

## REASONS TO REJOICE

TEXT: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Words for kids:

PHBF 1.16.2011

Scr. Reading: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Series: 1 Peter

### SOS Verse:

**1 Peter 1:3-4** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,<sup>4</sup> to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,*

In 1952, a 32-year-old woman named Florence Chadwick stepped into the waters of the Pacific Ocean off Catalina Island, intending to swim to the shore of mainland California, 26 miles away. She'd already been the first woman to swim the 20+ miles of the English Channel both ways. She was flanked by small boats that watched for sharks and were prepared to help her if she got hurt or grew tired. After about 15 hours a thick fog set in. She began to doubt her ability and she told her mother, who was in one of the boats, that she didn't think she could make it. Her mother reassured her that she was close and she could make it. But finally, physically and emotionally exhausted, she just stopped swimming and was pulled out. Within just a few minutes, the boat reached the shore, revealing that she had swum over 25 miles and the point she quit swimming, the coast was less than 1 mile away. At a news conference the next day she said, "I do not want to make excuses for myself... But I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it." Two months later, she tried again... and she did.

This opening section of 1 Peter help all of us to see the shore, especially in times when the fog of distraction or suffering has settled over our life like a shroud. Peter wants to make sure that, come what may, we make it, as verse 9 indicates: "obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." He wants all his readers to reach the shore. But there's more. Peter isn't content just to help us make it; he wants us to experience joy in the journey. He wants our lives filled with praise (v 3), rejoicing (v 6), and "joy inexpressible and filled with glory" (v 8). Peter can't make the journey any shorter or the coastline any closer. But he can give us the perspective we need to make sure, by God's grace, that we get there.

What we're going to find is that *Peter has his eyes on two important days: the day of our atonement and the day of our accounting. The day of Jesus' death on the cross and the day of our appearance before God.* An alpha point and an omega point. Those two endpoints give us nine reasons for joy which we can group under three headings:

- Pondering our past,
- Experiencing our present, and
- Anticipating our future.

### PONDERING THE PAST

**1 Peter 1:3** *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

1. God had mercy on you. (3b)

God's mercy is His goodness expressed toward those in distress.

**Psalms 57:1** *TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO DO NOT DESTROY. A MIKTAM OF DAVID, WHEN HE FLED FROM SAUL, IN THE CAVE. Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by.*

God is always good, as a quality He possesses in Himself. But He does not always *act* in mercy. Sometimes He acts in judgment. The first mention of mercy in the Bible is found in the story of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, where the Scripture says: "[Lot] lingered. So the men seized him and his wife and his two daughters by the hand, the LORD being merciful to him, and they brought him out and set him outside the city" (Gen 19:16). The city deserved judgment, and they received it. But in his misery and distress, Lot received mercy.

Friends, every single day you live on God's mercy. Every day you live, God is treating you better than you deserve. The Scriptures tell us that what we deserve is God's wrath upon us for our sins, described in Jesus words as "eternal punishment" and "outer darkness where there will be

weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Mt 25:46,30). That is what we deserve, but instead God showers His mercies on us all.

But Peter isn’t just talking about God’s mercy to all people in general. He’s focused on God’s mercy of salvation: “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again...”

Last week we examined vv 1-2, where Peter directs our attention to God’s foreknowledge as the basis for our salvation. Now Peter names a second aspect of God’s character that functions in that role: His mercy. The ultimate reason and the only ultimate reason the Bible gives for our salvation is this: God has mercy on whom He has mercy. Why did He save you, if you are a Christian? Because you initiated His mercy by calling on Him for help? No. Because in the mysterious workings of His own heart, He chose you for mercy. The initiative came from Him, which is even more clear in the next phrase:

2. He caused you to be born again. (3c)

The NIV has “he has given us new birth,” but that’s not quite strong enough. He caused you to be born again. He didn’t merely allow you or invite you. In mysterious mercy, He caused you.

As Peter writes about being born again, you can imagine him rocking back in his chair and reflecting for a moment on Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus 30 years earlier. “You must be born again,” Jesus said, and Nicodemus didn’t get it. But Peter understands it, and so must we. There couldn’t be a more far-reaching concept than a new birth. Birth imparts to us our ethnic identity, citizenship, socioeconomic class, and even the potential and limitations for our mental and physical development. A “new birth” recreates all of that for Christians, giving us a new identity, new citizenship, new class, new family, new character, and new future. God is now our Father, and heaven is our home. In mercy, God caused you to be born again. Such was your past. Now let’s look at your present.

## EXPERIENCING THE PRESENT

1. You have a living hope through the resurrection. (3d)

By her own testimony, hopelessness is what ended Florence Chadwick’s swim prematurely. The destination appeared nowhere in sight, and she gave up in despair. But the Christian experience can and should be different. Christians have reason to hope.

“Hope” in the Scriptures is not wishfulness, like “I hope we have spaghetti for dinner” or “I hope we have a snow day again this week.” Hope is confident expectation. That’s what Peter means by the phrase “living hope.” Our hope is alive and real. It’s not a dead hope based on futility and emptiness. Our hope lives because the ground of our hope Himself is ever-living: “born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

For the theologically minded (which includes all of you, I hope wishfully but not confidently), notice that hope results from being born again, not the other way around. The sequence matters: God begets and we hope, not we hope in God and He thus begets.

2. You own an eternal inheritance. (4)

**1 Peter 1:4** *...to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,*

Yes, we are displaced people. Earth is not home. Verse 1 calls us exiles. It means our best possessions are not of this age or earth. Material prosperity, good health, religious freedom, even our own physical family are not the main rewards of faith in Jesus. But we do have a lasting possession there, in our eternal home. Peter describes it as “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.”

