

Feed Your Fear: The Pilgrim's Guide to Standing Firm

Part 2

1 Peter 1:17–21

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Introduction

Well, we return to our brief look at a most wonderful passage in the First Epistle of Peter, chapter 1, and verses 17 to 21. Last week, I reminded you how important it is to have an ironclad, rock-solid theology of suffering before you enter into the experience that suffering. The storm shelter of sound doctrine that keeps you grounded in the midst of the hurricane of suffering can't be constructed in the middle of the storm. It needs to be set firmly in place ahead of time, so that when that trial comes, second-nature kicks in, and we can retreat to that haven of biblical truth.

We all need to be equipped to suffer well—to suffer according to the will of God, as Peter puts it in chapter 4 verse 19—before that suffering comes upon us. Because it *will* come upon us. And in a way, as I mentioned last week, that we have not been used to. It's become more obvious than it's ever been that Christians are *pilgrims*. “Those who reside as aliens,” as Peter calls us, “during the time of our *stay* on earth.” This world is not our home. We are exiles, strangers in this foreign, sin-cursed land, sojourning to the country of our true citizenship, where righteousness dwells. And so it's no surprise that, as citizens of heaven, we come into conflict with the enemies of righteousness, and that those enemies grow hostile to us, we who are unimpressed with all that they hold dear, and who are wholly devoted to the holiness that marked the life of Jesus our Lord, whom this world hated and put to death.

And yet, while it should be no surprise, we in North America have enjoyed such an abundant measure of God's common grace and kindness, that we have come to *expect* the world to be hospitable to the church. But over these past two years, the way the governing authorities—really throughout the world, but also here in Southern California—have mobilized against people of conscience, the way the culture has rushed so violently into its repudiation of the foundational, core truths of the biblical worldview, and into its celebration and defense of immorality in every sphere of life, it's convinced me that our commitment to Christ and Scripture will be tested in ways that we have not seen in this part of the world.

And because what I want more than anything is for Christ to be magnified in you—for you to glorify and honor Christ in your lives, for your lives to make Christ look as glorious as He is—I

believe that one of the most significant responsibilities I have as a pastor is to prepare you to stand firm against persecution in a way that makes much of Jesus.

And to do that, we have turned for a brief moment to First Peter, who writes to persecuted believers in the Roman Empire under Nero, who had been (as we mentioned) himself burning various buildings throughout the city of Rome and telling the public it was the Christians—who had been impaling Christians on spikes and lighting them on fire to use as human torches. It was as plain as it could be that these believers were aliens and strangers in the world, and needed to bear up under unjust suffering. First Peter functions as something of a traveler’s guide to the pilgrim’s journey through the land of his sojourn. How are you going to navigate your way through this hostile territory in a way that glorifies and honors your King? Peter answers that question in this letter.

And after praising God in verses 3 through 12 for the privileges that we persecuted pilgrims enjoy by grace, he issues three overarching commands from verses 13 to 21. In verse 13, he calls them to **a life of steadfast hope**: “Fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” In verse 15, he calls them to **a life of universal holiness**: “But like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior.” And then, in verse 17, he calls them to **a life of holy fear**: “If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth.” Rather than fearing the wrath of their persecutors, and succumbing to the temptation of compromising their faithfulness to Christ amidst suffering, they must fear God, who is not only our accessible Father, but also our impartial Judge.

And we mentioned that this holy fear of God that strengthens believers to endure persecution faithfully is not the terror that rightly grips the heart of an unbeliever who stands before the bar of God’s justice in the nakedness of His own righteousness. No, it’s the fear that sons and daughters have for their father, the fear that desires to please God precisely because we belong to Him—because we love Him and don’t want to displease or dishonor Him. This is the key, Peter says, for the pilgrim to stand firm in suffering: “pass the time of your sojourning in fear,” as the King James translates it.

