

Sermon Title: Born Again To A Living Hope
Scripture Text: 1 Peter 1:3 (1 Peter #2)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 2-28-16

First Peter Chapter 1 is again our target for this morning. We are going to make only a little bit of forward progress in this book, but don't worry—we will be gaining momentum in some of the places as we go along.

But these opening verses of First Peter are really special. I have tried to imagine Peter's thoughts as he wrote down the words in our passage for today. We will eventually see how it was Peter who said that Old Testament prophets wrote down some of the things that they wrote, and then went back and studied it and tried to figure it out (1 Pet. 1:11). It was the Holy Spirit who inspired what they wrote (2 Pet. 1:21), and they could not yet perceive two comings of Christ (see Lk. 24:26), so they actually studied what they wrote. And I can picture Peter, having been guided to write these opening words, looking back at them and marveling. These are not the theological musings of some ancient thinker in a monastery. They are the heartfelt beliefs of a man's man who was chosen by the Holy Spirit to write down things of *utmost* importance for you and me to apply every single day of our lives.

Peter was certainly no ignorant fisherman. Some who like to attack the obvious things of the Bible have said that Peter could not have written this because it is too majestic for an ignorant fisherman from Galilee. Well, what they should have done is read this and said, "Wow! Look what God did with a fisherman from the Sea of Galilee!" It was a marvelous thing. He *was* a fisherman, but he certainly was not ignorant by any measure. These two books of the Bible that are written by him are marvelous, both for their sublime doctrines and their *very* practical applications.

Today, as we move into Verse 3 of Chapter 1, we are going to begin an exquisite passage that you could file under the category of the doctrine that we usually call "Eternal Security." There is so much here, though, and we are going to visit First Peter 1:3-5 in two installments, and we are going to emphasize the "security" part next time; but today, I need to back up and pick up a couple of things that we slid by last week because I wanted to save them for today, and then we are going to move ahead into Verse 3.

First of all: Think about what might have been on Peter's mind. He wrote: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (vs. 3, NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted). I can see him stopping at that point and looking at the words on the parchment, and thinking something like, "I know *exactly* when it dawned on me who Jesus really is. He took us way up north to Caesarea Philippi to get away from the crowds so He could train the twelve of us (Matt. 16:13). And Jesus was asking us what people were saying about Him, and who they think He is. We told Him all the different things that we had heard; and then He said, 'But who do *you* guys say that I am?' My mouth was in gear way before my brain—and that is pretty normal for me, you know—but this time I was right. I blurted out, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus looked at me and told me that it was His Father who had revealed that to me. Indeed, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

And *then* he wrote: "who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again." Think of how *that* may have flowed through the heart of Peter. He might have thought something like, "Surely no one understands the mercy of God like *I* do. I used the foulest

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words I had ever heard on the Sea of Galilee that night when I denied that I even knew Jesus (Matt. 26:74). It is obvious that I am a Christian because God did it. God *caused me* to be 'born again' (Jn. 3:3, cf. vs. 5; Jn. 1:13; Acts 16:14; 1 Cor. 1:30). If God did not cause my salvation, there would not *be* any salvation for old loudmouth Peter!"

And then he went on to write: "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Oh, say the word "resurrection" and Peter's mind would *immediately* whir into motion. Maybe he was thinking something like, "There are only a few of us left who saw Jesus after the Resurrection. Oh, Lord, please help the next generations understand our wonderful hope! That morning of the Resurrection, my mind nearly *exploded*! And when I think about the fact that Jesus singled *me* out to talk to *me* after He rose from the dead (Jn. 21:15-19)—I weep every time." (cf. Mk. 16:7)

Peter was a pretty strong-thinking kind of guy, and I can't really know exactly what was on his mind, but I do know for sure that from these words that he penned, we can understand that they are the "living" and powerful "Word of God" (Heb. 4:12; 1 Pet. 1:23). They truly *are* that, and they can minister to us today (Prov. 16:20).

So, we are going to *technically* study First Peter 1:3; we are going to move ahead to that. But I want to back up to Verses 1 and 2 again—pick out a couple of things that, as I said, we minimized last time—under these headings:

1. God Chose You (vss. 1-2)
2. He Caused You To Be Born Again (vs. 3)

It starts out with Verses 1 and 2. We studied them last time, but there were two things that I did not focus on because I wanted to save them for today and roll them in with what is here in Verse 3.

