

God's Perspective Toward Us in Uncertain Times:
Passage that Speaks Comfort from Heaven

I am motivated in this very short series on the love of God for His people considering the cumulative impact of the events that fills the major new networks. Covid following by the omicron virus brought such isolation that in our experience of pain we came to value the benefit of community. Our nation seems to be fractionalized to such a degree that the symbol of our nation was pillaged, a nation built on the foundation that a collective people would lay aside individual good for the benefit of the citizenry. A potentate currently threatens the use of its ultimate military capacities creating international uncertainties. Additionally, reasons for concern appear to abound on more fronts than I care to enumerate. All that said, are there solid reason we should not despair in anguish. I think the answer is an astounding "YES." I desire to explain how we can be positive in a world, and country, that seems to have forgotten the enormous privileges we have in a land of plenty.

Turn our eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace.

The purpose of this series is to help us all think of how very much we are loved of God, through the mercies of Christ applied by the Holy Spirit. Simply stated, what you fill your mind with, what occupies your thoughts, will determine the extent of your peace of mind and joy in life. The key to the Christian life is found in filling our minds with good thoughts. What God has done for us, how much He loves us, how much He has acted on our behalf, is to find peace in troubled circumstances.

We turn now to I Peter 1:1-12.

I. Introduction, 1:1-2

A. The author, 1:1a

It is interesting that in the second letter Peter wrote, he refers to himself as Simon Peter, here only Peter.

The claim to apostleship is that of the highest office in the church of God, a claim equal to that of OT prophets. However, the authority to write and be listened to is strengthened by the phrase “of Jesus Christ,” the only office in the Bible that appears with this phrase.

B. The recipients, 1:1b-2a

1. The readers, v. 1b

All that we know of these Christians is that they resided in the Roman provinces of Asia Minor (Turkey, the Romans viewed the area as the gateway to Asia and so named it Asia Minor).

The original readers of the letter are described as “resident aliens.” The point seems to be that they are people that have become displaced for some reason. The most logical explanation is that they have become such, not because they are not members of the society or unknown to the people around them (newcomers, a different ethnicity and heritage), but because of the social consequences of their faith (which fits the theme of the book).

2. Their location, v. 1c

The recipients of the letter were scattered in churches located in four Roman provinces (two regions, Pontus and Bithynia, was viewed as one province by the Romans). The most logical explanation of the sequence of the Roman provinces is that of the route taken by the carrier of the letter to the churches, most likely Silvanus (5:12). Considerable research has demonstrated that the only two ports that could accommodate trans-Mediterranean shipping were Amisus (Samsun) in Pontus and Byzantium (Constantinople) in Bithynia. Silvanus landed in Amisus journeyed southward, then westward before turning to the North to end the journey.

What becomes clear is that the letter is a circular message to be read (and likely copied) in numerous churches, some having been founded by Paul on his earlier missionary journeys (most likely).

3. Peter’s location

The apostle wrote the letter from “Babylon (5:13),” a designation that is

likely understood symbolically for Rome. Literal Babylon was largely uninhabited in the first century. There is no record of a church in the city, nor that Peter was in the region. “Babylon” is used in the New Testament symbolically for the city of Rome (Rev. 16:9, 17:5, 18:2 [17:9 refers to the seven hills that comprise the city]). The two cities are comparable because they were centers of world power, cultural decadence, and opposed God’s people. Being in “Babylon,” Peter apparently heard of the plight of the Christians in Asia Minor and wrote to them (we have no record that he labored in any church there, though we know that he spent time in Corinth, Greece).

4. Their situation

The persecution endured by the recipients of the letter seems to be that of discrimination and ridicule rather than anything physical; the instruction the author gives is about mental and emotional reaction to unjust treatment (2:1). It likely arose from the unwillingness of Christians to embrace their former lifestyle (i.e., social incompatibility).