And as we move through verses 17 to 21, we find that Peter gives the suffering believer **three considerations** to meditate upon in order to feed this holy fear of God that will sustain him in his trials—**three considerations that** will help us cultivate this fear that will preserve us from compromise even in the midst of persecution, so that we will be prepared to suffer well.

Review I: The Prerogative of Your Father (v. 17)

And saw two of them last week. The first came in verse 17, namely, **consider the prerogative of your Father**. Peter says, Your Father shows no partiality. He hates sin wherever He sees it. And if He sees it in His children, though His judicial wrath against it has been satisfied by the blood of Christ, He is nevertheless displeased by it. And precisely because He loves you, He disciplines you. And He sends forth His hand of discipline to correct and chasten us. And so, Peter says, conduct yourselves in fear of that discipline. You don't want to displease your gracious Father. You don't want to come under His discipline! So conduct yourselves accordingly.

Review II: The Price of Your Redemption (vv. 18–19)

A **second consideration** that feeds the pilgrim's holy fear came in verses 18 and 19. And that was, number two: **consider the price of your redemption**. And we see that in verses 18 and 19. Peter writes, "Conduct yourselves in fear...; knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ."

The price of your redemption, Christian, was the blood of the spotless Lamb of God. It was the blood of God the Son Himself. Jesus never even deserved to have blood, let alone have His blood shed by wicked men. There is no more precious, worthy, estimable price of anything in the world than the blood of Christ. And so Peter says, If *that* was the cost of your redemption out of the slavery of sin, can you treat this blood as such a contemptible thing, that you give no thought to living the very life of sin that this blood was shed to redeem you from? You see, when you give yourself to the very lawless deeds that the blood of Christ was shed to free you from, you conduct yourself in a way that indicates that you do not believe that blood was precious. And everything in you shrink back from that thought in fear. Do you see what he's saying, then? Conduct yourselves in fear, because you know how precious the price of your redemption was. Fear living your lives as if the ransom price of Christ's blood was not precious.

III. The Glory of Your Savior (vv. 20–21)

Well, there's a **third consideration** that will strengthen and support your holy fear of God during the time of your stay on earth. Not only the prerogative of your Father; not only the price of your redemption. But number three: consider **the glory of your Savior**. Look at verses 20 and 21. Peter mentions the name of Christ at the end of verse 19, and then just bursts out in praise: "For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God."

This glorious redemption purchased by the precious blood of Christ—this was no afterthought! This was no accident! This was the gracious plan of God determined before the world began.

That Christ would appear on the earth as the incarnate God-man, that He would live a perfect life in obedience to the law of God, would die to shed His precious blood to ransom His people from sin, and then would be raised from the dead and be seated in glory at the right hand of the Father in heaven, and become the sole source of faith and hope in the one true and living God to everyone who believes!

And I love this. Peter speaks of the precious blood of the spotless Lamb of God, graciously shed to redeem slaves to sin, and his heart is *so* full that by the time he mentions Christ's name at the end of verse 19, he just can't hold it in. His heart is set ablaze, and he erupts in celebratory praise of the glory of Jesus in so beautiful a fashion that it sounds almost lyrical as you read it: "foreknown before the foundation of the world," "appeared in these last times for your sake," "raised from the dead and given glory," "through Him you believe and hope in God." This **third consideration** that will feed the pilgrim's holy fear of God and strengthen us to stand firm in the face of persecution and temptations to compromise is the **consideration of the glory of our Savior**.

And there are at least **four aspects** of the glory of your Savior that Peter celebrates in those two verses. And we'll devote ourselves to meditating on those four aspects of Christ's glory in the remainder of this sermon.

A. His Predetermination (v. 20)

In the first place, consider **His predetermination**. Verse 20: "For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world." This Christ—the spotless Lamb of God who has shed His precious blood for the redemption of His people—He is no ordinary redeemer. He is, in fact, the eternally appointed redeemer. The plan for Him to rescue sinful man from our futile way of life inherited from our forefathers was a plan that was devised in eternity. "Before the foundation of the world," Peter says.

