

EYES ON THE PRIZE, 1PET.1:3-12

A New Hope #2

◆**Intro:** When I was in seminary, many moons ago, two of my friends invited me to run a 25K with them. A month or so before hand we started running after classes for about an hour at a time. Having played four years of soccer in college, running in a straight line with no ball was foreign to me. They gave me pointers along the way: remember to eat lots of pasta; whatever you do don't stop because you won't want to start up again; pick a person as a goal and chase him. If you pass him, pick another. These were good pointers. I picked my buddy Dan, and chased him through Grand Rapids for 2 hours and 5 minutes I will never forget. I'll tell you this; if Dan hadn't been running in front of me as my goal, I don't think I'd have ever finished.

◆And this is what Peter is talking about in our text. Peter is reminding Christians, scattered about in the Roman Empire, just as we are scattered about the entire globe today, that we are pilgrims on a journey to something better. Keep that something better in mind. There's a lot more than pie in this sky! It is an entire, eternal festival! If you keep your eyes on the prize of Christ, you can endure terrible things and yet be joyful! First let's talk about the prize.

◆**1. Salvation: If you belong to Christ, the goal of your faith is guaranteed and on the way.** You know how when you order something on the internet and you get an email saying, "Your package has shipped."? You have that sense of anticipation. It's exciting to get a package in the mail. Well,

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when you believe in Jesus as savior, your package has shipped. It's like a massive heavenly machine has kicked in and giant gears are set into motion that won't stop until the final product is delivered. In this case the product is your salvation.

◆v4-5 tells us that our inheritance is "kept in heaven", "until the coming of salvation." Future.

◆v9 explicitly states that the goal of our faith is "the salvation of your souls." Present; "you are receiving".

◆A. Salvation is the goal of our faith and it is multifaceted. It's got a **past** tense: when you believed Jesus is the God he claims to be, you entered into your salvation, which as we saw last week, was also planned in the heart of God long before you believed, before he made planets! Salvation's got a **present** tense: we are being saved more and more in this life as the Holy Spirit convicts our hearts, and we turn more parts of our lives over to God. We call that sanctification, and God promises to make it happen. And salvation has a **future** tense too: it will be complete when Christ returns to Earth.

◆This means we are not all that we shall be. Remember that anticipation that your package is coming? Well something better is coming! Salvation is here, AND salvation is coming. We, and everything else under Christ will be made better. For instance, the created realm will be fully restored as well.

◆*Romans 8:19-21 For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are.*

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Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.

◆ You can see the "salvation of your soul" includes a great deal more than not receiving punishment you deserve. It includes what we don't deserve; a New Heavens and a New Earth, which is no small deal. A pollution free universe. And also new bodies that don't get arthritis!

◆ *Romans 8:23-24 we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved*

◆ Salvation also includes power over evil in this life; personality change you could never master on your own.

◆ (My Grandfather was a kind of crusty, aggressive person when I was young. But he got saved in his later years, even though he went to church his whole life, and I can tell you honestly, he became different from what we had ever known him before. In a good way.)

◆ Salvation includes the ability to find joy in the midst of bad circumstances! Who can create that on their own?

◆ *v6 in this your greatly rejoice (even though for a while you...suffer*

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◆v8 *you are filled with inexpressible and glorious joy... (even though you don't see Jesus.)*

◆This all indicates that what you may be going through right now is not the whole picture. Even our troubles are mere episodes in a most magnificent adventure, because of salvation through Jesus.

◆B. Here's a corollary to what we've just seen: salvation in Christ is guaranteed. That is, Christians don't lose their salvation. Their salvation doesn't have a half-life. It doesn't wear out, or go out of style like shirt collars, or jeans without holes.

◆v4 says it can never perish, spoil or fade. It says it is "kept" in heaven, safe like your money in the vault.

◆"Well", you say, "that's all just grand that there's this great inheritance in heaven, but what if I louse it up and don't make it to the reading of the will? Huh?" That's just crazy talk!

◆v5 says your inheritance isn't the only thing preserved. So are you! You are "*shielded by God's power until...*" that day.

◆Listen, God does not lose his sheep. It's not possible. It might look like it sometimes but it's not the case. Jesus said nothing can snatch his sheep out of his hands or the Father's hands. We call that perseverance of the saints. (Jn.10)

◆You may face all kinds of difficulties in life. In fact you will. More on that in a moment. But salvation is an established guarantee to everyone who believes in Jesus. Salvation means you become a spiritual billionaire in Christ.

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◆2. Suffering. It can make my faith in God's guarantee

even stronger. The fact is, you discover the *reality* of your faith in God when you suffer. Until times get hard, we are not so sure if we are just "fair-weather" Christians, or "I'm-totally-sold-for-real" Christians. Surety is a by-product of suffering. Let me share with you a story. Chinese Christian leader Brother Zhong tells this story:

I was attending a training course for my house church network's council members and youth leaders. The Public Security Bureau (PSB) raided us the first day. All the leaders were arrested.

The prison authorities shaved our heads and interrogated us. We were warned that the hardened inmates would beat us. So with much trepidation, another brother and I entered our cell.

We were greeted by the sight of 16 other inmates, lined up in two rows and thumping their fists. My heart beat rapidly as I sent prayers up to God.

The leader of the gang asked, "Why are you here?"

"Because we are Christians," I replied.

"You don't beat people up?"

"No," I assured him.

"Do you sing?"