5. Their comfort, vv. 1d-2c

Comfort amid trials and sufferings come from reflecting not on the immediate circumstances but upon the grace, mercy, and greatness of our God. Thus, a clue to comfort in trials is to focus on what we have in Christ, not upon what we think we may be losing. No matter the extent of the loss, they do not compare! They are chosen of God.

The term “chosen” or “elect” is an adjective describing the “resident aliens.” Christians are people that have been chosen out by God to be His. This action of God took place in eternity past.

The basis or criteria of God’s election of these people is God’s foreknowledge. The term does not simply indicate knowledge of a person, but “a personal, loving, fatherly knowledge” by God. Divine love for us before our creation is why He chose us. I Howard Marshall (*I Peter*, 31) notes: “This does not mean that God chose them because He knew in advance that they would respond to his call, but simply that God took the initiative and chose them before they had done anything to deserve it.”

The means of the temporal expression of divine love in choosing us to be

His is through “the sanctifying work of the Spirit.” “To sanctify” means to set apart or for an end or goal (the goal being obedience to Christ). This suggests what we have here is that “sanctification” is being used for regeneration or salvation. By obedience (faith, trust) we become attached to Christ. The sequence is important.

From the very beginning God has given us His Spirit whose current function is to promote moral godliness and rectitude. We are a people called to holiness of conduct. Paul in II Thessalonians 2:13 uses a similar phrase (“... God chose you as the first fruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.”

The purpose of God’s action for us is stated as two-fold. First, God’s purpose is to bring us into conformity to His son, Jesus Christ. Second, God’s purpose for these “alien residents” is to work in them to induce daily obedience.

The “sprinkling with His blood” is a difficult phrase to understand. Since the order of divine actions is being set forth, it likely does not refer to the divine act of forgiveness since Peter places it after the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Clearly the reference is to an OT ritual and the most likely context is the purification ritual after cleansing from leprosy (sprinkling a person with blood only occurred on two other occasions, the inauguration of the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai and priestly ordination; neither seems to fit the context here). Sprinkling of a leper speaks on cleansing from defilement and restoration to the community. Thus, the consequence of divine salvation for the recipient is devotion to God and continual restoration to God in fellowship. Sprinkling would be then a reminder of cleansing.

Here is the definition of a Christian in a nutshell. It is one who has been chosen of God based on His discriminatory love and fatherly care through the ministry of God’s Spirit resulting in our devotion to God and cleansing from sin’s defiling effects.

The fact about the recipients: “chosen aliens”

The means of God’s choice:

The Father’s love (foreknowledge)

The Spirit’s regeneration (sanctification)

The end: obedience to Christ (see Acts 6:7 for a similar expression of faith/trust in Christ)

The result: cleansing through Christ's sacrifice

What should not be missed in the introduction is Peter's emphasis on the trinity of God, three persons: God the chooser, conformity to the Son the cleanser, and the Spirit the motivator/sanctifier.

C. The blessing, v. 2d

The salutation is a prayer that grace and peace would abound. Grace speaks of the free and unmerited disclosure of the love of God; peace is the consequence of the experience of it. This is clearly what these distressed people need.

II. The Possessions of the Believer in Christ, 1:3-12

Peter's point in the letter seems to be that endurance in trials is a product of one's focus. If you focus on your loss, the pain will seem unending; if you focus on what you have in Christ, it will lighten the burden considerably. Thinking of the grace and kindness of God lifts burdens!

In many ways this is a typical first century letter in structure. Beginning with a greeting (vv. 1-2), followed by a statement of blessing (vv. 3-12), a pattern found in II Cor. 1:3 and Eph. 1:3 in Paul's letters, for example.

A. Our present possessions, vv. 3-5

This is a praise section. The apostle lists the things that we should joyfully recognize that God has granted to us.

1. The blessing of salvation, a living hope, v.3

This hope is a gift ("he gave us," "caused us to be born again") and it is assured by Christ's resurrection. Because Christ conquered death, as evidenced by His resurrection, we have a living hope! His resurrection demonstrates that He has conquered death for us! Hope is one of the most characteristic words in I Peter (1:3, 13, 21; 3:5, 15); he uses it as a synonym for faith (3:5, 15). Looking forward to what God has for us in the future gives balance and relief in today's fears, toils, and tears.