Now, this is astounding, because it means that the remedy for sin was planned before mankind had sinned—before mankind was created, even. Friends, this is just one of the many passages of Scripture that teach us that God is absolutely sovereign in the matters of sin and salvation—that man's fall into sin did not take God by surprise, that the cross of Christ was not an afterthought. It was not God's Plan B response to Adam's thwarting of God's purposes! No, the cross—and therefore the sin that made the cross necessary—were *Plan A* in God's mind. Before God created Adam and Eve, before He placed them in the Garden, before He gave them the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and therefore certainly before they disobeyed Him and plunged all of humanity into cursed destruction, He had designed our redemption in Christ.

That is why the Apostle John in Revelation 13:8 calls Him, literally, “The Lamb slain *from the foundation of the world.*” Not, of course, because the Son of God had literally been slain before time began! But because God’s plan to rescue sinners from damnation by the death of Christ was established in eternity past! It’s also why, in Ephesians 1:4, the Apostle Paul says that the Father “chose us in [Christ] *before the foundation of the world.*” He uses that same phrase to speak of the Father’s unconditional election of individuals to salvation, which took place in eternity past. Before anyone had sinned, before anyone had been created, before anyone had done anything good or bad, God determined that He would create men and women in His own image, He determined that they would fall into sin, and He determined that He would rescue them from that sin in Christ, who is God the Son. That’s why Paul says in 2 Timothy 1:9 that God “granted us ... grace” “in Christ Jesus from all eternity.”

Now, I want you to notice this particular way Peter speaks about God’s eternal plan of salvation in Christ. He says that Christ was *foreknown* before the foundation of the world. Now this word, *foreknown*, means so much more than simply “knowing beforehand.” This is not just that the Father somehow “looked down the corridors of time” and knew before it happened that His Son would be the one to redeem sinners. No, if that were the sense of “foreknowledge”—just “to know in advance”—we would be constrained to say that God foreknows everything. And then what sense would it make to single out Christ—or anyone else, for that matter—and say “He was foreknown”?

No, the proper sense of this term, *to foreknow*, is, as one preacher put it, “The establishment of a relationship with distinguishing love and purpose” (Martin). In fact, that’s how the term is used most often with respect to God’s foreknowledge: it’s a synonym for God’s election of individuals to salvation. And actually, that’s how Peter uses the term at the beginning of this chapter. Look back at the first two verses of chapter 1. He addresses the believers as “those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, *who are chosen* according to the *foreknowledge* of God the Father.” So you see this connection Scripture makes between God’s choice and His foreknowledge. That connection is also seen in Romans 8:29, where Paul says, “For those whom He [that is, the Father] *foreknew*, He also *predestined* to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He [the Son] would be the firstborn among many brethren.” Foreknowledge is akin to predestination—with foreknowledge emphasizing God’s love and predestination emphasizing God’s sovereignty. God determines to set His love upon individuals and establish a relationship with them, and in the same moment predestines, or predetermines, that the end goal of their election will be brought to fruition: their ultimate likeness to Christ.

And so, the idea of “foreknowledge” denoted by the Greek term *proginōskō*—both in texts like Romans 8:29, as well as in our text in 1 Peter 1—isn’t just knowing facts in advance; it’s loving people in advance. It speaks of the knowledge that characterizes an intimate personal

relationship. Perhaps this is most clearly illustrated in Romans 11:2, where Paul uses the same word with respect to God's relationship to His people Israel. He says there, "God has not rejected His people *whom He foreknew*." Now, for God to foreknow Israel doesn't mean that Israel was the only people God knew *about*. No, Paul's emphasizing the intimate relationship God established between Him and Israel, founded on the covenants of promise.

