

## TITLE PAGE 1 Peter 1:1-12

### Angels on the Edge of Their Seats.

- Writing from Rome
- Written near the end of his life, AD 60 or so.
- Persecution is the context, by the general populace
- Encourages readers to live a life of holiness
- 3 main themes
  - o Salvation
  - o Pursue the values of heaven
  - o Holy people b/c of X
- God knew you and chose you.
- All praise to God verse 2
  - o Mercy, born again
  - o Jesus Christ raised by God
  - o We live with expectation
  - o Priceless inheritance
    - Pure, undefiled, beyond change and decay
  - o God is protecting you until you reach this salvation revealed on the last day
  - o Be glad – joy ahead! Endure trials for a little while
  - o Trials test that your faith is genuine.
  - o One day, you will receive praise and glory and honor – cf other translations
  - o Love him, trust him, rejoice
  - o The reward will be salvation of your souls
  - o Wonderful, good news

I don't know about you, but there are some Bible characters that I seem to relate to better than others. I've been listening to the Bible in a year via The Bible Project, and lately I've been in the story of Samuel, Saul, David, and Jonathon. I understand that David was a man after God's own heart, but I find myself conflicted about that. I read about his life and then I get to thinking, "Maybe I'm not so bad after all." Which probably isn't the point, mainly because that's a works/righteousness kind of reaction. What's worse, perhaps, is that in these stories, I find myself interested in the bodyguards of the king, and how brutal they could be. (I know, a Mennonite guy interested in violence, it's not good).

Anyway, let's take Abner, Saul's bodyguard, for example. He's running from a guy named Asahel, and he warns him to stop following him or he would have no choice but to kill him (2 Sam 2). Asahel doesn't stop pursuing him, and Abner, a man of his word, kills him. (I confess to having similar conversations of this genre, though less violent, with my younger brother Steve when we were kids. They went something like this: "Steve, if you don't stop bugging me, I'm going to pound you till you start crying and then you'll run to mom. He wouldn't stop, of course, so I would have to follow through, being a boy of principle). Asahel was Joab's brother, by the way, and Joab was David's bodyguard. Joab wasn't the forgiving type, it turns out, and he made sure to revenge-kill Abner in a private chamber, luring him in by suggesting he wanted a private conversation with him (2 Sam 3).

When it comes to the New Testament and the many characters there in, besides Jesus, I find that I am drawn to Peter. When you look at his life in the gospels and in Acts, you see how interesting his life was as he followed Christ. Certainly his spiritual life was not linear, in that it was always about improving or not making mistakes; rather it seemed to go in fits and starts, great in one moment, and in the next, not so much. Yet the events of his life, with Christ and then after, seem so incredible even now. From that first meeting with Jesus when he healed his mother in law (Lk 4:38), to hearing that rooster crow 3 times, to wanting to go fishing when he couldn't figure things out after the resurrection, to those restoring, life-changing words from Jesus, to that first church meeting where Ananias and Saphira died, to visions of clean and unclean foods, Peter didn't have it dull. And, after all those experiences, he managed to write a couple of books, and they continue to ring true even in our current age.

## 2 PETER'S CONTEXT

And so we come to his first letter, and there are a few things we should note by way of context.

First, this section from his letter is a very appropriate passage given that we have just come through Easter. Second, Peter understands what it means to follow Christ in an adversarial environment. The time of his writing was about 60AD, and so the believers, especially in Rome, were nearing the time of formal persecution by Nero, though not yet having been blamed for the fires of Rome. Additionally, Peter was writing from Rome, a place he called Babylon at the close of this letter, to signify it as the power centre of a world hostile to God's people (NLT notes, p. 2131). Peter was writing to people who were wanting to follow Christ in an environment that wasn't exactly friendly to the idea.

### VERSES 1-3

As we look at our first three verses, we should make note of Peter's use of language. First, Peter introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. That may not seem significant, but at the outset we see that Peter is describing himself with humility but also, in some sense, with authority. Peter knows that Jesus is Lord, and that it is Jesus who sends him and who is behind his message. And so as he writes the letter, he also carries authority as one who has been with Jesus (Harink, p. 27). His letter contains apostolic authority, and it's important for his readers to understand this, and especially for the church in its infancy stages. I know I think about this often; my faith relies often on the bearing witness of those who were with Jesus during the events around his earthly ministry. And I often find myself giving thanks to God that they were able to record those events so that we might believe as well, but also to be encouraged in our faith.

