

“Reserved”

1 Peter 1:1-12

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at Believers City Church
in Menomonie, Wis
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1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls. 10 Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, 11 searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.



As Peter put pen to paper to give us this letter, 30 years had already passed since those crazy, daring gospel days of walking and learning with Jesus during His earthly ministry. That’s a lot of water under the bridge...30 years of battles, of miraculous events, and certainly a lot of spiritual blood and bruises. Yet despite the often uphill battle, the number of believers and churches had significantly grown over those years. More faith communities... more faithful individuals. Believers throughout Asia had begun to prioritize a life of faith, service and church family. Churches were embracing their salvation, and rejoicing in their faith. It had been, 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 now it seemed that in many ways those good days were gone now. There was suddenly a very real atmosphere of testing and persecution. The days of trouble “had arrived.” They *always* arrive! In every believers life and in every believers fellowship, the times of testing will come. These Christians and the churches they were a part of, would now come to know whether they had the spiritual metal to stand in the midst of the storms, or whether they were merely “fair weather” followers.

These were the wicked days of the infamous Emperor Nero, who had begun a brutal persecution of the faithful. He would be merely one of many historical figures who would over the centuries exercise incredible violence

against God's children. Far more than mere name calling and made up negative google reviews, there would actually be multiple attempts to erase the name of Christ and His followers from this earth. Believers were now being imprisoned, tortured, and put to death. Naturally, these followers of Christ were wondering what was happening. Had God turned His back on them? Were they being punished? Were they out of God's faithful hands? Had they believed in vain?

In his book "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. (Denison Forum on Truth and Culture, November 3, 2017)

The results of such trials and persecution is always the same. Some would, ...did, ...and will always, attempt to run away. Many will hide, and many will go "underground." And when all is said and done, many will simply have quit the race. If not openly and publicly, certainly practically and effectively. We need to know today as we step into this letter, that it was literally in the midst of these very fires that Peter would write. He would clearly choose his words to both encourage and strengthen the believers, as well as challenge them as to where they stood and in what they had placed their faith. "*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

"Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ..."

That must have felt really good to be able to say that. For he did not begin herein with "Peter...the guy who denied his Lord three times." Or "Peter, the guy Jesus had to rebuke...the guy who sunk beneath the waves due to a lack of faith." This Peter now ...*it seemed* ...was a different man. Despite everything that had happened, he was still in the game, and still fighting to move forward. Jesus ...upon Peter's restoration, told him "...*when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren.*" (Luke 2:32) and clearly Peter remembered that directive.

Peter wrote this letter to the "pilgrims" ...the "strangers," ...the "sojourners." People that were "just passing through." People for whom this world was not their home, but rather was just their "mission." It is an easy thing to find oneself "overwhelmed" by the events around us if we forget that we aren't going to be here too long. We're **leaving**. Thus, for this sort...they never get too comfortable or too contented or too complacent.

"...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied."

Peter reminds them that they had been truly chosen of God. They had been chosen because of the “foreknowledge of God.” Our timeless God ultimately knows all of us...now and forever...thus he knows who is coming. God simply chooses *those* guys.

Despite their difficulties...despite those we endure today, God had not...*has not*, abandoned us. Afterall, He has promised to “*never leave us, never forsake us.*” Thus, any trepidation that they were experiencing, wherein God had somehow dumped them from His grace and love, was not real. In fact, it was impossible! Peter reminds them that they have received “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled ...and that does not fade away...” Christ had clearly given them a warranty...a “guarantee” as to how it will all end, and that He would be with them throughout their journey.

Our text reiterates to us the warranty of our salvation and the inheritance that is kept in heaven for us. We have “reservations.” No matter what comes against us, nothing and no one can take that from us. After all, it is not just in our hands to protect and to fight for. It is all held by God. Christ Himself tells us in John 10:28 that “*I give them eternal life, and they will never perish. No one can snatch them away from me...*”

For these believers to whom Peter was writing, it 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? Maybe He would ghost them? But Peter was assuring them that their standing was not even *by* them or *because of* their works. But rather their salvation was determined by *Him*, held by *Him*, and guaranteed by *His promise*. They were secure through the sacrifice of Christ 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.