Now, the Old Testament counterpart to the Greek *proginōskō*, is the Hebrew word *yada'*, which, in its most basic form means "to know." But many times it carries this same connotation of intimate, personal knowledge. For example, Genesis 4:1 says, "Now Adam *knew* [*yada'*] Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain." This kind of knowledge results in the conception of children! Interestingly, *yada'* is also sometimes translated as "to choose." In Genesis 18:19, God says about Abraham, "For I have *chosen* him, *yada'*, so that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of Yahweh by doing righteousness and justice." The knowledge connoted by *yada'* so aptly describes God's personal, sovereign election that all the modern translations translate this verse as "chosen." Amos 3:2 uses this term very similarly to Romans 11:2. There, God says to Israel, "You only have I *known* among all the families of the earth." Again, this can't mean that Israel was the only nation God had known *about*. It means that they alone were the nation upon whom He set His love, and bound Himself to by covenant. In Jeremiah 1:5, God speaks to Jeremiah concerning his call to ministry, and He says, "Before I formed you in the womb I *knew* you, And before you were born I *consecrated* you; I have *appointed* you a prophet to the nations."

To know, to consecrate or set apart, to appoint for ministry. These are the concepts that are at play when Peter says Christ was *foreknown* before the foundation of the world. In eternity past, in the secret councils of the Trinity, there existed such an intimate, personal knowledge between the Father and the Son that there was established a special, covenantal relationship between them, in which the Father "set His love" upon the Son, "chose" Him, "set Him apart," "appointed" Him to be the Mediator between God and men, and promised to reward Him upon the completion of His task. In John 17:24, Jesus prays to the Father on behalf of His people, that they would see His glory which the Father had given Him, "for," He says, "You *loved* Me before the foundation of the world." Jesus uses the same phrase as in 1 Peter 1:20, "before the foundation of the world," and instead of saying, "You *foreknew* Me before the foundation of the world," He gives the sense of the term: "You *loved* Me before the foundation of the world."

In Isaiah 42:1, God speaks of His Servant and says, "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold, *My chosen one* in whom My soul delights I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations." In Luke 9:35, on the Mount of Transfiguration, the Father's voice *thunders* out of heaven, saying, "This is My Son, *My Chosen One*; listen to Him!"

In Hebrews 3:2, the author says that Christ “was faithful to Him who *appointed* Him.” The Father appointed Christ to His earthly mission. What did He appoint Him to do? He appointed Him to be the high priest of His people. Hebrews 5:1: “For every high priest taken from among men is *appointed* on behalf of men in things pertaining to God.” And then Hebrews 5:10, “being *designated* by God as a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.” And what does the high priest do? Hebrews 2:17: He enters into the holy of holies—into the very presence of God Himself—and He makes propitiation for the sins of His people. And how does He do that? Through His sacrificial, substitutionary death on the cross. Acts 2:23: “This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and *foreknowledge* of God, you nailed to a cross ... and put Him to death.”

And what was His reward? Psalm 2:8: “Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the very ends of the earth as Your possession.” Isaiah 52:13: “Behold, My servant will succeed! He will be high and lifted up and greatly exalted.” Isaiah 53:10: “He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of Yahweh will prosper in His hand. As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied.”

And so Peter calls us to **consider the glory of our Savior**, and first of all to consider His **predetermination**. He was foreknown by the Father before the foundation of the world. Loved. Chosen. Set apart. Anointed. Foreordained. Predestined to accomplish the work of redemption for those whom the Father had chosen, and invested with the sure promise of reward and blessing.

But what sense does this make in the flow of Peter’s argument? “Conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your sojourn on earth, because you were redeemed by an eternally-appointed, predetermined and foreordained Redeemer!” Why does that make sense? Well, consider how these persecuted pilgrims were regarded by the world around them. Think of how you’re regarded by the world around you. You’re religious fanatics who worship a crucified carpenter you’ve never seen! You believe in fairy tales because you need a supreme authority to appeal to so you can force everyone to behave like you want them to! You’re narrow-minded, anti-science, homophobic, transphobic, misogynistic, xenophobic, white supremacist bigots! You are literally a threat to public health!