Verses 1 and 2—we read them last time, but let's refresh our minds: "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure."

This is addressed to people who are going through *very* hard times. They were under the Emperor Nero. That was *not* a good time to be a Christian, socially speaking. They were in constant danger of life-threatening persecution. If people these days were in a situation like that, most Christian leaders would recommend that we start support groups to help them learn how to handle the "stress." We would tell them to get into counseling.

But Peter, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, begins his book with *exactly the opposite* of what most people say today. Most people today make this dichotomy: There is "*doctrine*" and there is "*practical stuff*"—and they have *nothing* to do with each other. And you could not get more *anti-Christian* than that, because *you have no basis* for practicing Christianity *except* on the basis of the great *truths* that are made to come to life in the Scriptures (e.g., 2 Cor. 7:1; cf. Rom. 12:1; Heb. 12:28; 1 Jn. 3:3).

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Peter reminds us of some of the most *profound* doctrines in all the Bible. He starts out by reminding us that if you are a Christian, you were "chosen" in Christ "before the foundation of the world" (Eph. 1:4; cf. 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9). Is that *amazing*? You were on God's mind *before* He fashioned the *universe*! (see Ps. 103:17; Jer. 1:5; 31:3; Gal. 1:15; Rom. 8:29-30; Rev. 13:8; 17:8)

And He determined to know you personally: You are "chosen according to the *foreknowledge* of God" (see Acts 2:23; 13:48)

And he reminds us that every day, we need to rely upon His Holy Spirit to produce the holiness that God desires in our lives (Rom. 8:4, 13; Gal. 5:16; Col. 1:11). He reminds you that it is your duty to obey tenaciously everything that you know from His Word (Matt. 28:20; Lk. 11:28; Jn. 14:15), that we might be known as the ones who "obey Jesus Christ" and who are thereby shown to be the ones "sprinkled with His blood"—which is a metaphor, like when the sacrifice was offered in the Old Testament: The worshipper would offer the sacrifice, the priest would make the sacrifice; but it was when the blood was "sprinkled on the altar" (Lev. 1:5)—*that* is when the sacrifice's benefit was applied to the one who was the worshipper. So, we have been "sprinkled" with His "blood"—that means you have put your trust in what He did for you (Is. 53:5-8; Rom. 5:10; 2 Cor. 5:21; Col. 1:20-22).

Now I want to look at a phrase that we skipped over last time—as I say, because I wanted to save it for now. The first of the two phrases is: "those who reside as aliens, scattered"—then he lists *where* they are "scattered." Literally, the phrase is: "I am writing to you who are aliens of the dispersion."

You know what an "alien" is: An "alien" is a person living in a place not his or her homeland, a place other than where their citizenship belongs. If you decide to vacation in Mexico, while you are there you are an alien; that is not your home.

"Scattered" is from the word *diaspora*; we get our English word "dispersion" from it. It is first used in the Scriptures to describe Jews scattered away from the land of Israel throughout the world—the ones who are not living in the land of Israel, but they are Israelites; they are Jewish by heritage (Jn. 7:35).

Here, he uses this same term—not only for Jews not in Israel, but he describes *all* Christians this way because we are *all* spiritual pilgrims (Ps. 119:54); we are all "aliens" in this world (1 Pet. 2:11; cf. Ps. 39:12; 119:19; Heb. 11:10, 13-14, 16). This world is not our home. The Apostle Paul said it in so many words in Philippians 3:20—"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. Lk. 10:21; 2 Cor. 5:8; Eph. 2:6; Col. 1:5; 3:3). We are waiting for the King to come from our Homeland, to bring thee Kingdom *here* to Earth!

And in this world in the meantime, while we wait, our citizenship is established there, but now we are "dispersed"—*exactly* according to God's design for us to be spread around the world so that we can be representatives to promote His Kingdom as "ambassadors" living in hostile territory (2 Cor. 5:20; cf. Phil. 2:15).

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Now, we *are* looking forward to when Jesus comes as "King of kings and Lord of lords" (Rev. 19:16). When He comes and He "reigns" on Earth, we get to "reign with Him for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6; cf. 2 Tim. 2:12; Rev. 2:26-27). That situation will be *much* different and *much* better because He will "rule" with "a rod of iron" in righteousness (Rev. 12:5; 19:15; cf. Ps. 2:9).

