

Born Again by the True Grace of the Gospel

1 Peter 1:3-5

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Friends, there are circumstances in our lives that can simply break our hearts, aren't there? Sometimes these circumstances are so dark that they can traumatize us. We can become jaded, scarred, and even have post-traumatic syndrome. I enjoy watching war documentaries that are done really well. I enjoy hearing the stories from the men and women who were in the fight. Some of their stories are amazing and even 30, 40, and 50 years later, they tell their stories with obvious pain and tears.

Late Thursday night I could not sleep so I was watching WW II in HD. A man in his 80's was telling how his boat was sunk off the coast of the Philippines. He said the survivors were hanging onto the life raft, and then all the sudden sharks were everywhere. He said one man was bitten, and they had to push him away from the group in order to protect the rest of the men. Then he said he was hanging on the raft when all of a sudden, he felt something pressing on his leg. He looked down, and it was a huge tiger shark. He said, "*I began to pray. Oh Lord, please make this thing go away. Do something! Help me! Save me!*" Then he opened his eyes, and it was gone. After days of drifting in the open sea, one man had drunk so much saltwater that he began to hallucinate. He said he began to see his mother and talk to her. He called out to her and then swam away from the group and told them he was going to see his mom. When they tried to stop him, he pulled his knife and threatened to kill them. Then he just sank below the waves. Finally, a small frigate came upon them, but they would not pick them up until they could verify they were truly American. All the time he told this story, his hands were jittery, and his eyes were filled with tears. You could hear the distress in his voice as he told his fifty-year-old experience. He didn't tell his sons what had happened to him until after thirty-one years had passed.

When I think of experiences like that, I think of the line from *The Lord of the Rings*. At the end of the book, Frodo said to Samwise Gamgee when they were looking back over their experience, "*How do you pick up the threads of an old life? How do you go on, when in your heart, you begin to understand...there is no going back? There are some things that time cannot mend. Some hurts that go too deep that have taken hold.*"¹ As I said at the beginning, there are some circumstances in our lives that can simply break our hearts. There are some circumstances in life that simply leave us traumatized. For example, to be deserted, abandoned, neglected, or betrayed by a spouse, family member, or friend is painful. The death of a loved one or the long-term illness of a loved one can be overwhelming. The loss of dreams, the loss of the ability to work, or the loss of the ability to provide for others can be devastating. Sometimes guilt and regret over the pain that we have caused others, and perhaps the sin we have committed against others, leaves us wallowing in the Swamp of Despondency and self-pity. Right now, perhaps during the pandemic, the fear of isolation is like a dark cloud hanging over your head. Perhaps the shadow of fear of contamination of yourself or to others leaves you paralyzed and confused as to how to live your life.

I agree with what Tolkien said through Frodo; there *are some hurts that go too deep, some that even time cannot mend*. However, we should not desire to pick up the threads of an old life. Instead, we should

¹ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/frodo-baggins>

take in what is learned from the suffering and then let the Lord Jesus Christ make something new. Ecclesiastes 7:2 reminds us:

*It is better to go to the house of mourning
than to go to the house of feasting,
for this is the end of all mankind,
and the living will lay it to heart.*

You might be asking: *Why is Pastor Michael telling us of all these hard things as he begins to work through 1 Peter 1:3-5?* These verses are not about suffering. In reality, they are about suffering. For while Peter does not begin with the suffering of the church, he knew that was what was going on in their lives.

Peter laid a doctrinal foundation that not only saw the church through dark days but continues to see us through dark days. Peter didn't begin with suffering. He began his letter to the churches with God.

Here is what I want you to ask yourself on the front-end of this book. What is it that is going to keep me going as I stand on the banks of the river called Suffering, and I have yet to wade into its water? As a matter of fact, later in his letter, Peter will say to us, *do not be surprised when the fiery trial comes upon us and our enemy, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*

Our goal in suffering is to not respond with surprise but with our feet firmly planted on the Rock of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that takes Rock solid theology from God's word in order to do that. Standing firm in suffering is not some abstract mystical experience. Instead, it is supernatural and begins with *the rock-solid theology of God's foreknowledge, our election, in vv. 1-2 and now our new birth in vv. 3-5 which will enable us to respond to suffering with doxology.* As R. C. Sproul often said, "*All sound theology begins and ends with doxology.*"²

We are going to walk through vv. 3-5, and there are five truths I want us to see in this passage that will lead us to praise and worship of God the Father.