You, like Peter’s audience, have become painfully aware that you have no place in this world—that you are strangers and exiles on the earth (Heb 11:13), that you are the offscouring of the world, the scum of the earth, the dregs of all things (1 Cor 4:13). And what does Peter do? He tells you: not only have you been redeemed by this precious blood of Christ, but there was never a time—not in all of human history—where your Father did not have you on His heart! From before the foundation of the world, God saw your wretchedness! He saw your fall in Adam! He saw all the sins of your youth! He saw all the sins of your adolescence! He saw all the sins

you've committed since becoming a Christian! And apart from anything in you—indeed, in spite of everything in you—He chose you for Himself and gave you to His Son! He set apart His own beloved Son, in whom He was well-pleased, and appointed Him to be your Mediator—to stand between you and your deserved condemnation—and to be crushed under the full fury of the wrath of God for your sins.

Oh, how boundless is the love of the Father to us! This is your standing in the world, pilgrim! Eternally graced by so glorious a Father, who set apart and appointed His Son for you from before the foundation of the world! How could you ever displease so gracious a God? How could you ever be tempted to compromise faithfulness to Him—even in the midst of the severest persecution—if He has loved you like this? Oh, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth, considering the glory of your Savior, in His **predetermination**.

B. His Incarnation (v. 20)

A **second aspect** of the glory of your Savior comes also in verse 20. Number two: consider the glory of your savior in His **incarnation**. “For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has *appeared* in these last times for your sake. . .”

This term “appeared” is translated from the Greek word *phaneroō*. It means to make manifest, to reveal, to disclose. As we have just seen, God the Son was appointed to be mankind’s redeemer from eternity past. He is, again, as Revelation 13:8 says, “The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” Jesus is no less the Redeemer of the Old Testament saints than the New Testament saints, because it is the efficacy of His blood that redeems all those who are saved. Whereas our faith looks back to Him, their faith looked forward to Him in the types and symbols that God revealed to them at that time. And so Christ has always been the Redeemer.

But He has *appeared* in these last times for your sake. Now, this does not mean that Christ merely appeared to come to Earth—that He was some sort of ghost or apparition that appeared to take human form but who had no flesh-and-blood existence. Such a teaching was one of the early heresies in the first and second and even third centuries. Gnosticism taught, among other things, a radical metaphysical dualism: spirit was good, and physical matter was inherently evil. And so they rejected the idea that Jesus was genuinely human. He had only appeared to be human, but was solely divine. Some early forms of this teaching were already present in the late 80s, because the Apostle John writes in 1 John 4:2, “By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ *has come in the flesh* is from God.”

And so, “appeared,” in 1 Peter 1:20 does not mean that Christ seemed to dwell among us. No, this is referring to the **incarnation** of God the Son. The eternal Word from the Father, John 1:1, who *was* in the beginning, who was *with* the Father in the beginning, who was Himself *God* in

the beginning: this Word became *flesh*, and dwelt among us.” The eternal second person of the Trinity, Philippians 2, “though existing in the nature of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but nullified Himself.” How? By “taking the nature of a slave, being *made* in the likeness of men.” The eternal Son made Himself of no effect by taking on a human nature, even while never altering or shedding His divine nature. One hundred percent God, and one hundred percent human—two full and true natures subsisting in the single person of God the Son. Miracle of miracles!

