

NEW BIRTH INTO A LIVING HOPE

1 Peter 1:3-2:3

Key verse 1:3

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”

Christ is risen! In this passage Apostle Peter praises the Lord for the new birth God has given us through Jesus’ resurrection. This new life we receive through union with Christ comes through faith in the gospel, and is marked by hope and joy. But just like a baby needs to grow in physical maturity, so each one of us needs to grow up in our salvation. The areas Peter teaches us to grow in are: faith, hope, love and holiness. We do so through obedience to our Father’s word, by which we are born again.

First, new birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1:3-1:12). Peter begins with praise to God: **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”** Peter had followed Jesus for three years. But when Jesus talked about his suffering and death, Peter rebuked him. He wanted to follow Jesus out of his human loyalty, even instigating violence at Jesus’ arrest. Yet no matter what he did, he could not prevent his Master’s arrest and trials. Bewildered and in fear of his own imprisonment and possible execution, Peter denied being Jesus’ disciple three times. Then he remembered Jesus’ words and wept bitterly. But here Peter powerfully praises God. What changed? He was born again. He met the Risen Christ. He received the Holy Spirit. He became a man of resurrection faith. At the time he wrote this letter, there were wanted posters all over the place with his name on them. This didn’t bother Peter, because he had a source of praise welling up in his heart. Do you want such powerful praise in your heart? What was the source of Peter’s praise?

Verse 3 again reads, **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”** God, in his great mercy, sent Jesus as our Savior. He prayed from the cross, **“Father, forgive them,**

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for they do not know what they are doing.” Our sins broke God’s laws, making us the objects of his wrath. Our rebellion broke God’s heart, making us his enemies. But in the cross of Jesus, he washed our sins away. He reconciled us to himself, forgiving our sins, atoning for us, and accomplishing our redemption. Three days later, God raised Jesus from the dead. This vindicated Jesus, defeated the power of death, and revealed the reality of eternal life for all who believe in him. But there is one more thing that his resurrection has accomplished for us: new birth. 2 Corinthians 5:17 explains the new birth this way: **“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”** This new creation is not a do over. Jesus explained being born again to Nicodemus like this: **“Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit”** (Jn 3:6). This new birth is into a spiritual life, with benefits.

The first is new birth into a living hope. Unlike hopes in this world that disappoint or are never achieved, living hope motivates, inspires and fuels faith in any circumstance. It is a hope that no matter what happens, how bad things get, or how blessed I am, this world is not the end of everything. That which is coming is greater than the sum total of all that has gone before. This hope is living, as it is maintained in our lives through the living Jesus by his Holy Spirit whom he has sent to us. He reminds us of all of Jesus’ words, and enables us to get up and try and again, find a new way, endure! Living hope is like rushing water, that always finds a way to run down the mountain into the rivers, or like the weeds in Chicago, that always find a way to poke through the streets and sidewalks. There is life in this hope.

We thought about Peter’s resurrection faith fueled by a living hope. The Bible is full of people of such faith, beginning with Abraham himself. When tested by God, Abraham was willing to offer his son Isaac as a sacrifice. Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead (Heb 11:17-19). His Son Isaac inherited this faith in the Lord who provides. His wife was barren, so Isaac prayed and she conceived twins. There was a famine in the land at that time, so he should leave to provide for his family. But God told him to stay. How would they survive? Isaac planted crops that same year, a year of famine, and reaped a hundredfold, because the LORD blessed him (Ge 26:12). His faith in God made him

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unstoppable. David was anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel. But Saul, the current king, hated him. He pursued him, and made David's life generally hell. David pretended to be a madman, an enemy of God's people, but he never gave up hope and faith in God. He struggled with this living hope, and became a man after God's own heart, and his kingdom a model of Christ's own. In Samuel there is a story of another man whose hope was in God: Jonathan. He was the heir apparent to Saul. Yet God chose David instead. Jonathan was not envious, but fully supported God's choosing and David. He lived by faith in God, no matter what. In our day as well, we see people living by resurrection faith because of a living hope. In 1986 the nuclear power plant in Chernobyl, northern Ukraine, had a catastrophic failure. M. Peter Kim, living with his wife Sarah in Kiev, decided to remain in the country to preach the gospel of Christ to Ukrainian people. They had to endure many kinds of suffering including miscarriages. Why do it, when many others left? They did so by faith, and with a living hope that circumvented all obstacles, and found a way. Likewise, in the Middle East, where our missionaries are so lonely, they engage with joy and spirit because of this living hope. We remember our brothers and sisters in Africa as well, engaging gospel ministry in spite of harrowing and daunting obstacles. What an awesome blessing of this new birth: To live by faith in a living hope!

