

“Great Expectations.”

...1 Peter 1:1-12

by **Pastor Tim Dodson**
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1 Peter 1:1-12 *This letter is from Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. I am writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. 2 God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and his Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace and peace. 3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation, 4 and we have a priceless inheritance — an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. 5 And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. 6 So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while. 7 These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold — though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. 8 You love him even though you have never seen him. Though you do not see him now, you trust him; and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. 9 The reward for trusting him will be the salvation of your souls. 10 This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. 11 They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward. 12 They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen.*

The ascension of Christ was now some 30 years prior to this letter being written. That's a lot of water under the bridge...a lot of battles, a lot of miraculous events, and certainly a lot of spiritual blood and bruises. By this time the number of believers had begun to multiply in number, and grow in spirit. Faith communities *had been* and *were being* formed. Believers throughout Asia had begun to meet for prayer, worship, and fellowship. Churches had been embracing their salvation, and rejoicing in their faith. It was, in many respects, the best of times. It is the period that every family of believers holds dear in the history of their fellowship.

But it seems that in many ways those good days were gone now. The real trials and persecution had begun. The arduous and fearful days of trouble had arrived. The believers would now be seriously tested as to whether they had the metal to stand in the midst of the storm and lean in.

These were the wicked days of one Emperor Nero who had begun a brutal persecution of the faithful. He would be merely the first of many historical figures who would over the centuries exercise incredible violence against God's children. Often the goal was *and the result nearly* genocide. This wasn't an issue of someone calling someone a bad name or the ridiculing of Christianity at one's job. No, believers were being imprisoned, tortured, and put to death. Naturally, the Christians were wondering what was happening. Had God turned His back on them? Were they being punished? Were they out of God's faithful hands? Are we alone?

In *The Global War on Christians*, John Allen calls the worldwide persecution of Christians “the most dramatic religion story of the early twenty-first century, yet one that most people in the West have little idea is even happening.” The respected journalist describes this persecution as “the most compelling Christian narrative of the early twenty-first century.” According to him, “Christians today indisputably are the most persecuted religious body on the planet.”

According to the evangelical group Open Doors, one hundred million Christians face interrogation, arrest, torture, and/or death because of their religious convictions. Todd Johnson of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary documents that one hundred thousand Christians, eleven per hour, have been killed on average every year of the past decade. The humanitarian group Aid to the Church in Need describes this global assault on believers as “a human rights disaster of epic proportions.”

While 30 percent of the world’s population identifies as Christian, 80 percent of all acts of religious discrimination around the world are directed at Christians. One scholar estimates that 90 percent of all people killed on the basis of their religious beliefs are Christians.

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As always is the case, some folks to whom this letter was addressed would run, some would hide, and many would go “underground.” Some would simply quit the race. It was in the midst of this chaotic fog that the Lord’s faithful servant Peter wrote this letter. His words and the words of God Himself would be spoken to encourage and strengthen the believers: *“Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”* Deut 31:6

The Old King James says that Peter wrote this letter to the “strangers.” But this is not meant to insinuate that he didn’t know any of them, rather the word literally means “sojourner,” or “one just passing through.” He was reminding them that that through their difficulties, that this world was not their home. They were merely “passing through.” Certainly it is easy to get overwhelmed by the events around us if we forget that we aren’t going to be here too long. This world is not our home, and we are soon leaving here!

Peter reminds them that they are the elect...the truly chosen of God. They were the “elect” because of the “foreknowledge of God.” Our timeless God ultimately knows who is coming and who is not. Those who come or *are coming* are “God’s elect.” Peter unloads the weight of their standing before God off of their shoulders, and places it firmly on the back of our Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 3 in the NLT tells us... *“All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by his great mercy that we have been born again, because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation...”*

Despite the difficulties, God had not abandoned them. He had promised to *“never leave them, never forsake them.”* Any fear that God had somehow dumped them from His grace and love was sorely misplaced. It was impossible! Verses 4-5 tells us that those of us who are truly His have a *“priceless inheritance — an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by his power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see.”* “...until you receive this salvation,” is not speaking of our rebirth, our salvation experience, but rather that last “salvation” from this earth and all that it has bred.

