SAVED TO A LIVING HOPE

Getting saved is a joyful event [comment on picture]. There are a multitude of scriptures which speak to the joy of our salvation. For you personally what is the best thing about being saved?

Salvation is the theme of First Peter. It was written to encourage believers. And so it’s my prayer that as we study this great letter that it will encourage us and build up our faith.

[Next slide] The Apostle Peter, Petros, “the rock,” is one of the most prominent figures in the New Testament. In fact you could argue that Peter is the third most prominent person behind only Jesus and Paul. He was one of Jesus’ 12 disciples. He was in Jesus’ inner circle along with James and John. Often he was the spokesman for the disciples. Jesus and the disciples stayed in Peter’s home frequently, whenever they were in Capernaum. Peter was never afraid to speak up and to speak his mind. He certainly was not shy although he did not always say the right thing. Sometimes in his over-exuberance he misspoke. But give Peter some credit. He was the only one of the disciples brave enough to get out of the boat and to walk on the water toward Jesus. Peter’s lowest point came on the night Jesus was arrested when he denied Jesus three times. Jesus, however, later restored Peter and told him to “feed My sheep.” Then in the Book of Acts we see Peter again, this time filled with the Holy Spirit, and preaching at Pentecost. Three thousand people got saved. Shortly after that Peter healed a man who was lame outside the temple. He then preached a sermon in Solomon’s Portico and five thousand more men were saved. Later on in the Book of Acts God convicted Peter’s heart of his personal prejudice as a Jew against Gentiles. God used Peter to lead Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and his entire household to believe in Jesus and to be saved. And God continued to use Peter in a mighty way during the early days of the church. Despite Peter’s prominence in the N.T., we have only two letters from him that made the canon of scripture – they are, of course, First and Second Peter, which we will be studying this quarter. So let’s get started…

READ 1 Peter 1:1-2

Peter introduces himself as the writer of this letter calling himself “an apostle of Jesus Christ.” So Peter has apostolic authority in what he will say. He writes to a specific group of people. Who are they? “Elect exiles.” These are mostly Jewish believers (but also Gentiles) who have been scattered in five Roman provinces. These provinces cover the greater part of modern day Turkey. These Christians he is writing to have been forced to leave their homes and have become exiles in strange lands. This was because of stepped up persecution against Christianity by the Emperor Nero (“the Dispersion”). History tells us that Nero began persecuting Christians (who he wrongly blamed for burning Rome) in 64 A.D. That’s why many scholars place the writing of 1 Peter around that same time. So Peter, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit writes this letter to these persecuted, exiled saints who are suffering injustice for their faith in Christ. He writes to encourage them. Peter is actually being obedient to the command of his Lord, Jesus, who told Peter just before His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane: “I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again [Jesus knew Peter was going to deny Him that evening], strengthen your brothers.” Peter is doing exactly that here in 1 Peter. He is strengthening his brothers, his fellow believers.

Verse 2 is what I call Salvation 101. Peter is talking to the elect, to believers, those who have been saved. The salvation process that they have undergone involves the work of the triune Godhead – the Father, the Spirit and Jesus Christ, the Son, as well as an action on the part of people. First, there is the foreknowledge of the Father. God is sovereign and He has a pre-determined plan. You need to understand that foreknowledge here is more than just God knowing ahead of time who will be saved. God has a plan and a purpose for everything that happens. It is all by His design. Romans 8:29 says, “For those whom He foreknew He also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son…” Second, there is the sanctification of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit works in our hearts to convict us of sin, of righteousness and of judgment (John 16:8). Third, there is the blood of Jesus Christ. This is a reference to Jesus’ death. Jesus’ death on the cross satisfied the demand of a holy God against sin. In the O.T., on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would sprinkle the blood of a sacrificial animal on the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies for the sins of the people. Jesus Christ “entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Hebrews 9:12). Lastly in verse 2, not to be overlooked, people participate in the salvation process as well. This is an act of volition, of our free will. Peter summarizes it in one word: “obedience.” There is our obedience to Jesus Christ, which comes by an act of our faith in Him, resulting in salvation. Acts 5:32 says, “And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey Him.” Obedience to Jesus.

In verses 3-9 Peter is going to talk about the very essence of our salvation, what all is involved, the various aspects. We could literally spend weeks or months on these verses unpacking all the deep truths here. But, for the sake of time we are only going to skim the surface.

READ 1 Peter 1:3-5

Peter praises God for salvation. In verse 3 Peter sees salvation as the work of God – “according to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope…” Our salvation is a gift from God. It’s our inheritance. It’s something good and wonderful! In verse 4 Peter says that our inheritance is imperishable. It’s not going to deteriorate over time like so many things in this world do. That’s good news. Our inheritance is undefiled. It’s pure and free from sin and evil. If you believe that by sinning you can lose your salvation (as some denominations teach) then that means that your sin can potentially defile your inheritance, your salvation. But Peter says that not even our own sin can defile our salvation. That’s comforting. Finally our inheritance is unfading. With anything new, time causes its glory to fade. But our inheritance, unlike the glow on Moses’ face (when he met with God on Mount Sinai), its glory will never fade away. What an assurance. Our blessings in Christ are sure.

Verse 5 says that our inheritance, our salvation is fully protected by the power of God. We have eternal security. GOD is our refuge and strength. GOD is our strong tower. HIS power protects us. Because HE is all-powerful, nothing can cause us to lose that which He has provided, promised and preserved for us.

Peter says that our salvation, which comes thru faith is fully guarded and protected by the power of God. It is being kept in heaven for us and it is ready to be revealed in the last time. Certainly there is an aspect of our salvation that we can enjoy in this life. Peter will talk more about that here in a minute. But the biggest part of our salvation, our inheritance, is reserved for later, in the last time, when we finally leave this life and are with the Lord in heaven.