Hebrews 2:14 puts it this way: “Since the children”—that is, us, those whom He came to save—“Since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also *partook of the same*, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.” The Son of God partook of the same human nature—the same “flesh and blood”—as we sinners have, so that He could accomplish our righteousness as a Man and bear the curse of death in our place. Fully man, and therefore able to stand as man’s substitute. Fully God, and therefore able to satisfy the wrath of God on behalf of the innumerable sinners who come to Him in repentance and faith. Behold the glory of the **incarnation**! Only God Himself could ever atone for sin, and yet only man’s sacrifice would be accepted on behalf of man. No one *ought* to pay except man, and no one *could* pay except God. And so in marvelous wisdom, God conceives of the unthinkable: that to reconcile man to God, God would become man. Hebrews 9:26: “But now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested [same word] to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”

“At the consummation of the ages.” Galatians 4:4 says, “When the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son.” Or, as our text in 1 Peter puts it, “in these last times.” This is a phrase that refers to the fact that we are living in the last days of salvation history. The “end times” began in Bethlehem, with the birth of the Messiah. All of history culminates in the *appearing*—in the **incarnation**, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In 1 Corinthians 10:11, Paul calls those of us who live in this era of history those “upon whom the ends of the ages have come.”

And he’s making the same point as before. He’s saying, “You strangers and aliens! You hated, suffering outcasts! You who have no home—no place to belong in this foreign land called planet earth! You whom the world regards as no more valuable than to be impaled on stakes and burned as human torches! Can you fathom the unspeakable privilege that is yours? The whole sweep of human history has been designed by the God of the universe—look again at verse 20—for your sake. The God of the universe has planned from before time began, and He has ordered all of human history—indeed, accomplished the most marvelous miracle in history—for your sake, by sending His beloved Son into the world to bear man’s nature, so He could bear man’s curse!”

Back in verses 10 to 12, Peter told them that the prophets who predicted the coming of Messiah made careful searches and inquiries, longing to know who this Messiah would be and when

would be the time of His coming. He says these are the “things into which angels long to look.” The **incarnation** of God the Son astonishes the angels, who minister before the face of God Himself! What a stunning privilege that these suffering believers have—to be the ones upon whom the ends of the ages have come, the ones living at the time of the fulfillment of centuries of prophecy! As Colossians 1:26 puts it, “The mystery which has been hidden from the past ages and generations, but has now been manifested to His saints, . . . Christ in you, the hope of glory.” And he says to them, as he says to us, “Could you throw away all those privileges by failing to conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth?”

And once again: this appearing was no mere appearance. As we’ve said, the **incarnation** of Christ had a particular purpose: “He partook of flesh and blood *that through death* He might render powerless him who had the power of death.” Friends, Jesus was born to die. The **incarnation** is simply the means to the atonement. Christmas is simply the prelude to Good Friday. The incarnation meant the cross. The incarnation meant the wrath of God. This is what Peter means when he says, “He has appeared in these last times *for the sake of you.*” Second Corinthians 8:9: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though being rich, yet *for your sake* He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.” And that poverty was nothing other than being stripped of His most precious treasure—being abandoned by His Father to suffer the wrath that you and I deserved.

And I simply can’t resist reading to you a section from John Flavel, which I think does the work of the application of this thought better than I ever could. He writes, “Ah! Christian, can you look upon Jesus as standing in your place, to bear the wrath of a Deity for you? Can you think on it, and not melt? That when you, like Isaac, were bound to the altar to be offered up to justice, Christ, like the ram, was caught in the thicket, and offered in your place. When your sins had raised a fearful tempest, that threatened every moment to entomb you in a sea of wrath, Jesus Christ was thrown over to appease that storm. Say, reader, can your heart dwell one hour upon such a subject as this? Can you with faith present Christ to yourself, as He was taken down from the cross, drenched in His own blood, and say, ‘These were the wounds that He received for me; this is He that loved me, and gave Himself for me: out of these wounds comes that balm that heals my soul; out of these stripes my peace: When He hanged upon the cross, He bore my name upon His breast, like the high priest. It was love, pure love, strong love to my poor soul—to the soul of an enemy—that drew Him down from heaven, and all the glory He had there, to endure these sorrows in soul and body for me.’” May Jesus Christ be praised for His grace! Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

“For *your sake,*” Christian. Can you meditate on **the glory of your Savior**—the glory of His **incarnation**, and the glory therefore of His substitutionary atonement—and not have your fear fed? Remember what the commentator Robert Leighton said. We quoted it last week: “If you would increase much in holiness, and be strong against the temptations to sin, this is the only art

of it; view much, and so seek to know much of the death of Jesus Christ” (180–81). The Scottish minister Hugh Martin wrote, “The secret of being truly, and comfortably, and usefully ‘strangers in the earth,’ lies in our being no strangers to God.” We must keep communion with God, and there is communion with God in these thoughts of Christ—God *with* us, given over to death *for* us.

