

# ***Together We Endure: The Letter of 1 Peter #1***

*“Not an Immigrant, Not a Tourist” // 1 Peter 1:1–12*

There’s a few words I think some of us are tired of hearing: Coronavirus. Pandemic. Unprecedented. Lockdown. Put a little thumbs up in the comments if you would like to go a week without hearing those words.

I’ve had a few of you straight-up tell me, “I’m tired of talking about COVID-19.” And I get it. We took a few weeks to think through how a follower of Jesus should respond in a moment like this, and, of course, that will stay in the back of our minds as we move forward, but we are going to shift now to a study through the book of 1 Peter. One of my favorites!

**Now, you ask, “Why 1 Peter at this time?”** Peter wrote this letter to a church whose world had been turned upside down like ours has. In the opening greeting of the book, he says, I am writing this **“To those chosen, living as exiles dispersed abroad in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia...”** This was a group of believers who had been scattered all over the world through political and religious persecution. Everything in their lives was uncertain; their communities had been shattered; their worlds were totally rocked!

- We haven’t necessarily gone through persecution like that, but many of us feel like we are living through a period of isolation and uncertainty unlike anything we’ve experienced before. We may not literally be exiles, but on some level we can relate.
- How do we endure, even thrive during such a time? That’s the question of 1 Peter.

First, let me just give a quick word about the author, Peter. Most people, when they start to read the Bible, develop a real affection for Peter, because there is just something about him we feel like we can relate to. He had a big mouth and said some stupid things. And he was not real churchy, either, which sometimes I find refreshing. The Apostle Paul is sometimes way up here; Peter is almost always down here. Paul was like, “I was a Pharisee of the Pharisees; graduated with honor from the most prestigious school in the land;” Peter was like, “Yeah, but I can tell you the difference between a carp and a bass.” Paul strikes me as the kind of guy who translated documents from ancient Syriac in his spare time ; Peter the kind of guy who watched Tiger King twice. (BTW, I just learned they are turning Tiger King into a movie, and who did they get to play Joe Exotic? Only the finest thespian of our generation! NICOLAS CAGE. That’s a match made... well, it’s made somewhere.

Paul was the kind of guy who wore his shirts buttoned all the way to the top; Peter was not afraid to wear Crocs in public and if he got a stain on his robe just flipped it inside out. You catching my drift? The point is, Peter was just really down to earth. And you’ll find his book that way, too. Gritty. Earthy.

**1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ: To those chosen, living as exiles,**

2 key words in there. Chosen, and exiles. **Chosen** means we belong to God. He’s our true home now. **Exiles.** That speaks to our current relationship with the world we live in. Peter, of course, was writing to a group of people who literally had been exiled from their country, and Peter uses that as a metaphor for all Christians everywhere. All Christians are essentially exiles in this world; temporarily isolated from their true country and taking up residence from another.

When you're living in a country that you're not from, you can be one of three things to it<sup>1</sup>:

- You can be **an immigrant**. An immigrant is someone who seeks to make this new country their permanent home. They are not from there, they want this new country to be their new home. And that is what a lot of Christians do with this world. They might know up here that they are citizens of heaven, but they treat this world as if this is where they really want to live. So they leverage most of their resources to make a comfortable life here; they obsess about their reputation here; they stress about what they do and don't have here (Am I ever going to get married; is my ship ever going to come in; why is life here so hard; there's so much to life I may never experience!).
- **Option 2 is a tourist**: A tourist is the opposite of an immigrant. They don't want to live in this new country, they're just visiting. They don't form any real connections to the place, but they stay huddled in their groups; while you're there you speak your own language; you eat your kind of food; you stay in Western hotels and complain when you can't find a Starbucks. If there's political or social problems going on in that society it doesn't concern you--you have no connection to that place. This is the attitude some Christians have toward our world. They stay separated; never get involved; feel no connection to the community around them or its problems. They're like, "Me and Kirk Cameron are waiting to get raptured off of this trailer park of a planet." This is wrong, too.
- The third option is what Peter talks about here: **Exile**. An exile is someone whose home is somewhere else, but for an undefined amount of time they have to make their home in a new place. So they invest in this new community, form relationships, learn the culture, but they don't want to get *too* attached and all the while they are looking for the day when they can go back home. Christians who live as exiles are not focused on owning a lot, because their real home is elsewhere. They are satisfied with just enough to get by, because their real treasure is somewhere else. It's like when you are in an airport, you usually have little shops that will sell you necessities at ridiculously high prices. That's so when you have a layover you can be comfortable. But you know what you never see in these shops? Shopping carts. Because nobody goes there to load up. You buy enough just to get by. It's a temporary stop en route to your real home