There was no doubt not only the natural bodily fear via all of the events that were transpiring around them, but there was the secondary fear that maybe things were not right between them and God. Maybe they had unwittingly mucked up their stand with God? Maybe He had abandoned them? But Peter was assuring them that their standing was not even **by** them or their works. But rather their salvation was determined by HIM, and guaranteed by **His** promise. They were secure through the sacrifice of His son upon the cross. They had been positionally sanctified, “set apart” for God...held firm by the presence of the Holy Spirit. This was **His** work, **His** doing.

This “setting apart” was for our blessing of course, but moreover for the glory of God. It also held within that act an earthly purpose. For through that sanctification work, we are called to and empowered for obedience unto Him and the kingdom pursuits. Verse 2 points out that as a result of what was done for us; *“...you have obeyed him.”*

The sprinkling of the blood was for the confirmation of the covenant agreement between man and God, and to designate the setting apart, the sanctification of our lives and bodies, now holy for His exclusive use.

It is as if Peter has dragged these believers to a spiritual hillside, to look out over the horizon of the future. They are able to see behind them, from where they came, forward to the ultimate salvation gift of God, and even beyond to their eternal future with Him. He would remind them that they had been born again. Through such a miracle, they had been given a new life. They were no longer the people they were before. They were different. The apostle Paul tells us that we are “*no longer strangers and foreigners... (but) citizens along with all of God’s holy people... (literally) members of God’s family.*” (Eph 2:19) As members of His family we have access to the very power that brought Jesus back from the dead!

This inheritance as the adopted children of God is given to us absolutely and without any stipulations. We have before us in verse four, one of the strongest verses concerning the security of salvation: we have “*a priceless inheritance — an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay.*” Therefore our salvation...our very standing in Him is not up to us. It cannot be lost for the one who is truly reborn, who is truly part of His family. It’s done, it’s absolute. As Jesus spoke from the cross, “*it’s finished!*” Of course we would be well warned that it is imperative that we are indeed reborn in the first place, and there is redemption evidence manifested from our lives. But the believers were being reassured that God had not and will not drop them. No matter how bad things get, God is still God, is still their heavenly Father, and is still in control!

Verse 5 tells us that we are “kept by the power of God.” That word “kept” means to build a fortress around. Such a great inheritance is not secured by us or anything that we do! No, it is much too valuable to be left in our hands! Indeed, we on our own **would** muck it up! This promised gift is kept by God, and is waiting for our individual or corporate arrival to heaven.

Certainly this great truth would have had a great impact upon the one writing the letter! For Peter was one who tested the very veracity of this promise. He had some awesome failures, even his very famous denial of Christ! Yet he came to understand that he *had not* and *will not* cease to be one of God’s own children.

Though such often seems otherwise, the fact is most of our trials last but for a brief time, and they pass. Yet such not only *will* come, but in fact they *must*. For the testing of our faith, whether we will trust God through the difficult times **and** the good, is something that is a very real part of the development of our faith. And like it or not, sanctification is a **process**, and a lifelong one at that! Such trials are not designed for God to find out what we are made of, but for **us** to find out! Through them, we learn not to lean upon our own understanding, our own strength, and our own works. They are designed to draw us nearer to our redeemer, and to teach us what we need yet to change and where we yet need to grow. Because if you are breathing today, you are not done.

The fact is that in such times we either draw closer to the Lord, or we move away from Him. “Fire” has a way of causing movement! No one sits still when they are in a fire. Through it we find out exactly where we stand, and the limits of our faith. Are we “fair weather friends?” Or one who sticks closer than a brother? Trials take away false security and illusions of faith.

One of the proofs of the actuality of our salvation is that we believe in Him and we love Him, even though none of us have ever seen Him in the flesh. In this lies the greatest motivator of faith. Not fear, or some sense of prudent self-preservation, for those are short lived and too weak to keep us spiritually upright. No one will be a Christian solely out of fear. For when the sun comes up and the immediate danger is past, we will return to the life we led before.