I. Our New Birth results in praise of God the Father (v. 3a)

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

Verses 3-12 are one single sentence in the original Greek language. The main clause of this one sentence is the very first sentence we see in English, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!"* Everything in these verses flows out of this doxological sentence.

Remember, Peter had just written, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!"* He had just celebrated God's foreknowledge and election of God's exiled people, and what we need to realize is that God's foreknowledge, election, and predestination of His people is not some general election of nameless faces of people but of specific persons. Also, *divine foreknowledge* is not merely *divine knowing* but God's *divine plan to act in power on behalf of His chosen people.* Peter made it clear that the elect exiles were under God's sovereign control, and all things were working according to His sovereign plan.

So, Peter declares at the very beginning of his letter, *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!"* Peter's blessing is very close to the *Eighteen Blessings* that were recited three times a day in the Jewish synagogue. Those blessings looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. Now Peter sees that blessing fulfilled in the Lord Jesus, and he overflows in doxology. He blesses and praises God, our Father, for His saving work of Jesus and the miracle sinners being born again.

² R.C. Sproul, *1-2 Peter*, p. 9; R.C. Sproul said this often when he taught. When he said it he was actually quoting his old theology professor G.C. Berkouwer who taught him at the Free University of Amsterdam.

One of the beautiful characteristics of vv. 3-5 is how it looks at how God accomplished our salvation past, present, and future. This blessing looks backward and sets its gaze squarely on God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It praises Him for what God has done in Christ.

A good question to ask yourself here is: Am I stunned that God in His foreknowledge, chose me and saved me from my sin and eternity in Hell? Are you stunned that you are saved? Honestly, it is a miracle that God saved any sinner. Or, on the other hand, perhaps there is a little part of you that believes, *“I deserved to be chosen to be saved. I would have chosen Jesus. I would have repented of my sin and placed my faith in Jesus anyway?”* If you think that you had some part in your salvation, then you are a *glory thief*. You are robbing God of the glory of the stunning salvation He has worked through the Lord Jesus Christ. If this is you, then perhaps working through these verses will help you see the glory of God in your salvation. Perhaps then you will repent of your sin of believing you had anything to do with your salvation.

II. Our New Birth is the work of God the Father (v. 3b)

“According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again.”

If you had any question about your part in your salvation, v. 3b should settle that question. It says *He (God the Father) caused you to be born again*. He did it. Not you.

You may ask, *“Well, what about my faith in Jesus?”* Good question. What does Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us about faith in Jesus? It is a gift of grace. *Where does the gift of grace come from so that we may believe in Jesus?* Grace only comes from God. Grace is not a work. If you earned grace, then it is not grace. In other words, your ability to believe in Jesus as your Lord and Savior was given to you from God the Father. So, even your faith is not your own doing. It is a gift of God. What this means is that to be born again is only caused by God. In John 3, Jesus told Nicodemus that to be born again is like the birth of a baby. It is a spiritual birth, but it only comes from God, just like physical birth is an act of God. To be born again is a miracle of God that only God can do. It is the resurrection of a dead spiritual heart to new life. It is indeed new birth.

Here are two more important truths to raise your affections to God. First, Christianity is different than every religion in the world because Christianity is not about your search for God and you finding Him. Christianity is not about you working your way upward toward God. This is not Christianity.

Christianity is God coming down to us! It is God making Himself known to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, saving us, and then we enjoy fellowship with Him. At the very heart of Christianity is a glorious God who revealed Himself to sinners in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then through Christ’s death and resurrection, He caused us to be born again and then we have faith in Jesus.

Second, and you need to keep your mind armed with this truth: Just because we are born human does not mean we are born children of God.

It is popular to believe that we are all God’s children. I understand what people mean by that. They mean we are all created in God’s image, but that does not make us all God’s children. We are not born God’s children. We are born children of wrath, children of the devil, separated from God by our sin and destined for Hell for all eternity. We are born dead in our sin and by our lives, loving the sin in which we live.

We are not God’s children until we are born again by the Holy Spirit of God. We will not place our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ until we have been born again. Friends, you must be born again.