Wuest's translation of the verse is wonderful: *"Let the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be eulogized, who impelled by His abundant mercy begat us anew so that we have a lively hope, this*

lively hope having been made actual through the intermediate instrumentality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ out from among those who are dead.”

2. The blessing of a secure inheritance, v. 4a

This hope cannot be lost or diminished; in fact, it is reserved for us (literally, “it is garrisoned about”). For the OT saint, the fruition of hope was the Promised Land, Canaan; for the NT saint, it is heaven. Canaan was a shadowed picture of a promise fulfilled to us in heaven.

Three adjectives describe our inheritance:

- It is imperishable (not subject to decay, not subject to diminishment).
- It is holy or pure (not subject to the staining power of sin containing nothing unworthy of God’s complete approval).
- It cannot be lost or forfeited (the verb is a perfect in tense, passive in voice, meaning that God has done this for us).

3. The blessing of surety, vv. 4b-5

This hope, this inheritance, is reserved in heaven for us. Heaven cannot be assaulted, and its treasures carried away by a tyrant for God alone guards it for us.

a. The Statement, v. 4b

The verb tense is a present participle (“being kept”) meaning that God is constantly watching over us with a view to making sure we obtain His inheritance (v. 1).

b. The means, v. 5a

The objective means of our surety of inheritance is God’s power; the subjective means of God’s constant protection is our faith in Him, our clinging to Him.

c. The end, v. 5b

God is guarding our inheritance, preserving its existence, until He gives it to each of us when He returns to establish the new heavens and earth (the garden that was defaced in Gen. 3). The “last day” is at the end of time as we know it.

B. Our present posture, vv. 6-9

It seems that what Peter is saying is that delight and disappointment is the lot of all “resident aliens.” The comfort and delight that we have in God’s provisions (our future inheritance and current protection) are

designed to help us through the trials of life. The spiritual provisions of God far exceed the temporal circumstances we find. We should view the temporal and transitory through the enduring and permanent.

Peter moves from ecstasy to agony. How do trials function in our lives? They lift our eyes to a greater reality than the mundane; they strengthen our character; and they bring to us the praise of God.

1. The consequence of God's provisions: joy, v. 6a

"In this" mostly likely refers to the blessings of vv. 3-5. In the NT, "joy" focuses on delight because of what God has done for us. Mary in the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-47) says, "...my spirit rejoices in God my savior." This phrase is paralleled with "my soul magnifies..." The issue here is focus!

2. The reality of present circumstances: trials, v.6b-9

a. The fact, v.6b

"Though" alerts us to the other side of all our lives, suffering. It suggests the emotional pain of grief, not physical pain.

"If is it necessary" indicates that a purpose lies behind it; it is not merely happen-stance; it is part of the divine will for us (though we may never understand it). "For a little while" suggests that it will not always be the case for us. Peter does not describe the nature of the trials; it is purposely kept vague though it has to do with emotional grief.

b. The fruit: character development, v.7

Peter explains the "if necessary" of the previous verse by citing the purpose of suffering (there are others that can be derived from the Scriptures elsewhere). There is no joy in suffering itself and we should not derive some morbid pleasure in it. However, comfort can be ours in it when we acknowledge the hand from which it comes and the consequence of it; it is character building like nothing else.

1) The benefit, v. 7a

Trials demonstrate the genuineness of our confession of Christ; it shows what we truly value. The faith of these people is not in doubt (v. 5); trials demonstrate what is already a reality.

The word “trial” can also be translated by the term “temptation.” The origin and motive distinguish the way to translate the common noun. Trials come from God with a view to our spiritual benefit (James 1:2-12); temptation comes from the devil with a view to our destruction (James 1:13-16).

