I Peter Lesson 1 (2023)

**NEW BIRTH, LIVING HOPE, AND INHERITANCE**

1 Peter 1:1-12

Key Verse: 1:3-4

“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 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.”

 From this Sunday, we will study the first letter of Saint Peter before studying the book of II Samuel and the Gospel of Mark. I chose this letter because it reminds us of the greatness of God’s salvation through Christ Jesus. While struggling to survive in this troubled world, it’s easy for us to become tired and often carried away by losing the purpose of God’s great deliverance in our lives. More often than not, it’s a chronic problem for many Christians today, including us, who tend to overlook it until it’s too late. So, we will explore God’s great salvation plan for us in Christ Jesus, which includes all kinds of trials and challenges in life.

Look at verse 1. “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the province of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” Saint Peter’s introduction of himself is brief compared to Saint Paul's. It’s probably because every early Christian knew him as one of the top disciples of Jesus Christ. Nobody questioned his apostleship. Apostle Peter was a highly respected figure who represented Christ Jesus in the early Christian communities. I like to call him “Saint Peter” because it was not just his high position in the church but his authentic lifestyle as a follower of Christ that made him highly respected.

In the first century, many Jewish Christians lived outside Israel, scattered throughout Asia Minor and modern-day Turkey, and were occupied by Rome, like the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. (Map#1) We are unsure how many Jewish Christians lived there and established local churches. Generally, the congregations in those areas included both Jewish and non-Jewish Christians. Regardless of their ethnicity and nationality, Peter calls them **“God’s elect,”** which means **“God’s chosen people.”** (2:9) The term **“God’s elect”** indicates that Christians are God’s chosen people as opposed to the Jews - people of Israel, who were also called “God’s chosen people.” Jews believed they were God’s chosen people, while Christians believed they were God’s chosen people. Who was right? Well, both were right.

Then, what is the difference between the Jews and Christians? The Jews are chosen based on God’s covenant with Abraham. God said to Abraham in Genesis 17:6 and 7, “I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between you and me and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.” So, if we are not born as Abraham’s descendants, there is no way we could be regarded as God’s chosen people. But things have changed after the coming of Jesus, the Messiah.

Look at verse 2. “Who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.” The phrase “Sprinkled by his blood” stands out. Christ Jesus fulfilled God’s covenant with Abraham through his sacrificial death, shedding his blood on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Now, ethnicity does not matter. In the New Testament time, God chooses his people not just from the Jews but also from all other people through the covenant of Jesus’ blood.

We must be aware that we are chosen by God even before we know it. We didn’t choose God, but he chose us. Jesus even said to his disciples in John 15:16, “You didn’t choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last….”

Christians chosen according to God’s sovereign will are also sanctified through the Holy Spirit. It means that God chooses his people, he has a great plan of salvation, and God’s salvation is a process that includes justification, sanctification, and glorification. It’s a massive project that is going on for us. We must know that God’s work is in progress, and we are under God’s construction. (pic#1)

Saint Peter knew that Christians scattered around the world were facing all kinds of trials and challenges in their lives, including persecution and discrimination against them. Yet, he did not see them as miserable people but as God’s treasured possessions on earth. He said to them, “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (1 Pe. 2:9) He blessed them by saying, “Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”

In the following passage, verses 3-12, Saint Peter further explains why Christians are incredibly blessed. Read verses 3-5. “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 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.” We can imagine that in the tone of his voice, Saint Peter was full of confidence and excitement when he proclaimed the great blessing of God’s salvation through Christ Jesus. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” It wasn’t merely an empty wish for them. In his declaration, we notice three important terms, ***“a new birth,”*** “***a living hope,”*** and ***“an inheritance.”*** They are all related to Christ Jesus: a new birth through Christ Jesus, a living hope in Christ Jesus, and an inheritance of Christ Jesus. Let’s think about them one by one.

We have only one life to live. Some people don’t like themselves. They often blame others and dire circumstances for their unhappiness. How can we have a new life when we are old and don’t even like our circumstances? After all, all humans perish no matter how successful they may be.

But Saint Peter said God gave us new birth through Christ Jesus. How is it possible? When Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night, Jesus told him, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.” (Jn. 3:3) Even though Nicodemus was Israel’s teacher, he didn’t understand how an older man, like him, could be born again. Jesus told him again, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.” (Jn. 3:5) What did Jesus mean to be born of water and the Spirit?

It means that even an older man like Nicodemus can live a new life by dying to his selfish ego and putting on a new self in Christ Jesus. We are a new creation when the Spirit Christ Jesus lives in us, just as Paul said in Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

As people grow older, seeing themselves in the mirror may be uncomfortable. Our hair gets thinner year by year, and our skin gets wrinkled and has more dark spots. Outwardly, we are wasting away. We cannot reverse the aging process. But there is encouraging news. Inwardly, we become a new creation day by day through Christ Jesus, which we may call ***“transformation.”*** 2 Corinthians 4:16 states, “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” That’s new birth through Christ Jesus.