The story is told of the 19th-century pastor Charles Spurgeon’s preaching. Spurgeon consistently preached that people must be born again. After an evening service, an elderly lady, who was a regular at

Metropolitan Baptist Church, asked him why are you always telling us we must be born again. To which Spurgeon replied, "*My dear lady, it is because you must be born again.*"

Friends God must cause you to be born again! That is your only hope of salvation. You must be born again. If you are not born again, and you are seeking God, then you are like a man trying to climb a rope made of mist to heaven. It is not possible.

So, what do you do if you see you need Jesus and you want to be born again? Call on the name of the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved. Only the elect will call on the name of the Lord. Only the elect will have any desire to call on the name of the Lord. Only the elect desire to be saved, so if you want to be saved, the Holy Spirit is working in your life. Obey the gospel by believing on the name of the Lord Jesus and be saved.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, your salvation is all of God. God, the Father in *His great mercy*, acted on your heart first. Grace is God's unmerited kindness toward us as sinners who only deserve the wrath of God in Hell for all eternity. God's mercy, on the other hand, is God contemplating our misery and showing His kindness toward and saving us. It is His mercy that caused us to be born again. God's mercy is Jesus loving you before you love Him. God's mercy is the Holy Spirit breathing the life into your dead spiritual heart. It is God's mercy that took you out of the misery of your sin, adopted you into His family, and signed your adoption papers in Jesus' blood.

III. Our New Birth results in a Living Hope in God the Father (v. 3c)

"to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

With our new birth, God has given us hope and not just any kind of hope but a *living hope*.

Hope is not the crossing of the fingers where we hope the sun comes out, or we hope Iowa State wins. We often use the word *hope* to mean wish.

Biblical hope is not a wish. Biblical hope is the certain expectation that God will accomplish a future event.

But notice how Peter defined our hope. He said *we are born again to a living to hope*. Why not just say *hope*? Why say *living hope*?

He wants Christians to understand that their hope is the result of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is not a dead hope in a dead Savior but hope in a Living Savior who is at this moment alive. Neither is it hope in a vague past event but in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Let me give you a visual example. Protestants do not use crucifixes where we see Christ hanging on the cross. We have an empty cross because Jesus has risen from the dead and is alive! It is the Living Hope of Jesus that confronted Peter on the beach at the Sea of Galilee and restored him to ministry.

It is the Living Hope of Jesus that will sustain us when we are going through suffering. It is the Living Hope of Jesus that we need right now as we go through this pandemic. It is the Living Hope of Jesus that we need when persecution is bearing down on us. It is the Living Hope of Jesus that our brothers and sisters who are going through suffering in the world need when they are lined up and shot for their faith in Jesus. It is the Living Hope of Jesus that we need when we see our loved one on their death bed to sustain us at that time and the time after they die. It is the Living Hope of Jesus that we need when you are on your death bed. The Living Hope of Jesus is given to you when you are born again. Are you born again?

IV. Our New Birth gives us a Glorious Inheritance in God the Father (v. 4)

“... to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”

The Apostle Peter tells us that we are given an inheritance when we are born again to a living hope. He uses three words to describe our inheritance.

The first thing we need to understand is that the word *inheritance* is an Old Testament and Old Covenant word. It pointed to the inheritance of the Promise Land given to the Jewish people through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. Peter now defines God's people's *inheritance* in light of the New Covenant made through Jesus' death and resurrection.

The old inheritance of the Promise Land was temporary. The sin of the Jewish people defiled it, and it was taken away from them. The Promise Land was a shadow that faded away when the true Promised One came—Jesus. Jesus is our True Inheritance.

Peter describes our inheritance imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.

- *Imperishable* means “not able to be destroyed.”
- *Undefiled* means “no pollution or unpolluted.”
- *Unfading* means “not subject to decay.”

The fact is we really do not have adequate words to describe our inheritance in Jesus. We struggle to comprehend something that is *imperishable, undefiled, or unfading*. Everything on this planet *perishes, is defiled* to some degree, and eventually *decays*. We say certain foods are *non-perishable food*, but the fact is eventually, it will spoil. The terms used to describe our inheritance is in eternal categories.

Think about how limited we are in understanding these terms. How can the *finite* conceptualize the *infinite*? How can the *limited* understand the *limitless*? How can the *perishable* comprehend the *imperishable*? We cannot, but nevertheless, we grapple with these words hoping for a breakthrough.