2) An illustration, v. 7b

Just as gold is refined by fire, the impurities removed through heating the metal, so trials refine us. Gold is a precious metal and subject to deterioration; faith is far more precious and permanent (lesser-to-greater comparison). Like gold, faith is impure; trials serve as a refining process in both cases.

3) The end, v. 7c

Imagine the unimaginable. The product of faithful endurance through trials, with the result of its fruit in spiritual maturity, will result in the praise of God when Christ returns for His people in the Last Day (the context is one of encouragement to endure trials as being from God for our good). Again, the purpose of trials may not be known until God praises us!

c. The current perspective, vv. 8-9

1) Delight in God, v. 8

Note the words that describe the delight: “love,” “believe,” “rejoice,” and “joy.” Here is faith expressed, “... having not seen Him you love Him.” Peter is saying that we not only find solace in difficulty in our future hope, but also in our daily relationship with Christ. Both foci should be important to us, neither have to do with life-management outcomes.

2) Surety in God, v. 9

The reason for these attitudes is that trials function to bring us to the realization of the blessings of our salvation. The purifying consequence of trials causes us to look beyond the temporal to the experience of our redemption and the wonder of life in Christ.

C. The present privilege, vv. 10-12

The connection with the subject of salvation is v. 9. Hence, these verses are an expansion of salvation as it relates to the OT and to the NT believers’ greater privilege of insight.

Our comfort amid discomfoting circumstances, in part, is to remember what a wonderful privilege we have in our increased understanding of God's progressive revelation to His people. What the prophets could not grasp, and what angels can only ponder, we know more clearly. In Jesus, you have both a dying redeemer and a triumphant king!

1. An understanding the prophets sought, vv. 10-12a

The OT prophets (the reference is to the prophets as a collectivity) expended great intellectual energy to understand the meaning of their own writings seeking to understand the fulfillment of God's promises.

a. The quest, v. 10

Despite the diligent search of the Scriptures, the prophets could not understand how the promised one could combine the offices of prophet, priest, and king.

b. The conundrum, v. 11

Though the prophets possessed the Holy Spirit, they "hit a brick wall," so to speak, in seeing how the Christ could suffer and reign (they did not grasp an incarnation, a crucifixion, a resurrection, and an enthronement, a century's lapse of time, and then His return to consummate His kingdom).

With the advantage of the NT Scriptures, you and I can understand what the prophets found perplexing. The promised deliverer is more than a political deliverer who offered a physical kingdom of peace and protection from aggressors; He is a redeemer. The kingdom would come through a sacrificing savior, a sacrificial lamb, not a king initially. This promised redeemer would first be the greatest of all the prophets announcing His claims and promises, then a dying lamb-priest (a fulfillment of all the Passovers, the monthly and daily sacrifices) offering Himself for us (dying in our place to satisfy), and now the king through His resurrection-enthronement (Dan. 7:13-14) who rules through His Church now in His absence and in the future over a spotless kingdom forever with us as His inheritance forever. The NT tells us the meaning and message of the Hebrew Scriptures!

c. The realization, v. 12a

The prophets realized that the fulfillment of the things they could not understand would be realized later. The time arrived after

Christ's resurrection.

2. A reality the angels longed to see, v. 12b

The angelic hosts of head are not the recipients of salvation, but they have a deep interest (literally, "a passionate desire") in understanding it. To do so, along with the prophets, they must understand the church.

Applications

1. It is important for all of us in sad and distressing times, moments when we feel entirely abandoned and empty, to turn from our circumstances and think of our privileges having been brought into the family of God
2. Because God has granted His gifts of life and comfort to us, they cannot be taken from us, lost, or forfeited (we are not more powerful than God). God promises to bring us securely into the eternal experience of them. He will protect us until we receive our final deliverance; we need not despair!
3. What a great privilege and honor it is to be a child of God. Think of it; God's love has no beginning, and will have no end, because God's actions are a fruit of His character (truth, power, love, omniscience, eternal).
4. Think of the great privilege we have of knowing the intensions of God more clearly than any OT prophet, as well as the angelic host. You and I should "count our many blessings.