The second thing he mentions is an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. When my sons were born, they entered into my family, and inherited my long Greek last name. When we are born into God's family we receive a true inheritance. With faith in this inheritance, we live differently. Jesus said in Luke 12:32, **“Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. ³³ Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will never fail, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. ³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

Look at verse 25. The main content of this inheritance is **“salvation.”** Weren't we already saved when we believed in Jesus? Yes, however, salvation is not a one-time event, but something more complex that God himself is working out, and will carry to completion by his great power that shields us from all of

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Satan's schemes and efforts. Left to ourselves, we are unable to save ourselves. But nothing is impossible with God, who works in each of us to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose (Php 2:12-13), our eternal salvation.

In all this we have much to rejoice about! However, there is something very important we should not misunderstand. It is easy to take this very idealistically and assume all our problems are solved, and it is clear sailing to salvation. But look at verse 6. **“In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”** Yes, this new birth is not immune to trials. Through the study of Mark's gospel a few years ago, I learned a valuable truth: problems are not the problem: they are the evidence that we are alive. If we overcome one kind of trial, there is another waiting. These trials are of all kinds: financial, career, health, relationships, internal grief, external grief, the list goes on. How are we to rejoice in this? Verse 7: **“These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”** Like Abraham, or Isaac, or David, or Jonathan, these trials are the opportunities to exercise resurrection faith in God and overcome. Recently a friend of mine had lost a job and then his father within a year. Yet as he looked back, he was not overcome by these trials, but rather was surprised to see how he endured them by faith in God. The genuineness of his faith was proven to him, and to all who were able to hear his testimony. Most of our trials that cause us suffering are unknown to others, how we endure and struggle. Yet they are not unknown to our Lord Jesus, who when he comes will reward our faith, and share his glory and honor with us in eternity.

Look at verses 8-9. **“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”** Every experience is an opportunity to live by faith and know Jesus better. Relationship with Jesus motivates, sustains and encourages us. As we endure hardships, or rest in his presence, cry out to him in prayer, we experience the reality of this new birth: an inexpressible and glorious

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joy. We are receiving now the end result of faith: salvation of our souls. Does this describe you? Are you filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy?

Sometimes my trials seem hard to bear, and I lose this joy, and my patience. From this passage, I learn to see the trial as the opportunity to practice my faith, and experience living hope in action. Another thing that steals the joy of salvation is unrepented sin in our lives. David experienced this after committing adultery and murder. Yet there is a simple solution when we are in David's place: repent before God, as David did in Psalm 51:10-12, **“Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹ Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.”** Other times, I may lose joy if I fixate on a temporary hope, or earthly inheritance.

Sometimes we lose our joy simply because we have fallen into a rut, lack understanding about our salvation, or have become cold-hearted and habitual about our faith. In verses 10-12, Peter compels us to once again consider how awesome a salvation we have received in this new birth: These prophets searched with the greatest care, and found out things about the Messiah that wouldn't even apply to them, but to us, and angels long to look into these things! Our salvation, this process that began with our new birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, which we participate in knowing him, sharing in his sufferings, with burning hope in his glories, is the greatest thing going on right now! Are you excited about that, or distracted by something else? This takes effort, a sober mind and intentionally setting our hope, but it is worth it!

Many years ago, a dear friend of mine was evangelized, and I began Bible study with him. He had dropped out of high school, and really struggled even to read the King James Bible his baptist church exclusively used. He asked me, “Why do I need to read this Bible? I believe in Jesus, isn't it enough to just love him?” I said to him, “Yes, of course. But remember when we were in high school, and we would write love letters to our girl friends? We would labor hard over them. And when we received one, we read it thoroughly. God has given you the greatest love letter, that expresses not only his feelings about you, but who you are, and more

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importantly who he is, and what he is planning, and how you are involved. Would you really just let that love letter sit on a shelf and gather dust?” The next week when I came to Bible study his huge TV was pushed into the corner and he had purchased hundreds of dollars of Bible study books. There was an open Bible in every room of his small apartment. Later he became a preacher.

Christ died and rose again to give you new birth. He wants you to be filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, on fire with love for him and his purpose in the world. Please don't remain in a habitual, dry and joyless life. Find out the problem, try something new, by faith. Evangelize a new campus, pray with someone you never prayed with before. Ask for help, fast in prayer, join a prayer vigil; do something to rekindle your passion, joy and Spirit this Easter, for the gift we have received in Christ is far too great to let pass us by. I hope none of us miss out on this great life we have been given in him.