But, you know what? As good as the Kingdom on Earth is going to be, that is *still* not our permanent home, that is still not where we belong! Our ultimate home is in the "New Jerusalem" (Rev. 3:12; 21:2; cf. Gal. 4:26; Rev. 21:10) in the "new heaven" and the "new earth" (Rev. 21:1; cf. 2 Pet. 3:13; see also Lk. 16:9; Rev. 3:12).

The reason I wanted to set that aside and save it for today is because I want to emphasize that in order to help you see through some of the watered down *perversions* of the Gospel which run rampant these days.

Understand this: The purpose of your salvation is *not* to make *you* happy and comfortable *in this world*! It is to help you understand: *You do not belong here!* *You do not want* to get comfortable in this world! (see Heb. 13:14)

Now, don't get me wrong: Give me comfort or discomfort—I choose comfort. Give me hard or easy—I chose easy. Persecution or blessing—I choose blessing. I have *no problem* with God giving us good stuff while we are here (Ps. 84:11; 1 Tim. 6:17). But *this* is not "the thing"! This is not the end of it (1 Cor. 7:31; 1 Jn. 2:17). You do not belong here, and *the world will treat you accordingly* (Ps. 37:12; Jn. 15:19; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Jn. 3:13).

Our purpose is *not* to "reclaim" an eroding society! You hear this every four years in the cycle that we are in now of a presidential election, and all the Christians ride up and say: "We need to reclaim our society!" *No, we don't!* (2 Tim. 3:13) I don't want to settle for something as *pathetic* as a reclaimed earthly, worldly, fallen society! *I want to "be with the Lord"* (1 Thess. 4:17). I want *His* "righteousness"! (Phil. 3:9)

Now, would I like things to be better? Yeah! Would I like Christians to be exalted and lifted up and promoted to the highest positions of authority because of their character? Oh, I would *really like that!* Give me a choice to vote between somebody who is going to try to rule according to Scripture and somebody who is going to rule according to man, I'll choose the Christian. Okay, we don't have that choice. Give me a choice between somebody who will make things worse *faster* and somebody who will make things worse *slower*—I'm going to choose *slower*. And that is the choice that you need to make, and it is your God-given responsibility to make it—and that is not what I am preaching about.

The point is: Right now, our "citizenship" is elsewhere. We are disbursed in this world to be "ambassadors" in a *hostile environment* (Ps. 37:32; Prov. 29:27b; Gal. 4:29; 1 Pet. 5:8; 1 Jn. 5:19; Rev. 12:17). *That* is why we are here! *That* is what the rest of our time on this planet is all about! That is all *before* we receive the full joy that we will have in eternity (Matt. 25:21, 23; cf. Ps. 16:11). That is *before* we see the full purpose of our salvation, which is for the "glory" of God (Eph. 1:12; 3:10, 21; Rev. 5:9).

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Something else I did not linger on last week because I think it helps us move into Verse 3 is the end of Verse 2. Look at it again—his prayer at the end of Verse 2. After he says who he is and who he is writing to, he says this: "May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure." That is how Peter prays for the people to whom he was a shepherd.

Now I want to give a bit of trivia here. This is going to matter or be understood by, as much as I know it, approximately two people here at Heritage Bible Church, but I will say it anyway: This sentence contains a rare occurrence of a verb in the "optative mood." I'll bet you made it through the *whole week* and probably *never* used the word "optative," even if you went to the eye doctor. You are mispronouncing it if you think you got an "optative" exam—that is not what it is. But this is a rare verb form. Less than one fourth of one percent of the verbs in the New Testament are in this form. The closest you could come to it in English, by way of translation, is to think of it as wish. It describes something that is potential, and expresses the desire that what is possible or potential would become reality.

So it fits perfectly with praying. Because I know God's Word, I know what can be yours in Christ; therefore, I pray that it will be so. I *know* that God is "gracious" (Ex. 22:27; 34:6; Ps. 111:4; Jer. 3:12). May God's "grace" be "*multiplied* to you" (2 Pet. 1:2). I know that God is the "God of peace" (Rom. 15:33; 16:20; Phil. 4:9; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20). May God's "peace" be "*multiplied* to you" (2 Pet. 1:2).