Second, and still in verse 1, you can see that Peter uses language such as “God’s elect” and “exiles” as he describes his readers. This language ought to alert us to the fact that he is relying on the history of the Israelites as he writes, but also applying those experiences to his readers. When Peter talks about God’s elect, some might have the compulsion to think in terms of theological categories, as in Peter sure sounds like a Calvinist here. It’s a shame that Peter had no idea who Jean Calvin was, and so perhaps it’s better to see this as who the ultimate agent is in terms of who was responsible for the development of the people of God. God is the one who did the electing, turns out, and this ought to remind us of how God chose the people of Israel as well. You may recall God’s dealing with the people of Israel, reminding them in Deuteronomy 7:6-8 that they were a holy people, but it had nothing to do with them, really. It was all about God choosing them and keeping his promises to them, and that story informs the continued story of the people of God after Jesus’s resurrection (Harink, p. 28).

But Peter isn’t done there. He also quickly uses the term “exile” in verse 1 to describe the people of God, and here we see that he was originally writing to believers scattered in present day Turkey. The notion of exile was also an important use of language for Peter, used to summon another important story from the history of the people of Israel. They too had been in exile, and the Babylonian exile would have been in mind here. But as such, when the people were in exile, they were to remain God’s people. In other words, the dominant culture was not to be the story for the people of God in their context. Jeremiah reminds us of how exiles were to live when the people of God were uprooted from their land, and Moses reminded the Hebrew people to remain distinct no matter if they were in Egyptian territory or Canaanite territory. Their job was always to be the people of God, trusting in

God no matter their circumstances, no matter the dominant culture they found themselves in. Peter reiterates that messaging for the post-resurrection community of believers.

## **VERSES 3-5**

We come now to the next section of our passage, verses 3-12, and if I were to use one phrase to describe this section, it's "How Great our Salvation." This broader section has smaller chunks within it, and so I'd like for us to consider verse 3-5 first. Peter goes on in the rest of the book to write about things like holiness, bearing witness with gentleness and respect, and so forth, but he does so after laying this theological groundwork. Starting again with God as we zone in on verses 3-5, Peter writes that praise ought to be directed towards God the Father of Jesus Christ. The literal language goes like this: blessed be the God and Father of the Lord of us, Jesus Christ. We often think and hope that God will bless us, but here God is the one who ought to be blessed, and we need to understand here that blessing can be another word for praising or extolling someone (NIDNTT, vol 1., p. 212). The reason God ought to be blessed is because he has provided new birth, also known as regeneration. This means believers have their status changed before God and their lifestyle before others (McKnight loc 1239 Kindle). Why has God done that? It seems it's simply because of his mercy. When you get into the weeds of it, God's mercy is rooted in things like undeserved love for the other, and promises kept, and so forth (Logos, Mercy). God is the author of all that goodness, at his own choosing, and Peter instructs his reader to ascribe praise to God as a result.

You'll note a second phrase of importance in verse 3, describing more of what is entailed in this new birth, this regeneration. When you experience this new birth, you are born into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. For me, at least, this

speaks to the immediate benefit of new birth. When we are reborn, regenerated, we are gifted a hope. To put it subversively, we get a sniff that God has a plan for the present (McKnight, loc 1248 1 Peter Kindle) and the future, and we can trust Him with that, and celebrate it.

Speaking of the future, when we participate in this new birth we are also born into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This language is reminiscent of what Paul wrote about at the beginning of Romans 8. Because we become God's children, we receive an inheritance in full; this is again a benefit of salvation. When we look at the Scriptures more broadly, we understand that salvation has various aspects to it; past, present and future. These aspects are also known as regeneration, justification, adoption, sanctification, and glorification, and these are incredible gifts given to us as we respond in faith to Jesus' resurrection. Faith, importantly, is a condition that God sets for his people as they respond to his gift of salvation and all that encompasses (McKnight, 1258).

### **VERSES 6-7 Hardships Ahead**

Of course, as we see in verses 6-7, we see that salvation is not a free pass, where once saved one no longer has to endure hardship or trial. No, in spite of the joy that salvation brings, suffering grief in all kinds of trials are to be expected. Note that Peter suggests that our joy ought be part of the present as we reflect on salvation; we do not have to keep all our joy pent up till that final day, when we experience salvation in full. Rather, our salvation is impetus for joy even today. And in spite of all that good news, we should not be surprised when things are tough, especially because we follow Christ. One commentator suggests that "the suffering and trials of which Peter writes are those that come upon

believers when our lives are being morally, socially, and politically conformed to the way of Jesus Christ, conformity that may put us at odds with the prevailing moral, social, and political realities of the wider world.” (Harink, p. 48). So in addition to the uncontrollability of life, the grief, separation, and pain we all experience as humans, Christians can expect a whole new level of suffering as well.