C. His Exaltation (v. 21)

But we must move on. Because Christ does not stay dead, does He? No, the sorrows of Good Friday give way to the triumphs of resurrection Sunday. And Peter does the same, as he moves on to a **third aspect** of the glory of your Savior that will feed your holy fear of God and strengthen you to suffer well in this world. Not only His predetermination and incarnation, but also, number three: His **exaltation**. Look at verse 21: “...who through Him are believers in God, *who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory*, so that your faith and hope are in God.”

You see, this Man was delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, was nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men, who put Him to death. That’s Acts 2:23. But what does Acts 2:24 say? “*But God raised Him up again*, putting an end to the agony of death, since it was impossible for Him to be held in its power.” Though He was genuinely forsaken by the Father on the cross, the resurrection demonstrates that the Father was satisfied by the Son’s sacrifice, and that, since sin had been paid for, the Son was restored to fellowship with the Father.

And not only was Jesus resurrected, but He then ascended from the earth back to the Father, where He now reigns over all things at the Father’s right hand. Philippians 2:9 says, “For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name.” Before His ascension, Jesus Himself declared in Matthew 28:18: “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.” In the opening verses of the Book of Hebrews, the author speaks of the “Son, whom [the Father] appointed heir of all things. ... When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Hebrews 2:9 says, “Jesus, because of the suffering of death [was] crowned with glory and honor...” And perhaps the greatest of them all, Ephesians 1, verses 20 to 22: “[The Father] raised [Jesus] from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church.”

Now, why does Peter call attention to this? Because it reminds the believers—it reminds us—that we trust in and follow a Christ who is not unacquainted with suffering. We do not have a

never-suffering Savior! We have a Savior that was hated. We have a Savior that was spit on. We have a Savior that was mocked, and beaten, and killed in the most shameful way possible.

But that very same Savior was raised from the dead! He was highly exalted, and given the name which is above every name! He was seated at the Father's right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion! Our Savior was made for another world! He came into this world as a pilgrim, as a stranger, as an exile in a foreign land, a Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief (Isa 53:3). His sufferings were infinitely greater than anything we could imagine, but He did not waver in faithfulness to His Father. He did not compromise. He conducted Himself in fear during the time of His stay on earth, because He knew it was only a temporary stay. He knew that this life was for giving away, and that the next life was for rest and reward. And as a result of His faithful obedience, He was raised from the dead and exalted to heaven.

Dear brothers and sisters, that is not only our Savior; that's our Forerunner! He has blazed the trail that He now calls us to walk, as suffering pilgrims on a journey to Heaven. And if we can fix our gaze on Gethsemane, and on Golgotha, and think of the depths of the dishonor He suffered in His life, and then, if we can raise our eyes to Heaven, and think of the heights of the glory He enjoys now, and that He promises that to us as our imperishable inheritance, we will be able to deny ourselves, to take up our cross daily and die to self, and follow after Him. If we can, like Stephen, gaze intently into heaven, and, by the spiritual sight of faith see the glory of God, and see Jesus standing at the right hand of God, then even in our greatest of trials—even amidst a shower of stones like Stephen endured—we can be comforted that our Christ, our Head, has been exalted to glory, and that we His body shall join Him before long.