The translations of this verb range from what is in our translation—"be yours in fullest measure"—to some of the others which say: May it be "multiplied" to you (e.g., LSB, KJV, NKJV, HCSB, ESV); or, one says: May it "be yours in abundance" (NIV). The idea is: "I want something to just be *heaped* upon you from God."

And again, what Peter is praying for in the midst of suffering and persecution *is not* what most people ask God for in the midst of suffering and persecution. We say, "I don't want to suffer anymore, thank You! Please stop the persecution! Get me out of here!" Peter says: "In the midst of your suffering, may God's grace be heaped upon you. May God's peace be heaped upon you."

"Grace" is a favorable attitude toward something. You are "saved by grace" (Eph. 2:8); you are saved because God chose to turn things around for you, if you will (Eph. 2:5; cf. Rom. 3:24). You "stand" in "grace" (Rom. 5:2). It is because of the work of Christ that He has brought you into favor with God, based upon His perfect "righteousness" being applied to your account (2 Cor. 5:21; cf. Rom. 4:3-5; Phil. 3:9). So he says, "I want that to be poured out on you. I want it to 'be yours in the fullest measure.'" That means that "I want you to understand that *nothing* that this world can do can thwart God's goodness toward you (Rom. 8:35-39). May His grace be 'multiplied' to you!"

It also means that Peter wants you to "stand" in "grace" (1 Pet. 5:12) so that when the world attacks you, you don't lash out in "vengeance" (Rom. 12:19), you return a message of grace (1 Pet. 3:9; cf. Matt. 5:44; Lk. 6:28; Rom. 12:14; 1 Cor. 4:12-13; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 2:21-23).

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Same with "peace." You know what "peace" is; but as we use "peace," we usually think of a ceasefire—which is always temporary; some of them last for a while. But "peace" is not only the absence of combat, but in a biblical sense, "peace" is *also* the presence of "righteousness" (Ps. 85:10; Is. 32:17; Rom. 14:17; Heb. 7:2; Jas. 3:18).

So, Peter prays that you will not allow your "peace" to be disrupted by the tumult that you encounter in the world. Likewise, he prays that you are going to respond to the hostility of the world by proclaiming "peace" with God "through Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36).

Remember when they were stoning Stephen, and he said, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" (Acts 7:60) He understood "grace" and "peace" being "multiplied."

Heritage Bible Church's theme verses that we studied when this church was born fit well here at the beginning of First Peter; they could just as well be First Peter 1:1-2. Romans 5:1-2 says this: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have *peace* with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this *grace* in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God." And by the way: "Hope" is the next key thing in our passage this morning.

Remember always that the themes of First Peter are "suffering" and "hope." So, what he prays for is not immediate relief from the suffering; but in the *midst* of it, he wants you to understand the "grace" of God to stand in the "peace" of God so that you will live in the "hope" that God gives you.

So, to *help* you: Instead of saying, "Oh, don't bother with that dusty old 'doctrine' stuff," he mentions the Doctrine of Election—that you were in the mind of God before the world was (Ps. 103:17; Jer. 1:5; Gal. 1:15; Eph. 1:4; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:9); the Doctrine of God's Foreknowledge—which means that God predetermined this loving relationship that you have with Him now (Acts 2:23; cf. Deut. 7:7-8; 10:15; Rom. 8:29); the Doctrine of "Sanctification" (Rom. 6:19; 1 Thess. 4:7; Heb. 12:14)—that He wants to make you "holy" (Col. 1:22; cf. Titus 2:11-14); the concept of obedience to the lordship of Christ (Matt. 28:18-20; Jn. 3:36; Rom. 10:9; Phil. 2:9-11; Heb. 5:9), so that your obedience to Him would *show* (Matt. 28:20; Jn. 15:8; Phil. 2:15); the Doctrine of the "Blood" of Christ (Col. 1:20, 22; cf. Lk. 22:20)—the ultimate "once for all" sacrifice of Christ (Heb. 9:12; 10:10; 1 Pet. 3:18); and the Doctrines of "Grace" (Eph. 2:8) and "Peace" (Eph. 2:14).

And you know what? Peter writes this stuff *as if he actually thinks* it will help you—and *it will!* *Nothing else* will help you like knowing who you are in Christ (e.g., Rom. 8:31-34).