However, this “setting apart” was not without our participation. For through this sanctification work, we are first called to and then empowered for obedience unto Him and the kingdom pursuits. Verse 2 pointed out that as a result of what was done for us, we “*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.

Peter was taking these believers...and through such, *taking us also*, to a mountain top wherein we are able to see behind us... from where we came, and then to see forward to the ultimate salvation of God at the end of the movie, and even beyond that to our eternal home with Him. He was reminding us that we *have been* born again. We have been given...*past tense*, a “new life.” They were...we are, different now. No one is able to take that away from us no matter what they do to us...no matter what they throw at us. 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 been indwelt with the very power that brought Jesus back from the dead!

The reservations that we hold as the adopted children of God are 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 “*inheritance incorruptible and undefiled*”...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 to be warned that it is imperative that we are indeed reborn in the first place, and there is actual redemption evidence manifested from our lives. But the believers there in that day, for Peter and for us today, are being reassured that

God had not and will not drop us. No matter how bad things get around us, God is still on the throne, and is still in ultimate control!

Verse 5 tells us that we are “kept by the power of God.” That word “kept” means to “build a fortress around.” Our reservations are 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.

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

Though such often will seem otherwise, the reality is most of our trials will last but for a brief time, and they pass. But not only *will they* come, but in fact *they must*. For the testing of our faith, ...whether we will trust God through the difficult times as well as 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! But know this: our trials are not designed for God to find out what we are made of, but rather for us to find out! Through them, we learn not to lean upon our own understanding, upon our own strength and our own works. The truth is, these things are apparently allowed to “make us or break us.” 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!

In such times, one of two things will occur: we either draw closer to the Lord, or we will in fact 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 we have never seen Him in the flesh. Such operates in us as a great 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, no matter what the world dishes out, 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. It means there will come a day wherein there will be “*no more tears and no more crying*.” I am not simply drifting through life! Such joy and peace will never make sense to the unredeemed. They have no understanding of such.

In this mysterious relationship with God, we *are saved*, we are *being saved*, and we *shall be saved*. This is not merely some sort of a heavenly “life insurance” but in fact is a daily present relationship with Christ and the blessings, favor, and acknowledgment of God, *as well as* eternal life. All of this does not begin at some moment of physical death in the future, but is something we live *in* and live *through* here and now. All of which serves to remind us that He has indeed “got us firmly in His hands.”

Peter reminds these believers that their faith should in fact actually be stronger than any of the Old Testament prophets. For those prophets had only half the information that these believers had, and those believers truly

only had half the information that we have today! Much of the picture has been filled in through the life and sacrifice of Christ, but also upon the fulness of scripture and the passing of time. Know this today: 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 bet their very lives and their very eternity on what God promised! Those prophets before these believers did not live long enough to see all the things, but Peter was reminding them that *they* had seen them! And for sure Believers Church, *we have seen them!* The gospel had been laid manifest in our midst. The hand of God has been realized in the halls of this church. The Messiah has come. Death has been triumphed over. The power of the Comforter has come. They were...*we are*, the participants and beneficiaries of all that has gone on before us. They were...*we are*, witnesses to the present reality of God! Thus even if they did not...even if we do not, understand the whole of the reality before us, we are being called to stand strong!

Peter... *"when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren."* (Luke 2:32) That is what Peter is herein doing. 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. Truth be told, few of us will actually "finish well." Most people 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 he 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. Peter sought for an outpouring of God's grace, and the possession of real peace, and a passionate motivated *living out* for Christ. Certainly He had to know that those things come only from belonging to Christ!

Yes, 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 fight! 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...