Peter wants you to change your mentality toward the world around you. This world is not your true home, so don't be obsessed with your experiences here, what you do or don't have. And don't let it bother you that everyone else around you is different. That's what you should expect if you're an exile--you belong to a different kingdom, with a different set of values. You follow a different authority. Christians are supposed to seem strange to the world around them. How could you not? You're living with a whole different set of values; you answer to a different authority. In every way, you're marching to the beat of a different drummer. Imagine you're watching a huge drum corps out at halftime when we used to be able to go to football games. Everyone in the whole corp has their eyes focused on the guy on the platform. But you notice one guy in the middle is paying no attention to the guy. You notice he's got his headphones on and he's not watching the conductor call out the beats of the march, he's listening to the latest song by Chance the Rapper on Foxy 107. He's playing along with that beat. He's going to look odd--not because he is out of sync, but because he's tuned into something entirely different from everyone else. When you are really tuned into God, you're going to look odd. Extremely odd. In fact, if you're not odd, it's because your life is more in rhythm with the world than it is with God's word.

Now, in saying that, some of you are just odd period I don't want to excuse that. There's no excuse for that. You're just supposed to be so out of sync with everyone around you that you seem weird.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that in this analogy, we are referring to "immigrant" and "tourist" status in terms of how one lives in the world versus how we ought to live in God's kingdom. There is nothing inherently wrong with being an immigrant or a tourist, and many of us will find ourselves living these realities at some point. In this example, we are simply suggesting that living as exiles *best* represents how believers ought to live and engage the world we live in, given that our citizenship and our ultimate home is in Heaven.

Peter says, "Embrace your identity as an exile." He continues, vs. 2. We are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient and to be sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.

Now here, in this opening section, Peter shows us that the whole Trinity is involved in our salvation. If we've got to be outcasts from everyone around us, he wants us to know the glorious majesty of the One we belong to.

He starts with God the Father: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

Highlight that word **Mercy**: The Father's mercy conceived salvation's plan. Sometimes people think of God the Father as the God of judgment, ready to pour out his wrath, and Jesus is the nicer, understanding Son who jumped in the Father's way and was like, 'no, no' let's extend grace. That's wrong. It was the mercy of the Father that drew up salvation's plan.

He executed that plan by the Son, the 2nd member of the Trinity. Now, admittedly, the Trinity can be confusing. You have 3 separate persons in the Godhead but just one God. Not 3 different God. One of the best ways for understanding this came from the Apostle John, when he calls Jesus the "word" of the Father. Word. When you hear my word, you are hearing me. My words are an extension of me. Timothy 1, the first missionary to Muslims in the 8th century, who was trying to explain and defend the Trinity to a Muslim caliph, said: When you think a thought, your mind comes up with the thought...

Jesus was God's expression of mercy. Jesus was God purchasing salvation for us through his death on the cross. As we often say around TSC, Jesus lived the life we should have lived and death we were condemned to die. He was God dying on a cross. He didn't just die for us, he died instead of us.