But by modern standards, in this letter Peter just didn't give any "practical" advice. One of our friends here tipped me off to a book by one of the more interesting characters in the Body of Christ: Todd Friel. If any of you ever listen to "Wretched Radio" or "Wretched TV"—he has a lot of really good material. An interesting fella. He has a daily talk show. He recently published a little summary of what Peter did instead of being what we call "practical." Peter tells Christians, in the midst of their suffering, to do this. He says: "Remember your salvation"—he says that a bunch of times. He says: "Think about Heaven"—he says *that* more than once. He says: "Grow in holiness"—that is a theme we

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are going to see several times. He says: "Read your Bible." He says: "Love one another." He says: "Remember how Jesus was treated on your behalf"—and he says that more than once. And he says: "Now, I know that in the midst of this, you are going to have some really ugly people in positions that can affect you drastically." And so, what does he say? He says: "Submit to bad governments. Hey, if we can change it, that is nice, but submit to it."

Breaking the law in order to make a point is *not* biblical! Civil disobedience should happen when the government says you must *not* do something that God says you *must* do; then we have a higher authority (Acts 5:29)—or when the government says you must *do* something that God says, "Don't do." They have to absolutely countermand God—*then* we have a higher authority. But people who go around and say, "We are just going to take over this place in order to make our point!"—*No! That's not right!* You ought to be arrested, and you ought to get the consequences!

And by the way: That is *also* true when you *are* justified: You are accepting the responsibility. *That* is how great jail ministry breaks out! Arrest *the best people*, and lock them up! That is who the best jail ministry breaks out.

You submit to bad governments (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1-7; Titus 3:1). And, do you know what? God even knows about your boss. He says: "Submit to unsaved bosses." Maybe you got saved, and your spouse didn't. He says: "Submit to unsaved spouses."

Then he goes on to say, in some more of his "non-practical" advice: "Prepare to suffer the same way Jesus suffered. They weren't very nice to Him."

Oh, and he does say: "Pray"—he says that more than once. And he says: "Pastors are to be good shepherds." Why, he actually talks as if us acting like the flock of God *being together* is a good thing! Then, when you are doing that, he says: "Submit to your elders." And then he says: "Submit to God, and resist temptation."

Most people in the world would look at that list and say, "Oh, come on, *get real!* Give me some *practical* stuff!" The most practical thing you can do is to honor God by how you live (1 Thess. 2:12; cf. 2 Cor. 5:9; Eph. 4:1; Phil. 2:15; Col. 1:10).

After his list, Friel wrote these words: "Why did Peter offer such 'non-practical' advice to Christians who had rocks whizzing by their heads? Because God has different goals for our lives than we tend to have for ourselves. God actually has a *supernatural* purpose in persecution. God wants us to be a holy, set-apart people who respond to persecution like Jesus did. When the world sees our loving response to hate, they will be moved to ask, 'Who is your God?' 'But sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you' (1 Pet. 3:15). In other words: God uses persecution for the salvation of men. God does not want us to overthrow bad governments; He wants us to submit to them *that they might be saved*. Persecution is evangelistic."

He caught the sense of First Peter.

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Now let's move on to the next phase of your spiritual boot camp for handling persecution. Peter starts out by saying, "God chose you." Now he is going to say that He "caused" you "to be born again" if you are a child of God.

Let me ask you a fairly obvious question: Can a dead person make himself or herself alive? I've done a lot of funerals. I've even gotten over the creepiness of standing there with an open casket next to me. But I have always thought it would be more effective if I could say, "Bob! Get up!" Or, better yet, if Bob would just say, "Ah! I'm back!" You can't *do* that! So, how can *you*, when your spiritual condition is described in Ephesians 2:1 as "dead in your trespasses and sins"—how can you be "born again" to new life? *You cannot do it!* Dead people cannot make themselves alive!

So, Peter explains that it is by the power of God. Look at our new verse for today: Chapter 1, Verse 3 of First Peter—"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has *caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*"

Now, before the details, notice that first word: "Blessed." It is a word from which, actually, our word "eulogy" comes from; but this word *eulogētos* is used in the New Testament *only* for God. It describes "intrinsically blessed" or "worthy of blessing." "Blessed within Himself is God." God *is* "blessed," therefore, He is worthy for us to proclaim His blessing to anyone who will listen. And *He* is the source of blessings that we enjoy (Jas. 1:17).