For the reborn individual, through it all there remains a “*joy inexpressible and full of glory.*” That doesn’t mean I am always walking around giddy about the trials and difficulties I am enduring at a given moment. It means that despite such I am in His hands and will live on to be with Him. That there will come a day where there will be “no more tears and no more crying.” I am not “adrift” in Him. Such joy and peace will never make sense to the unredeemed. They have no understanding of such a position.

We **are** saved, we are **being** saved, and we **shall be** saved in this mysterious relationship with God. Ours is not merely a heavenly "life insurance" but in fact a daily present relationship with Christ and the blessings, favor, and acknowledgment of God, as well as eternal life. Such does not begin at some moment of physical death in the future, but is something we live **in** and live **through** here and now. That down-payment, the "earnest money" as Paul the apostle puts it, is but a morsel of the showers of blessings in the heavenly realm to come; but we begin to receive the believer's benefits immediately upon salvation. Such serves to remind us that He has indeed "got us firmly in His hands."

Peter reminds these believers that their faith should be stronger than any of the Old Testament prophets. For those prophets had only half the information that these believers had, and truly only half the information that we have today! Much of the picture has been filled in through the life and sacrifice of Christ. We are not here to just **learn** about the story, but to literally **be a part of** the story! We are not just *watching* the movie, we are *in the movie*.

The Old Testament prophets did not have what we have and yet they were still willing to be obedient and faithful! They were just standing on the *promises* of the Word. They bet their very lives and their very eternity on it! The prophets before these believers did not live to see all the things but Peter was reminding them that they *had* seen them! The gospel had been unfurled. The Messiah had come. Death had been triumphed over. The power of the Comforter had come. They were participants and beneficiaries of all that had happened. They were witnesses to the promises of God! Thus even if they did not understand the whole of the reality before them, they were being called to stand strong!

Jesus once told Peter "...when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren." (Luke 2:32) Now Peter was doing just that. Whether we appreciate God's methods or not, Peter was a better minister, a better man, a more faithful servant because of what he had gone through. Such times of testing can beat you, or it can make you stronger...*your choice*. Few of us will ever in fact "finish well." The hard truth is that most surrender to some level of spiritual mediocrity along the way, never completely knowing what they were born to do or called to be. They surrender to sit on the sidelines of Christianity because they are too lazy, too selfish or because they don't love Jesus enough to move on His behalf. But here was Peter...the guy who had spectacularly failed Jesus in the gospels yet early in Acts faced down the very men who had crucified Jesus and didn't flinch. No more denying. No longer afraid.

So as we begin this study of this letter, you first must ask yourself: *Is this your mail? Is this written for you and to you?*

This letter was written for *true believers*...not for those outside the family of God. It was written to be an encouraging, teaching, and even corrective letter for those already inside the faith. Through this letter, Peter's words will not be stomached by the novice or the pretender. Because Peter sought for the reader an outpouring of God's grace, and the possession of real peace, and a passionate motivated living out for Christ. Certainly Peter knew clearly that these come only from belonging to Christ!

The spiritual 'honeymoon' was over for these believers. The testing had begun. The trials had commenced. As it does for all of us in the Christian journey, the fires of our faith had arrived. It's always a shock when such comes! Maybe you are there today! We doubt, we cry, we get angry! Some will make it through. Some will not. Those who do will come out the other side stronger than they went in!

This was and is God's show. *His* battle. And though it was not easy and they did not always understand, God was still with them. For these folks, the "fires of testing" are dealt with the same way as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego dealt with theirs. No matter the outcome, they believed God had their back, and no matter what, they were not going to bow before the king of this world as their Lord. "Look!" Nebuchadnezzar shouted. "I see **four** men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed! And the fourth looks like a god!" Indeed! Because the "one they loved" was there with them. He is always in the fires with them, as sure as he is always walking through your fires with you.