The new birth through Christ Jesus opens even the gate of heaven wide, pouring out one blessing after another, which includes ***“a living hope”*** and ***“an inheritance”*** based on Christ Jesus’s resurrection from the dead.

What can be our hope when we get old, dick, and die someday? Some people die prematurely, and all die eventually. No hope can survive before the dominion of death. We don’t want to die if we have a choice. But since we don’t have a choice, we’d better accept it as a process of life. But what hope does Christ’s resurrection give us? It’s the hope of our resurrection after we die physically. We will be entering a new life on a different level, from physical to spiritual, from earthly to heavenly.

Death is the prerequisite for glorious resurrection, just as Jesus said in John 12:24, “Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” And Paul spoke of the spiritual body of resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15: 35-50. He said, “So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable; it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.” Have you ever imagined what kind of spiritual and heavenly body you will have? It’s beyond our imagination. This is amazing! Too good to be true. Resurrection is not just our wishful thinking. God, who created the heavens and the earth, has a great plan to give his children everlasting life in the heavenly bodies, different from the earthly bodies (1 Cor. 15).

What about inheritance? We receive the kingdom of heaven as our inheritance from God our Father. So, what does that mean? It’s hard to understand. But according to the Parable of the Vineyard (Mk. 12:1-11), inheritance is not just something we receive after we die. It’s based on what we receive from God our Father and what we do for him in our current life. We all received our life as God’s inheritance, including our talent, knowledge, health, family, children, life circumstances, wealth, etc. We must work on those inheritances, making profits for God as his stewards. Over time, we can grow as God’s stewards and bear the fruit of godly characters, such as love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness, patience, self-control, etc. (Gal. 5:23-24) And there will be no limit to our growth. It’s never going to be faded and spoiled. And fundamentally speaking, our inheritance is Jesus Christ himself in that we become like him in our character and actions.

As I grow older, I am aware of my age. I am curious to know how many years I have before I die. Some of us were already retired, and others will retire soon. I am also cautious that, at some point, I will no longer hold my position as the senior pastor of New York UBF. However, my life so far is only a preparation for my life in Christ now and beyond. Therefore, I believe the rest of my life on earth will have to go on in a new way in God’s eternal inheritance. So, I am ready to learn a new thing and be transformed. Indeed, the blessing of God’s salvation is fantastic. The world we live in today is not our permanent home. God’s kingdom is our permanent home, which is the epitome of God’s great salvation. God’s salvation in Christ is a spiritual reality that makes us move forward and be fully alive now and forever, no matter what happens to the world.

Look at verses 6-7. “In all this, you greatly rejoice, though now, for a little while, you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 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.” The phrase “In all this” refers to the great blessing of God’s salvation, especially its final stage, **glorification**. Given the hope of God’s great salvation through Christ, we can rejoice even during the trials we face because they are there to prepare us for our future glory. As gold is refined by fire, our faith is purified by trials in life up to the level of proven genuineness. We need to be concerned about the genuineness of our faith. It’s related to what is said in the following verse, verse 9.

Look at verse 9. “For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.” Two phrases stand out, **“the end result of your faith”** and **“the salvation of your souls.”** What does it mean? Well, from time to time, I am surprised to see some people who seem to suffer beyond what they can bear, like Job in the Bible. He had lost his children and all of his live stocks. And he also got a severe skin disease. It seems Job had suffered too much beyond he could bear. But the Bible says God does not allow trials and temptations beyond what we can handle. (1 Cor. 10:13) Honestly, it’s hard to remain cool when our hearts are broken in pain and sorrow. Yet, at least, we should not give in to negative thoughts. We should remain positive and wait on God, who is faithful, and will also provide a way out. We should be intentional about doing so. The end result is that we become genuine gold, which is the salvation of our souls. (Pic#3) That’s what Job said, “But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” (Job 23:10)

In verses 10-12, Saint Peter explains that the prophets of the Old Testament have predicted the mystery of God’s great salvation through the suffering of Christ. The fulfillment of God’s great salvation through Christ Jesus is something that the entire universe, including angels, looks forward to seeing. There will be great rejoicing and no more tears of sorrow and pain.

Facing some trials and challenges is unavoidable. We may not always feel rejoicing when our suffering does not seem to end. We instead remain in silent sorrow and bitterness. Some people consider that keeping the integrity of their faith in God is not essential if their life can be more comfortable. But that’s not true. God made our life difficult for a good reason. Creating a gorgeous pearl in a shell requires a painful process (Pic#4). Likewise, the life of faith is a painful process that develops the genuineness of our faith through trials and challenges. Therefore, when facing problems, we should not consider them God’s curse or punishment. We should not be afraid or ashamed of them. Instead, we should know that God’s love for us is deep and wide. His love is trustworthy. We should consider them pure joy, knowing God works for our good. God’s salvation in Christ is truly remarkable and mysterious. It’s God’s project in us that can never fail. When our test is over, we will come forth as pure gold. (Job 23:10). Therefore, as we face trials individually and collectively this year, let us be more relaxed, positive, and even cheerful to one another because God’s salvation is in progress.