Each of these three drives home the point that this inheritance will last forever. Our eternal treasure is untouched by death (imperishable), unstained by evil (undefiled), and unimpaired by time (unfading). To put it positively, it is eternal, pure, and beautiful. God’s people in the Old Testament expected and finally received an inheritance in the Promised Land. But death, evil, and the relentless passing of time took it all away. Not ever going to happen to the new people of God. And just to make

sure we don't doubt, Peter throws in this phrase: "kept in heaven for you." The word "kept" comes from a root word with a military application. It means "to guard," and it's used, for example, of the men positioned outside Jesus' tomb. They were guarding God. In our text, God is guarding our inheritance.

But not just our inheritance. He guards us, too:

### 3. God is guarding you. (5)

**1 Peter 1:5** *who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*

The inheritance is being kept safe now, but so are the heirs, who are guarded by God Himself while on their journey home. After describing our awesome inheritance, Peter assures us that we will certainly get it.

How does He guard us? Not by shielding us from harm or temptation or suffering. Rather, God's power energizes and sustains our faith: "by God's power are being guarded through faith." If you wish to know if God is guarding you, examine your life for faith. If it's there, He's guarding you by sustaining your faith. God sustains and our faith endures.

Trials are an implicit challenge to our faith. Persecution tempts us to renounce or submerge our faith so its inconspicuous. But even forms of suffering that fall outside the category of persecution from others—experiences like loss, grief, disability, or a prolonged struggle—these, too, tempt us to renounce our faith, particularly our belief that God is still good.

This simple truth—God is good—is utterly indispensable for our faith. Yet this is the truth we are quickest to doubt and the point where our faith is most vulnerable to attack. When the disciples were afraid the storm was going to swamp their little boat, their complaint to Jesus was not "Lord, aren't you *able* to help us?" Nor "Jesus, don't you *know* we're in trouble?" Instead, they cried out: "Teacher, do you not *care* that we are perishing?" (Mk 4:38) They doubted His heart.

Friends, this is a key way we should keep the gospel functioning every single day. When you are tempted to doubt God's goodness to you, come back to the cross. Only the gospel assures us that God loves us enough to abandon His own Son for us. The gospel is the good news that God doesn't crush His enemies; He saves them!

Notice that salvation isn't just something that happened to you in the past. Your salvation is still awaiting full completion in the future. Peter says God is guarded us through faith "for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Though Jesus' redemptive work is complete, the salvation He grants believers in the present is still awaiting completion in the future.

### 4. Your trials are short-lived and purposeful. (6)

**1 Peter 1:6** *In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, as was necessary, you have been grieved by various trials...*

Notice the two verbs: "you rejoice" and "you have been grieved." The rejoicing is in the very context of grief. It's significant to me that Peter doesn't say these trials have "tried" or "troubled" his readers – verb choices which would have created less of a contrast with "rejoice." He explicitly mixes or makes coexistent grief and joy. "You rejoice... though you have been grieved." Suffering is painful or else it would not be called suffering. Our perspective doesn't make the hurt go away, even if we can see the shore.

What our perspective does is help us rejoice even when we are grieved. How is this possible? Two reminders Peter gives in verse 6.

First, almost in passing he notes that the hurt won't last forever: "for a little while." Our present pain is only the sting of the needle which gives way to better health in the long run. A whole lifetime of suffering will seem brief when compared to eternity.

Second, our trials serve a purpose. They are not random or arbitrary. Notice the phrase: "if necessary." Necessary by whose agenda? Not mine! But it is necessary by God's agenda. To say that our trial is

necessary it to say that God is working out His plan even in our anguish. We never suffer without cause.

So Peter has reminded us of our past, and he's drawn our attention to the unseen blessings of our present. Throughout these verses he's alluded to our future, but now he focuses there in earnest.

## ANTICIPATING THE FUTURE

1. Your proven faith will bring glory. (7)

What is God's purpose in our suffering?

**1 Peter 1:7** *so that the tested genuineness of your faith- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Here is God's design in our suffering – refined, proven faith. Suffering shows whether our claim to trust Jesus is authentic. It's easy to trust Jesus when all is well. But trials have a way of knocking out the props from under our faith. ILL: "the acid test" – nitric acid to test gold.

Suffering shows us whether our faith is real, whether we really do trust Jesus to be enough for us. Is it worth it? Is the price of pain worth the proof that our faith is real? Peter says it is: "your faith [is] more precious than gold."

More precious to whom? To God. He delights in being trusted. Our faith is precious to Him. Our term "precious metal" is unknown in the heart of God. His category is "precious trust."

And when He sees it, He draws attention to it. He honors the people who honor Him with their trust. Notice the rest of the verse: "your faith... may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Is this praise and glory and honor for God or for us? The context – our heavenly reward – would imply that this is God's praise of us. If faith is

more precious to God than gold, surely He will remark on it when He sees it.

**Zephaniah 3:17** *The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.*

2. Someday you'll see the Savior whom you love and trust. (v 8)

Do you get the impression that thinking about heaven should be a normal part of the Christian life? Earlier Peter talked of rejoicing in the thought of our heavenly inheritance (v 6). Here, the intensity of our joy is significantly heightened – joy beyond the power of words to express:

**1 Peter 1:8** *Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,*

What more could one desire from life than joy and love? These both are the experience of the believer who knows Christ in his suffering.

3. You will be finally saved. (v 9)

Notice again, in Peter's thinking, only when we claim our final inheritance and enter into paradise are we indeed saved. Imaging it now gives us the experience of heaven before heaven: "joy inexpressible and filled with glory."

APPL:

- Praise God for these benefits. This is how the passage begins: "Blessed be God!"
- Talk to yourself rather than listen to yourself. Rehearse these realities over and over.

**[Lord's Supper]**

**[Prayer Focus: open floor for requests from congregation]**

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