There is an interesting contrast between this word "blessed"—as in "blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ"—and the *other* word "blessed," like in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3), "Blessed are those who mourn" (vs. 4), "Blessed are the meek" (vs. 5, ESV), "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness" (vs. 10), etc. That is a *different* word for "blessed"; that is a blessing that is pronounced upon believers in Christ. And here is the distinction: *This* word [in 1 Pet. 1:3] means "blessed by nature." "Blessedness" is an attribute of God. This is true of God, and no one else. Therefore, that *other* word "blessed" means something more like "prosperous" or "happy" or "in a good situation" or "well-off"; and that is a condition that we enjoy only because it is *derived* from God, who *is* "blessed." Do you understand? *We* are "blessed" because we receive from God who is "the blessed God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Now I'd like you to look at that verse again, and pick out sort of a sentence-within-a-sentence: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again..." Here is the sentence-within-a-sentence: "God...who...has caused us to be born again..." I just realized: That is not a sentence. Okay. But "God...who...has caused us to be born again..." Look at that description of you: "God...*caused* [you] to be born again." If you belong to Jesus Christ—if He is your Lord, if He is your Savior, if you are part of the flock of God—it's because *God did it to you* (see Deut. 30:6; Jer. 24:7; Ezek. 36:26; Jn. 1:13; 3:3, 5-6; 6:44-45, 65; Acts 16:14; 18:27; 1 Cor. 1:30; 2:14; 12:3b; 2 Thess. 2:13; Titus 3:5; Jas. 1:18; 1 Jn. 5:1).

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God is the cause of your salvation *because* you cannot save yourself! Dead people cannot make themselves alive! You would have never chosen God if He did not first choose you (Jn. 15:16; cf. Jn. 5:21; 6:44, 65; Rom. 8:7; 1 Cor. 2:14; 12:3b; Col. 1:21; 1 Jn. 4:19), and "call" you to "Himself" (Acts 2:39; cf. Rom. 8:30; 9:24; 1 Cor. 1:24; 2 Pet. 1:10; Rev. 17:14). If you came to that point that you've heard the Gospel, "that Christ died for [your] sins" (1 Cor. 15:3); if you've heard that you are a sinner, and you are convicted of your sins, and you say, "Yes, God, I want to come to You"—*that* is because of *God reaching out to you* by His Spirit (e.g., Acts 16:14; cf. Ezek. 36:26 with Lk. 8:15). *You would not choose Him*, left to yourself (Prov. 19:3; Jn. 3:19-20; 1 Cor. 2:14).

How do I know that? He told me. How did He tell me? It's in His Word: Romans Chapter 3, Verses 10 and 11. Paul says: "As it is written"—and then here I'm going to quote from Psalm 14 and Psalm 53, and this is the beginning of several Old Testament quotes strung together. But listen to this: "As it is written, 'There is none righteous, not even one.' " How many people are righteous enough to save themselves? *Zero*, not one, nobody ever, *no exceptions!* (Prov. 20:9; Jer. 13:23) "There is none who understands." How many understand all that it would take to be saved apart from the Word of God? *Nobody!* "There is none who seeks for God." Left to himself, man or woman *will not seek God*.

Romans 1 says that man "*suppresses the truth* in [his] unrighteousness" (vs. 18; cf. Jer. 17:9). We should *all* be able to look to "the heavens" and say, "There *has* to be a God!" (cf. Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:19-20) And man looks to the heavens and says, "What a mystery! Wow! 'Big Bang!'" No, no! That is *rejecting* the truth that is there, it's *pushing it away!* *That* is what man does on his own.

But the Greek in First Peter Chapter 1, Verse 3, requires that God is the cause, salvation is the result. Why, it's as if "you were dead" and you were "born again" (see Eph. 2:4-5).

This idea of "born again" isn't nearly as common in the New Testament as you might think from the way that it gets thrown around in *our* world. It became a very popular description of a Christian back in 1976 when Jimmy Carter, during the presidential campaign, said, "I'm a 'Born-Again Christian.' " And now, you would think "born again" must be on every other page of the New Testament. Do you know how often this word "born again" is used in the New Testament? *Twice*—both in First Peter Chapter 1. The other one is in Verse 23—"For you have been *born again* not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and enduring word of God." We will spend plenty of time on that when we get there. But notice: This is what new life is all about. This is what salvation is all about. It's like being "born again."