Then it happens! Finally, there is One who is all of these things at the same time. *Jesus is the inheritance of your salvation, who is imperishable*. He cannot be destroyed, and because He cannot be destroyed, He is able to keep our salvation secure for us in Heaven. Jesus is the eternal Son of God, who is our salvation.

Jesus is your Inheritance, who is undefiled. Because Jesus is the sinless Son of God, the Holy One of Israel, and the very Holy God Himself, our salvation has been won through His perfect purity. Nothing can ever spoil and corrupt our salvation. You may believe you have gone too far, or your sin is too bad, but the good news is—Jesus keeps you safe for Heaven. The inheritance of your salvation is undefiled not because of your efforts, but because Jesus keeps you.

Finally, the inheritance of your salvation in Jesus is unfading. Your inheritance in Jesus does not fade, nor will it wither up and die. Your inheritance is based on the eternal truth of God's word. The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever. In other words, God's promises never fade. They are eternal and as sure as the word of God itself. Your salvation is not based on you but on God, who caused you to be born again to a Living Hope. He keeps your salvation in Heaven by the power of His eternal promise, and that promise is in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The Holy Spirit adds one more clause to the end of this list of *infinity words*. So, keep in mind, the Spirit of God is not adding these words as a nice transition. He closes the description of the inheritance by reminding us *who keeps our salvation, where it is kept, and whose salvation it is*.

If it were not for God keeping our salvation in heaven for us, then we would be exposed to the endless dangers of this world to which we would eventually cave. We would be under certain attacks of Satan himself, and we would be defeated. But it is God who keeps our salvation in Heaven where only our faith can penetrate. The enemy cannot get to our salvation. It is hidden with Christ in God.

Finally, these last two words are precious. The inheritance of salvation He describes is—“*for you.*” There is nothing in this world that will give you more comfort when the trials and tribulations hit your life than to know that salvation is yours, and it is kept in heaven by the Father Himself—*for you.*

This is a present tense comfort that this truth ought to bring us. It is not *pie-in-the-sky* theology that says, “*Just endure it. Just grin and bear it. Be stoic and unfeeling because one day, you will be in heaven, and there will be comfort.*”

The fact is one day we will be in heaven, and every bad thing that has happened to us will come undone, and we will be free from it. However, there is comfort now in knowing that God holds us in His mighty hand.

We sing *He will hold me fast because it is true.* He does not hold us fast later—He holds us fast now! We have been born again to a Living Hope, and we are armed with the *living and active word of God that by our faith in Jesus Christ causes us to hold fast.*

V. Our New Birth means we are Guarded by God’s Power (v. 5)

“... who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

In v. 5, Peter drives one more gospel stake in the ground of our security so that we know that our Living Hope is an infinite, eternal Living Hope. He says, “*who (and when he says who, he means “you”) [you] are being guarded by God’s power.*” The word *guarded* is a military word that means *kept from escaping and protected from attacks.*

Now you may be thinking, “*I thought Peter was writing to a suffering church that was under attack? How can they be guarded and protected if they are suffering under attacks?*”

What Peter means by *guarded* does not mean we will not suffer or have anything bad happen to us. The greatest threat to us when we go through suffering is to fall into unbelief. It is to lose faith and when we lose faith we must keep believing in order to persevere to the end.

The next phrase in v. 5 says *God guards us through our faith.* What this means is that God keeps us believing and protects us from falling into unbelief. Doubts may arise as the wind, and the waves of trials and tribulations beat on our souls. We may question and doubt God’s plan or if He even cares, but He will not allow us to fall fully and into unbelief.

Like when Peter walked on water, and he saw the wind and the waves, and he began to sink and called out to Jesus to save him. Peter knew what it meant to be guarded by his little faith in a faithful God. Our faith will be rewarded as we persevere to the end or until Jesus returns.

When I think about growing old, and all the things that can happen to us health-wise, one of the things that concerns me is losing my mind to dementia or Alzheimer’s. Yet, I know the Lord Jesus is faithful, and I am often reminded of Steve Vardeman’s mother. Steve’s mother suffered from dementia, and she could not remember much toward the end of her life. However, Steve said she could sing, and she could always sing *Jesus Loves Me.*

Friends, the truth is even if you cannot utter a word or even if you are like my mother-in-law was and you are an angry person with Alzheimer's, it will be enough. You see, it is not the strength of your faith that saves you but the power of the One who keeps your faith.