and the personal holocaust you are going through, that's a special place. God is with you and the saints of old envy you and the angels would trade places with you if they could." In our trials and in our sufferings and in our struggles Peter says we must first of all be strengthened by this so great salvation—this extravagant, lavish, bountiful, inexhaustible, excessive, joyous, and in the last analysis, indescribable salvation.

Closing Prayer

We want to thank You again, our Lord, for this salvation which we enjoy. There are people here, Lord, who have passed through painful things. There may be some today passing through exceedingly painful moments in their life. You've sent this Word today to us to let us know that You are with us. In all those moments You're watching. Not only is the future kept for us, but You're keeping us now. There may be persons here today, Lord, who have recently been, in effect, evicted from a relation, or evicted from a place, or evicted from a place of meaningful service for them. They feel like the ones to whom Peter was writing—homeless and very much

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wondering if there are any assets left. So Your Word comes to us. It bids us look up, to behold You. The riches You have for us. In the midst of our trials, Lord, we are encouraged. We are strengthened. We believe that You are at work in us through them. When everything is said and done, the bottom line is going to be that our own character has been refined and purified. That You're going to work for the good in every situation that comes our way. And at the end there is reward and joy unspeakable. Thank You, Lord, for Your Word. Amen.