Second, grow up in your salvation (1:13-2:3). We have received new birth: and what should newborn babies do? At the conference I saw Calvin Park attending his first conference. I remembered bringing Judah, a two month old baby, to MSU to attend the “Your Kingdom Come” international summer Bible conference 2004. He was so small and cute! But have you seen him now? Babies are precious, but babies should grow up, just like Jesus in Luke 2:52, “**And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.**” So too with our new birth; it is not a destination, but a glorious beginning. I only remember three things from my wedding day. Pastor Ron gave us 1 Peter 2:9, to be a holy family for a holy nation. My cheeks hurt from smiling so much at my beautiful bride. And I remember my fellowship singing, “He’s Changing Me.” God’s will is for us to be changed, transformed, to grow in the knowledge and grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is so many things to say about Christian growth. But from Peter’s letter I want to think about only one thing: We are to grow in holiness.

Verses 14-16 read, “**As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.** ¹⁵ **But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;** ¹⁶ **for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”** What is holiness? It is not rigid conformity to a endless list of moral rules.

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Rather, it is the other-ness, the divine nature of God himself. As we read what is written in the Bible, we find our Father to be patient, full of compassion, mighty in power, awesome in wisdom, and possessing an unassailable integrity. This is different from anything we find in the world. The embodiment of holiness is most clearly revealed in the person of Jesus Christ himself. How are we to grow in holiness? The starting point is to recognize we need to let go of our past life, and accept his will to live a holy life. How nice it would be if we only had holy desires! No human being is a one-desire creature, but a ball of conflicting desires. While we now have new desires to grow as spiritual children, there is still a strong temptation to conform to past desires, much like a muscle memory, or bad habit. This may be the biggest misunderstanding that all Christians have: Spiritual growth is a daily spiritual conflict to submit to God (Lk 9:23; Gal 5:16-17). It is a spiritual battle.

At first, this conflict may take us by surprise, and we may misunderstand that something is wrong. One young man was deeply moved after attending an Easter Bible conference. He experienced new birth! Shortly afterwards he came to me with a look on his face that indicated he had a very serious problem. He had been a bit of a playboy, but something changed in him he couldn't understand. He said, "You know, when I look at worldly women now, they look so ugly, and these homely church girls look so attractive. What is happening to me?" But it is part of the process of our salvation: being conformed no longer to the old way of life, but rather to Jesus.

Another thing that makes it difficult to live a holy life, besides our inner desires, is the world we live in. Look at verses 17. **"Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear."** We all want to belong; nobody wants to be lonely stranger, outcast, or foreigner. How are we to live out a holy life, in a world that resists justice and denies the truth? Peter reminds us we are calling on, or praying to, the judge of all the world, and he will judge rightly. In the end it is only his opinion that truly matters. His impartial judgment will not be swayed by the accuser's lies, nor the trends of culture. To live in reverent fear before him is to

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remember this truth every day. Let's call out to him, and accept that living a holy life is going to make us strangers and foreigners.

Sometimes as we try to grow in holiness there is a strong pressure to conform to the culture we were born into, our family, nationality, religious traditions, etc... that want to take the first priority of our heart and identity. Others are enslaved to genetic predisposition, generational curses, or some other seemingly insurmountable legacy or obligation that crushes us. In 1874 six members of the same family were imprisoned in New York. Investigating the origin of such a family legacy, they traced the family line to a lazy, godless troublemaker in 1720 who was known to have a low moral character. He married a woman much like himself. Of the 1200 known descendants of this tragic couple: 310 were homeless, 160 became prostitutes, 180 suffered from drug or alcohol abuse, 150 were criminals in prison, 7 of them murderers¹. A careful search found that not one of all his descendants had made any significant contribution to society. It may be a history of abuse, addiction, mental illness, poverty, or divorce that we may feel powerless to overcome. What does Peter say? **“For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors,¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”** When we believe in Jesus, we are redeemed from that empty way of life. We have no obligation to it any longer; we are born again, we belong to God's holy family, and he is a good Father, with perfect genetics, no addiction problems or abusive tendencies. We are free to follow Jesus, and grow to be holy, just like he is.

The last thing I learned about growing in holiness is love: **“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.²³ For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.”** True obedience to God's word doesn't make us self-righteous or burdensome, but those who truly love God and love one another. We find that just as we were rescued from the imminent destiny of grass and flowers through the word of God, we want others also to share in this salvation. Sure, we

¹ <https://www.ucg.org/the-good-news/can-you-break-the-cycle-of-generational-dysfunction>

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get on each other's nerves from time to time, as we are all growing at different stages and in different trials. But let's make a decision to grow in purity and holiness by loving one another obediently and sincerely. Let's read verses 2:1-3. **“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. ² Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, ³ now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”** Babies crave milk as a matter of life or death. The more they eat, the more they grow. We too have tasted the goodness of our Holy God, who has mercifully given us new birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Has God spoken to you in the midst of your trials? Do you long to have that inexpressible and glorious joy? Let's grow up in our salvation, embrace and courageously live out this new birth by resurrection faith, and grow in holiness, following our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.