And what does that salvation offer us? A **"living hope."** "Living hope" means a hope that is stronger than death; a hope that extends beyond death. Where is that hope found? In the resurrection. In the resurrection, everything permanent that could destroy or defeat us was crushed.

Where is your hope for the future? Is it in the assumption that this pandemic won't last forever, and soon everything will get back to normal? Or that you have enough saved up or your job is secure?

Victor Frankl was a Jewish-Austrian doctor who was imprisoned at Auschwitz in WW2 and survived. Later, he wrote a book called *Man's Search for Meaning* in which he told stories from his time there, and he described how various prisoners dealt with the despair. Many, he said, responded to their hopeless situation by becoming brutal and cruel themselves--a kind of survival of the fittest. Others, Frankl said, just gave up. He wrote, *"Usually this happened quite suddenly, the symptoms of which were familiar to us who had been at Auschwitz for a while. We all feared for this moment in our friends. Usually it began one morning when the prisoner simply refused to get dressed, or wash or go out to the parade grounds for inspection. No entreaties, no blows, no threats had any effect. They just lay there. They had given up. Nothing bothered them anymore because they had no hope."*

Many, he said, held onto the hope that if they stayed alive, their health, family, professional achievements, fortune and position in society would be restored to them. That was their hope. But after liberation, they went home and many found those things that they had dreamed about--their homes, their jobs, their families, their communities--were irretrievably gone, or they'd changed, and an untold many went into deep depression and many of the survivors even committed suicide. Their hopes had been shattered.

Frankl said that the ones who truly overcame Auschwitz were those who had a fixed reference point beyond the world, something they held onto that was beyond the grasp of death and destruction. Frankl said: **“Life in a concentration camp tears open a soul and exposes its depths and its foundations.”** That’s essentially what Peter is saying: trials and pain expose where our hope is and if it lasts.

Like the prisoners at Auschwitz, for many of us, our hope is some fixed reference point here: a hope that our circumstances will change. One day, things will get better. Or maybe apart from the pandemic, you’re just not happy now. One day I’ll have a good job. One day I’ll be married. One day my marriage will get better. Maybe you feel undervalued, and you think, one day I’ll get the recognition I deserve! One day I’ll be free from this chronic pain and be healed. For years I was sustained in discouragement of what I thought I could become one day. But what if those things don’t happen? You don’t get the job. The marriage doesn’t get better. The pain doesn’t go away. Do you have a living hope that death can’t touch? A refuge that the challenges of life can’t overcome; a shelter that the storms of life can’t shake?

If you need anything in your life to change in order to have peace or be happy, you haven’t found the living hope Peter is talking about. Living hope is a joy and hope you have in whatever situation you are in!

(BTW, if you’re struggling with this, and want somebody just to pray with you to find hope, email us at [prayer@summitrdu.com](mailto:prayer@summitrdu.com) and someone will get back to you within 24 hours!)

Peter says that in the resurrection, we have a ‘living hope’ that consists of, vs. 4, **4 and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. 5 You are being guarded by God’s power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 You rejoice in this, even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials 7 so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, 9 because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.**

Could we take just a minute and declare our hope in the God of resurrection, our Savior, the King of Kings, and then we’ll unpack what this hope consists of:

In these verses, Peter explains what the believer’s hope actually is:

**What is the believer’s hope, exactly?**

**I. To Know Christ:** Just knowing him. **Did you see that in vs. 8** Peter says the goal of our salvation, the hope that sustains us in trials, is just knowing God, loving him, enjoying him! God is the ultimate end to our salvation.