Do you see? The very worst that they can do to us is kill us. But we serve a Savior, who looked at Martha, weeping for her brother's death, and said, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die." And then He raised Lazarus from the dead by the power of His own voice. I've said it before, but when your heart grabs a hold of this precious truth that no matter how miserable your persecutors attempt to make your life on this earth, that you will live again—that on the last day the One who raised Jesus from the dead will raise your decaying body to life again, will glorify it, and will reunite it with your soul for you to live again in the integrity of body and spirit on the New Earth—when your heart grabs a hold of that reality: you become invincible! You live above the fear of death! You live above the fear of man! And you conduct yourselves in the holy fear of God.

D. His Exclusivity (v. 21)

One more aspect of **the glory of your Savior** that will feed the pilgrim's holy fear and equip us to endure persecution and resist temptation to compromise. And that is, number four, His **exclusivity**. Let's look at the text again and hear this emphasis, starting in verse 20: "For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who *through Him* are *believers* in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, *so that* your faith and hope are in God."

And this is just a simple point, but oh, so crucial. There is no access to God except by Jesus Christ. "Through *Him* we are believers in God." Through *Him* our faith and hope are in God. "There is only one Mediator between God and man: the Man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). Only He was foreknown before the foundation of the world. Only He was God of very God from all eternity, who became man in the incarnation in the fullness of time. Only He bore the wrath of God on the cross for sinners. Only His blood was precious, as a Lamb unblemished and spotless. Only He was raised from the dead on the third day. Only He was exalted into heaven above all power and authority. And so only He can be the object of your trust for the forgiveness of your sins.

And if He is not yet, I call upon you to turn from your sins and trust in Christ for your righteousness before God this morning. Don't sit under the preaching of the Gospel of Christ and cling to your sin and your death. Don't sit listening to the glories of Christ being celebrated while all the while shutting the eyes of your heart against Him. Friend, there is a day coming soon when the door of mercy will be shut against you—when you will long to see the glory of Jesus, when you will ache to hear just one word of the glorious Good News that you have sat under this morning. And there will be no glory to see. No Gospel to hear. The only thing to be seen will be the black darkness of hell. The only thing to be heard will be the weeping and gnashing of teeth of those who have been damned for eternity along with you. And yet, friend, you sit here today with the door of God's mercy flung wide open—with the open arms of Christ Himself beckoning you to repentance and faith in Him, pleading with you to forsake your sin and your confidence in your own righteousness, and to come to Him to find rest for your weary soul. Don't delay another moment! Repent and trust in Christ this morning.

And dear fellow believers, for you who are trusting in Christ here today, though you may be despised by the world, your faith and hope are in God. You have reason to hope! And your reason to hope is not because you will have won the world's admiration. It is not because you will eventually convince the world of your political views and Christianize the culture. It is not because you will make America great again. No, your faith and hope are in the God, who appointed His Son for you in eternity past, and then sent Him into the world to accomplish your redemption, and then raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that you know that no matter what takes place on this earth, the same exalted destiny that Christ entered into awaits you as well!

You see, the God of Scripture does not offer us any hope, any solace, by our setting our minds on this world and the things of this world, but by raising our eyes to heaven, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God! “For you have died! and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:1–4). “Here we have no lasting city, but we are seeking the city which is to come (Heb 13:14). A city that has foundations (Heb 11:10)! Not like here where moth and rust destroy (Matt 6:19)! Not this present creation, which Peter tells us in 2 Peter 3:10 will dissolve like snow in the heat of divine judgment! No, we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13). We are looking for the city whose architect and builder is God (Heb 11:10), a heavenly city that will not decay or fade away (1 Pet 1:5)! We are longing for our home, where we can be face to face with our precious Jesus—to sit with Him, and walk with Him, and talk with Him, and to embrace Him, and to be at rest with Him!

O Christian! You may be hated and despised by the world! You may be the special object of the world’s derision, and even persecution. The storm *is* coming. But you be faithful. You magnify the worth of Jesus by the way that you suffer for His sake. You conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth. Because soon shall close thy earthly mission. Soon shall pass thy pilgrim days. Hope shall change to glad fruition, faith to sight and prayer to praise.