Now why would that be, do you think? Well, Peter suggests that the suffering of such trials should be interpreted by Christ’s followers as a test of faith, so that the end result might be praise, glory and honor. One author puts it this way: “God will set his stamp of approval on faith that has been tested and show this when Christ is revealed. Then the believer will openly share in the praise, glory and honor of God (Blum, p. 221). These sorts of values are not shared by everyone in society, of course, yet Peter reminds his readers that we ought to strive for a faith that remains after trial. Some of the rewards of such a faith will be revealed when Jesus returns. (Alison’s testimony at Easter)

### **VERSES 8-9**

In the meantime and in the present, I think Peter is expressing a fair amount of fondness to those who have not experienced Christ like he has. Even though they have not seen Christ, they love him, and Peter can see that. Additionally, the believers are filled with joy because they are receiving the goal of faith, the salvation of their souls. Salvation is a process, and sometimes it seems like a long process, but sometimes we need to look to the future and the goal of salvation to help us carry on. (Like cultivating a field when you’re a kid, etc.)

### **VERSES 10-12**

Peter continues to describe how great and magnificent salvation is by bringing in a couple of extra witnesses, so to speak. Verses 10-11 speak about the prophets who spoke of this grace that was to come to the believers. They did not know when it would come, but they knew in broad strokes that God would keep His promises and salvation would continue to manifest itself in a Messiah who would experience suffering and glorification. Peter's point, of course, is that his readers were the first amongst the privileged ones to see that Jesus was this Messiah. We too are privileged to understand this today, but the first believers after the resurrection were especially so.

Peter adds to this privilege of salvation by speaking of the angels. I'm no expert on angels, but depending on which translation you use, clearly the angels were also watching with anticipation as salvation played out more fully. Angels, as it turns out, have an intense interest in human salvation, witnessing the Lord's work. I entitled this sermon as "angels on the edge of their seats" and I think this is fairly accurate. The literal translation here is that of angels longing to look into this salvation. The imagery behind this is that they shift their position so as to see something better, more clearly (BGD, parakuptw, p. 619). In other words, salvation is a really, really big deal, with other worldly implications.

## **IMPLICATION 1**

As I bring this sermon to its close, I do trust the Spirit has been prompting you as you reflect on it. Here are a few implications that have been reiterated to me as we have visited this text.

First, I trust that we have been reminded of just how big a deal salvation actually is. Perhaps you've been a Christian for a long time, and you kind of take your faith for granted.

Perhaps you see your salvation as nice to have when things are tough, but not necessarily

vital for all of life. Or perhaps you have been mainly concerned about a certain aspect of your salvation. You think mainly of the return of Christ, and have essentially put all your eggs in that basket. Easter reminds us of a certain emphasis around salvation, that is to be sure, but Peter reminds us that the expansiveness of salvation includes a long history, is pertinent now, and will come in full in the future, and it's bigger than us, even cosmically. It is an incredible privilege to experience salvation, a privilege that the prophets foretold and one which the angels shift in their seats so as to get a better view. Peter reminds us that salvation is a profound gift, made possible by Jesus' resurrection.

### **IMPLICATION 2: GOD FINGERPRINTS ARE ALL OVER THIS SALVATION**

Second, Peter's writings remind us once again that God has taken the initiative to make salvation possible. Peter has a nice way of tying the narrative of the Old Testament into the new by using vocabulary that would have been familiar to those who knew the story of the people of Israel. Exile, sojourner, elect, these kinds of words bind the narratives of pre-resurrection people to post-resurrection people. And an important theme is reiterated in our passage: God is the one, who, in his mercy, has authored this. All glory to Him.

### **IMPLICATION 3: THE DOMINANT CULTURE IS NOT FOR US**

Third, let's allow the text to remind us that the dominant culture is not for us. We echo what those first believers in Rome would have said; Jesus is Lord, not Caesar. This will bring it's own trouble, let's not be naïve. The unbelieving world will have something to say, and it won't be kind. This isn't about getting a flat tire on your way to church, folks. It's about obeying Jesus in the midst of a secular culture. This will require strength, and it is a

test of the genuineness of our faith; may we embrace the test as it leads to honor and praise of Jesus Christ.

#### **IMPLICATION 4 PERHAPS WE NEED TO PRAY FOR RESTORATION OF JOY**

Finally, and perhaps oddly given my introduction, as I was writing and reflecting on our time today, I remembered the words of David from Psalm 51. I remember them from a Keith Green song, which is a bit telling, but here is the quote from verse 12. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. I think David reminds us that we can in fact lose sight of the privilege and preciousness of salvation. We sometimes fail to see the value of the gift, perhaps because the shine fades away over time. Or perhaps practically, we don't value salvation in our relationships or in our ministries, and we lean more towards social expressions of help. That's good too, don't get me wrong, but we dare not lose sight of the significance of salvation. And, I hope, we truly rejoice knowing how good God is to us for providing us with it. Amen.