Well, that’s something for all of us who are saved to look forward to. But for now the reality is that in this life, this side of heaven, we are going to face various trials…

READ 1 Peter 1:6-7

“In this you rejoice…” In what? In your salvation. In your inheritance; that which is yours as a result of your faith in Christ. The word “rejoice” means exuberance, exultation, great joy. It is the same word used in Luke 1:44 when Elizabeth described to Mary how the baby inside her womb leaped for joy whenever she heard Mary’s voice greeting her. We have an exceeding amount of joy as Christians because we have so much to look forward to. The reality, however, is that for now, in this life, we struggle. We face many trials and tests in our life. Please keep in mind that nothing happens to us outside of God’s plan and purpose for us. So, these trials are allowed by God, but they’re only temporary. If God deems these trials as necessary in order to stimulate us to grow spiritually or to strengthen our faith, then He will allow them in our life. But even though these trials grieve us (they hurt us physically or emotionally, they’re not pleasant), as believers who can see the bigger picture, the grand perspective of God’s plan. And we can rejoice even in the midst of trials. We can have joy.

John MacArthur describes the difference between happiness and joy like this: “Positive circumstances produce happiness. A positive relationship with the living God through Christ produces joy.”

In verse 7 Peter reminds us that our faith sustains us thru the tough experiences of life. As we experience these things we gain confidence, we are reassured, that our faith is the real thing. The experiences we go through work to prove whether or not our faith is real. James 1:2-4 addresses this. It says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” Real faith emerges from trials stronger than ever. [Comment about apostasy among believers – evidence that they were truly never saved to begin with]

The writer of Hebrews in Chapter 10 addresses persecuted believers who accepted joyfully the seizure of their earthly property because they knew that they had a better possession, an inheritance that could never be seized, never confiscated. They had the joy of their protected inheritance in Christ. Likewise, as Christians today, we can continually have joy because nothing can take away our inheritance, our salvation.

READ 1 Peter 1:8-9

The two key ingredients to any meaningful relationship are love and trust. They are essential. If you violate love and trust, then the relationship suffers. It’s no different with our relationship with Christ. A person who is truly born again, saved, not only believes, trusts Jesus, has faith in Jesus, but they also love Jesus. Paul when he was writing to the believers at Corinth said, “If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed” (1 Cor 16:22). Those are strong words. How do you know if a person loves another? By their words, yes, and also by how they behave toward that other person. Love is not just something we say or feel, but it is something that we do. [example of my love for my wife] Love is evidenced by one’s actions. Jesus told His disciples in John 14:15, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments.” Jesus desires our complete devotion and loyalty to Him.

Have any of us ever actually seen Jesus? No, but we still love Him, don’t we? Even though we and the believers that Peter is addressing here have never seen the Lord Jesus with our physical eyes, we still believe in Him, we still love Him, and we rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible. The KJV says “joy unspeakable.” Our love for our Lord runs so deep that it is difficult to express adequately in human words and thoughts. So we come up with a variety of ways to express our love – thru singing, thru music, thru art, thru poetry, or some other creative means that comes out of us. As 1 John 4:19 puts it, “We love Him because He first loved us.” The essence of Christianity is a love for Jesus Christ.

Flowing out of the personal fellowship we have with Jesus Christ thru love and trust, is the outcome of our faith, which we have here and now obtained, namely, the salvation of our souls.

READ 1 Peter 1:10-11

The O.T. prophets lived at a time before they could fully see its accomplishment in the work of Jesus Christ. So from their perspective much of what is involved in the salvation process was a mystery. God revealed truth to them by the “Spirit of Christ in them.” But they didn’t fully understand all that would be involved in Jesus’ life, death, resurrection and ascension. God revealed truth to them but they did not fully understand all the details. When the O.T. prophets wrote about God’s salvation, they didn’t have the Gospels or Romans or Hebrews. When they wrote, the church had not yet been born. The barrier wall between Jew and Gentile had not yet been broken down. They studied what scriptures they had at the time. They longed to know – Who is this Messiah? Who will it be? When will He come? They knew they were writing about a future event and to a future generation. It was fascinating to them to study about the Messiah and about His sufferings and His triumph and about His salvation and about the world coming to God. They made careful search. They wanted to know more. Peter says here that our salvation is so wonderful, so marvelous, that the O.T. prophets spent their entire lives trying to understand it more fully. What an advantage we have being able to look back at what Jesus did for us! We can fully understand what the O.T. prophets could not. If these men were so concerned about it, so thrilled with it, so desirous of plunging deep into its truths and understand it, then how precious should it be to us? Generation after generation, century after century, those godly men sought to know what you and I take for granted! How precious and wonderful our salvation truly is!

READ 1 Peter 1:12

Salvation was revealed to the O.T. prophets. They saw a future Messiah, a future kingdom. They saw the grace to come. But they didn’t know who or when. It was yet future. It was for a future generation. It was for us. When the good news was preached to us, when we heard the amazing message of salvation, of how Christ loved us and died for us, and how thru faith we could have eternal life, the same Holy Spirit who had revealed truth to the prophets of old, revealed truth to us. What an advantage we have that they didn’t have. We can look back at the cross and see clearly.

Peter mentions angels in verse 12. The angels have been involved in salvation. They announced Jesus’ birth. They ministered to Jesus after His temptation. They were there at the resurrection. They attended His ascension. They are now doing His bidding on behalf of the saints. The angels have been around the work of salvation, but none of them have ever or will ever experience it for themselves. Yet they desire to look more deeply into the immense miraculous gracious salvation that is ours but that they can never have. What an amazing thought! How great is our salvation!