There is one other place where there is *similar* terminology used; it is *not* the exact same word as is here, but it's over in John, Chapter 3. Remember when Jesus met with Nicodemus—who was the chief teacher among the rabbis in Israel (vs. 10)—and He told Nicodemus: "Unless" you are "born again," you won't even "see the kingdom of God" (vs. 3; cf. vs. 5). And Nicodemus was pretty savvy; he understood *exactly* what Jesus was saying, and he said, "Wait a minute! *That is impossible!* What, do You think I'm going to crawl back into my mother's womb and be 'born again'? That is totally impossible! That's absurd!"

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And you know what? *He's right!* It is *utterly impossible!* It cannot be done, except by *the power of God!* Only God can give eternal life (Matt. 19:26; Jn. 5:21). That is why "born again" is such a great concept. It describes the essence of being a Christian: It is new birth into a new life (2 Cor. 5:17), which is followed by growth "to maturity" (Heb. 6:1), just like a baby "grows up" into adulthood (Eph. 4:13-15).

Like I say, we will spend plenty of time on that when we get to the end of this chapter and the beginning of the next one. But that is why Peter says, in the beginning of Chapter 2—"Like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord" (vs. 2-3). "If you have tasted the kindness of the Lord" means: If you have been "born again." And if you are now "born again," you are born into new life (Rom. 6:4; 8:2). And so, just like a baby *longs* for nourishment from Mom, you need to "long for the pure milk" of the Word of God.

That is why we are so tenacious about preaching and teaching the Bible (Acts 20:32). The Word of God is the *only* nourishment that will make you become what God wants you to be (2 Tim. 3:15-17; cf. Ps. 119:9, 11, 38; Matt. 4:4; Jn. 17:17; Col. 3:16; Heb. 4:12).

There are a lot of nice things that can be said from a pulpit. We could dispense endless human wisdom—it could even be helpful. We could tell stories. I know how to make up clever homilies. We can be fairly entertaining. But it is all a waste of time unless you are fed the Scriptures to nourish your soul so that you "grow in respect to salvation," so that you "grow up into" being like "Christ" (Eph. 4:15; see 1 Cor. 1:17; 2:4-5).

So Peter says that because you are "born again"—which God has done to you by His grace; it is all His work that He has done to you; it is *never* against your will (Ps. 51:12; 110:3), but He has "called" you "to Himself" (Acts 2:39), He has brought you into this relationship that He "foreknew" because He chose you (Rom. 8:29), and He has brought it to pass in time (Gal. 1:15-16)—and so, *now* he says you are "born again *to a living hope.*"

"Hope," according to the Bible, is a lot stronger than how we use the word "hope." We usually say "hope" in the sense of, "I hope it all works out. I hope it doesn't rain on the day of our picnic." But in the Bible, "hope" is a lot more than that: "Hope" is settled confidence about the future, based upon the character of God." (see Ps. 31:24; 71:5; Acts 24:15; Rom. 5:2, 5; 8:25; 15:4; 2 Cor. 1:7; Col. 1:5, 23; 1 Thess. 1:3; Heb. 6:19; 11:1)

We are told to look forward to what He has for us: Titus Chapter 2, Verse 11—"For the grace of God has appeared"—same thing Peter says—"bringing salvation to all men"—because God "cared" you to be "born again," like Peter says—"instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age"—like "obeying the Lord Jesus Christ and being sprinkled with His blood." And he says this: "looking for the blessed *hope* and the appearing"—you could translate that "*even* the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus." It is "a living hope"—"born again to a living hope." Your "hope" is as real as Jesus is real. As certainly as He lives today, having come out of that tomb, we have assurance of our future with Him (Jn. 14:19; Rom. 5:10; 8:34; Col. 3:3-4; Heb. 7:25).

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But, you know what? This "hope" does not begin in the future. He calls it "a *living* hope." It is not an abstract thing that we are waiting for; it is *alive* in us right now! (Heb. 6:19) The word "living" is a present participle—which means: an ongoing thing—of the word "to live," the Greek word *zaō*, from which we get "zoology"; it's all about living things, right? "Zoology." This is "a *living* hope"—this is a thing that you have now. This is something that is *alive in you!* (Ps. 62:5-6; Rom. 5:2, 5) It's the same word "living" that we saw a minute ago in Verse 23—"the *living* and enduring word of God."