Let me ask this question: **Is God useful or beautiful to you?** Useful means that God is a means to something else that you want. Serving him is a way of getting prosperity, a good marriage, successful kids, streets of gold and a mansion in heaven or whatever. Or is God ‘BEAUTIFUL,’ which means he is an end in himself? An illustration I love to use here is the drama and theatre class I took in college. I signed up for it thinking we were going to do skits, learn improv and whatever. I probably should have read the catalogue better because it was a class on the history of drama in the theatre. We spent our entire semester learning about great plays. As a college junior I was NOT interested in theatre--I thought it was a bunch of guys prancing about in tights on stage, dancing and singing their way through a story when I’d just prefer to see the movie. I HATED that class, but I studied and did well in it--so that I could get a good grade, so I could graduate with honors, so I could get a good job, so I could make money. Fast forward 25 years later. I got the job. I am making the money. And guess what one of my wife and my favorite things to do is? Go to the theatre--DPAC, to see a bunch of guys

and girls prancing about in tights on stage, dancing and singing their way through a story. Oh, the irony--in college, 'theatre' was a means to an end. I studied it only as a means to getting money. Now I use that money to enjoy theatre. At least, I used to before I had to avoid crowds. It has become beautiful as an end all on its own. Theatre used to be useful; now it is beautiful. Is God useful to you, or beautiful? Do you seek him because he is a good means to something else, or do you see him as an end in himself? The trials of life have a way of showing you how God is in himself!

**II. To Be Like Christ.** This is the second goal God has for us in salvation. These verses talk about God refining us and purifying us to achieve the goal of our faith (vs. 9), which is the salvation of our souls. Peter in these verses alludes to all 3 dimensions of our salvation. Think of them as the **3 P's of salvation**.

- In vs. 3 he says we are **Freed from the PENALTY of sin (vs. 3)**. In theological terms, this is called 'justification' and it happened in the past. "*You WERE born again,*" he says in v s. 3. When you embraced Christ as your Savior, you received, at once, forgiveness for all your sins; you were given a perfect record, the righteousness of Christ, and stood blameless in his sight. This was all given to you when you received Christ.
- In vv. 4-5 Jesus says we are **freed from the PRESENCE of sin (vv. 4-5)**. In theological terms, this is called 'glorification' and it happens in the future. It's something, Peter says in vs 5 that will be revealed later. We will have a perfect, pure heart; we'll love the right things; we'll no longer struggle with pride and hatred and rebellion and weakness and deceit and jealousy. We'll be like Jesus. Oh, I can't wait for that! Let me ask: Is this part of your hope? Many Christians talk a lot about what they are saved FROM (the penalty of sin, hell) but not as much what they're saved FOR--Christlikeness! You can even hear that in the ways we phrase salvation! "If you died tonight..." That's a good question. But equally important is: If you get up tomorrow morning, will you grow a little more that day to be like Jesus?
- So you have the first P of our salvation, freedom from the penalty of sin; the second P, freed from the presence of sin; and then you have the 3rd P, the **Freed from the POWER of sin**. In theological terms, this is called 'sanctification' and it happens right now, the present, as God grows you more into Christlikeness day by day.
- Peter says all 3 are part of your salvation: justification, glorification, and sanctification, and all are activated by faith--which means believing that Jesus has done it all for you and will do it all in you. You rest in him, let him do the work, and become Christlike.

Which leads us the last dimension of our hope. **III. To Be With Christ.** In vs. 4 he points us to "an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you." Imperishable means it cannot be destroyed; undefiled means it will not ever spoil; unfading means it will last forever and never get boring; kept in heaven for you means no one can ever take it away. It's an inheritance preserved from disease and corruption and protected from poverty and injustice. My kids and I over lockdown have been watching the LOTR trilogy. Samwise Gamgee has this moment where he looks forward to a time when "every sad thing becomes untrue." That was JRR Tolkien's way of talking about this inheritance: a time in eternity where all sad things come untrue; where we are reunited with lost family; disease is taken away; relationships are finally and fully healed; there is no more pain and crying and God wipes away every tear.

That's your true hope, Christian! To know Christ; to be like Christ; to be with Christ. And see, that changes your perspective on trials NOW. Trials may be painful--they always are--but trials help purify your heart for the best part of your salvation--knowing Christ, being like Christ, and being with Christ! Trials loosen your grip on this world and force you to press into him.

Peter compares them in vs. 7 to the fire that purifies gold--the intense heat makes the impurities melt away leaving only the pure gold. That's what God does in your heart through trials. The crumbling of the business makes you reorient your priorities. The crumbling of your marriage shatters your self-centeredness and sense of self-sufficiency. The pain in your body makes you realize how fragile life is and teaches you to value those

things that really matter. Trials are God's way of purifying you and preparing you for heaven before he takes you there.<sup>2</sup>

This is the hope we have during trials. Can we take just a minute and declare that to God? I want to show you one more quick thing from this passage, but let's **Take a minute and declare to God that he is a hope better than riches, family, health, or success.** Go ahead!

In the final verses here, Peter turns to **the Spirit's** role in salvation: **10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who prophesied about the grace that would come to you, searched and carefully investigated. 11 They inquired into what time or what circumstances the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating when he testified in advance to the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you. These things have now been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—angels long to catch a glimpse of these things.**

The Father planned our salvation; Jesus accomplished it; the Spirit brings it to us. The Spirit first did that, he said, by **revealing salvation through the prophets and Bible writers.** Moses and David and Isaiah wrote the words but, vs. 11, the Spirit was the one speaking within them. The words of the Bible are the words of the Holy Spirit.

But there's more! Vs. 12, Peter says, the Holy Spirit then brought their words to us. Words on a page alone couldn't save us; truth has to be revealed to our blind and dead hearts. Otherwise we couldn't really grasp them! Imagine if you were born blind and people were trying to describe a sunset to you but you've never even seen color. But then suddenly, your eyes are opened. That's what the Holy Spirit does. He takes the concepts we've heard about and makes them real--he makes them burst alive in our hearts in a way that makes us yearn for them. The process of the Spirit getting the words in the Bible was called "inspiration." The process of making them understandable to you is called "illumination." Peter calls it the "new birth."

Finally, last thing--notice the last little phrase Peter throws in here, almost like an addendum: **"--angels long to catch a glimpse of these things."** These gospel truths are so amazing the angels long to get a look at them. What an amazing statement! Angels are jealous of what we get to experience! Angels, of course, understand the truth of gospel, but they've never experienced it! Never tasted of it's beauties for themselves. Think about that! How do you make an angel jealous? Think of all they have seen... They were there at creation/Red Sea/Donkey talking. Yet they wish they could feel what we get to feel in the gospel.

Peter wants to strengthen you as an exile by saturating you in living hope. And how does he do that? By pulling you in to get a closer look at the gospel. In the gospel are all the resources for the Christian life! The gospel is like a well--the best water in the well is not found by widening the circumference of the well, but by going deeper into it.

Going deep into your living hope in the resurrection of Christ this will do 2 things for you. It will give:

1. **Greater clarity in life:** It shows you **earthly life is temporary but heavenly citizenship is eternal!** Jesus lived to the fullest because he knew he would die, but he also lived to the fullest because he knew he would resurrect. One of the things God is doing in this extraordinary time is using the fear of death to wake us up to what is truly life! Like our friend Bryan Loritts says, you learn a lot more at a funeral than you do a party! So learn from this, and let it clarify your life.

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter 4:12, "Fiery trial." This is literal! Some Roman emperors were known to dip political prisoners in oil and impale them on poles and light them on fire

2. The second thing going deep in your living hope will give you is **Greater comfort in trials**. **These trials hurt, but from the perspective of eternity, are they THAT big of a deal?** I'm not saying our trials are not real, or they don't hurt badly now, but from the perspective of eternity, where all the sad things come untrue, can you see they are only light and momentary? One of my fav illustrations on this comes from John Wesley: Inherited a million dollars?

Let's close by one last time turning our eyes on Jesus and declaring that he is our Everlasting God, our Living Hope!