We are "born again to a living hope *through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*" Jesus' resurrection is what guarantees your future with God (Rom. 8:11). It was the Resurrection that turned Peter around. Remember, I said: When he hit bottom, he probably put a *dent* in the bottom: as far as *he* fell, from his pride of whipping out that sword [and saying], "I will go to *death* with You" (see Lk. 22:33) to "Blankety-blank-blank, I never even *knew* Him!" (see Matt. 26:74) in a matter of *hours*. Remember how it says that on the day of the Resurrection, Peter and John "*ran*" to "the tomb" to see what was happening (Jn. 20:4). I bet it was just more than his mind could take in.

That's why I said he must have marveled that Jesus chose to speak to *him* after the Resurrection, after all that he had done. Jesus let Peter kind of emotionally twist in the wind for a number of days. And then we read last time, in John 21:15-17, He restored Peter. And when He restored him, He gave him the same instruction stated three slightly different ways: "Tend My lambs," "Shepherd My sheep," "Tend My sheep." Feed them and watch out for them. Take care of them.

That is why Peter says we have been "born again to a living hope" because *Jesus is alive!* My friend, if "living hope" is not an accurate description of how *you* feel when you ponder your life, I think you need some serious Bible reading. You need to ingrain some important great doctrines of the faith. Your "living hope" is nothing less than "eternal life" (Titus 1:2; 3:7). "Hope" means "confidence optimism" (see Heb. 3:6). It comes from God's "grace" (2 Thess. 2:16). It comes from His goodness and His mercy being "multiplied to you" (2 Pet. 1:2; Jude 2). It is revealed in the Bible (Rom. 15:4). It is guaranteed by the Resurrection (Rom. 8:11).

So, if you are going to handle tough times *when they inevitably come* (Ps. 34:19; Jn. 16:33; Acts 14:22)—if you are not having tough times now, just be patient; they'll come! The way our world is going, it is heading for us. It is less and less politically correct, it is less and less societally acceptable to proclaim truth as God has revealed it (2 Tim. 3:13). The reason that I chose First Peter is because of what our world has been doing in the last few years. If you are going to handle tough times when they inevitably come, you need to begin with understanding that you have been "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Ooh! There is another very important question. You need to *understand* that you are "born again to a living hope," but for you to understand that, you have to be "born again to a living hope." If you have never, before today, understood that for you to know the Kingdom of God, for you to be able to embrace the Lord Jesus Christ, requires something *utterly impossible* for you to do! *Only God can do it!* (Jn. 6:44; 1 Cor. 12:3b)

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And so, if you feel the weight of your sin, if you understand that you are "alienated" from God Almighty (Col. 1:21; cf. Is. 59:2), and you have never before done it, *today* is the day for you to cry out and say, like the man in Luke 18, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" (vs. 13). If you have never done that, do that "today" (Heb. 4:7; cf. 2 Cor. 6:2). Be "born again to a living hope." I can't do it. If I could, I would. If I could do it for anybody, I would.

My own dad, as he lay on his deathbed, and he had had a stroke and could not speak, I'll tell you: If anybody can pray and talk anybody else into the Kingdom of Heaven, I did it that day! If I could do it for you, I would do it right now. But *you* have to call out to God to be "born again to a living hope." If you "call," He will answer (Ps. 145:18; cf. Jn. 1:12; 5:24; Acts 2:21; Rom. 10:9), and you can be, indeed, bathed in "a living hope."

So, Heavenly Father, my prayer is as it always is. You know us. You know Heritage Bible Church. Beyond knowing us collectively, You know each one of us intimately and personally, and there is absolutely nothing that we can hide from You. So, whatever stands in the way of us being faithful and fruitful and effective ambassadors for the Kingdom of God here on Earth, sweep it away today, I pray. If it needs to be at the most basic point of sweeping away the pride of thinking that we are good enough, sweep it away. If there is a secret sin, remind us: There is no such thing as a secret from You. Sweep it away. Give us the resolve, the joy, to be encouraging one another all the more as we see the day of the coming of Jesus Christ drawing near. Have Your way among us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.