"Yes," I answered.

The leader ordered me to sing a song. I wept as I sang. The Holy Spirit moved in our midst, and by the time I finished singing, every prisoner was also in tears. To my shock, the gang leader then asked to hear the gospel.

After that, my cellmates hungered to hear the gospel every day. One Sunday, we held a worship service. The prison guard demanded to know who was behind it. He threatened to punish everyone if no one spoke up. I stood up and confessed.

I was forced to remove my clothes and stand at an inclined angle to the wall. The gang leader couldn't bear it anymore. He asked to be

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punished with me. All the others volunteered to do the same. The infuriated guard stormed out. I was moved by my cellmates' act. One of them, who had been there for three years, became a believer that day.

◆ Now I ask you, do you think brother Zhong wonders if Jesus is real? But some of us still wonder. Are you as sure of the reality of God as Zhong is? You know, maybe we shouldn't always pray that everything goes well, and our kids don't suffer, and that God will keep us from all danger, etc. Maybe we should pray that God makes us strong for the sufferings we will have. We think we will be able to pursue God better without danger or hardship. And yet it works in just the opposite way. Nothing is more difficult than to grow spiritually when comfortable. That's why the believer Alexander Solzhenitsyn's reaction to his exile to the Soviet labor camp was to bless it, because it was there that he discovered that "the meaning of earthly existence lies not, as we have grown used to thinking, in prospering, but in the development of the soul."

◆ **B.** By the way, suffering is a God-ordained path for the display of his glory and goodness, and also our reception of his glory.

◆ *"We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," (Acts 14:22).*

◆ *In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, (2 Timothy 3:12).*

◆ *For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him, (Philippians 1:29).*

◆ Granted? Really? And what about this?

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◆ Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow-servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

(Revelation 6:11).

◆ There is a quota of martyrs?! Why must suffering be part of following God in this world? Think about it. If you have no suffering for being a Christian you must not be much of a threat in a world that hates God. Like any smart general, Satan sends reinforcements to the front line where there's battle going on. He needn't be concerned about coffee shop Christians who say the right thing when there's a preacher in the room, but otherwise have pretty much nothing to do with God daily. A fallen, sinful world is dead set against God and his ways! As your love for God grows you will by necessity become at odds with much in this world!

◆ Notice I didn't say "you must by necessity become miserable as a Christian..." Sourness and misery are not requirements for building Jesus kingdom. Steadfast joy in the midst of suffering is Peter's whole theme!

◆ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. (Acts 5:41, NIV).

◆ Isn't that intriguing? "Yay! We got beat up!" No. It's "Yay, they can tell we really are united with Jesus!" See, your struggles indicate that GOD is developing you. God won't waste a difficulty, and if he lets you have one, it's for your eventual full salvation.

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◆**3. Solidity.** Ok, finally, what is it that makes Christians believe that all this future, and coming grace of God (salvation) is reliable? Here it is: **the resurrection of Jesus is the foundation of our hope (v3)**. Paul preached it (1Cor.15). If this Jewish man, approximately 2022 years ago did not get out of his coffin and walk around again, Christianity is a joke. But there is no other explanation for a bunch of scared rabbi-disciples hiding from the Romans one day, but the next preaching Jesus' resurrection everywhere. There is no other explanation for the fact that Emperor Trajan in AD98 made it legal to kill Christians in the Roman Empire, but by 313AD, with the Edict of Milan, Christianity had turned the Roman Empire on its head, with the emperor a believer!

◆The resurrected Christ was seen by Peter and the other disciples, actually about 500 other people. They were so amazed and convinced of it's truth, that they all went to death claiming it was true. Would you die for something you knew wasn't true? Now what is equally astonishing is verse 8: those believers in Turkey had never seen Jesus! But they believed too. They had experienced Jesus because Jesus is a living person. That's why Peter calls ours a "living hope." (v3) People like you and me still believe though we do not see. We pray to this Jesus and receive answers. Our hearts feel his forgiveness. His Holy Spirit changes people we know into different persons. It all gives credence to

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the reality of Jesus being alive. No other religion has ever claimed this, or had evidence to back it up!

◆**Conclusion:** salvation/ suffering/ solidity. Tim Keller:

“Imagine you're a billionaire, and you have three ten-dollar bills in your wallet. You get out of a cab, and you hand the driver one of the bills for an eight-dollar fare. Later in the day you look in and find out there's only one ten-dollar bill there, and you say, "Either I dropped a ten-dollar bill somewhere, or I gave the taxi driver two bills.” What are you going to do? Are you going to get all upset? Are you going to the police and demand they search the city for the cabdriver? No, you are going to shrug. You're a billionaire. You lost ten dollars. So what? You are too rich to be concerned about that kind of loss.

◆This week, somebody criticized you. Something you bought or invested in turned out to be less valuable than you thought. Something you wanted to happen didn't go the way you wanted it to—these are real losses. But what are you going to do, if you're a Christian? Will this setback disrupt your contentment with life? Will you shake your fist at God? Toss and turn at night? If so, I submit that it's because you don't know how truly rich you are. If you're that upset about your status with other people, if you're constantly lashing out at people for hurting your feelings, you might call it a lack of self-control or a lack of self-esteem, and it is. But more fundamentally, you have totally lost touch with your

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identity. As a Christian, you're a spiritual billionaire" and [you don't have to be] wringing your hands over ten dollars.

◆With your eyes on this prize of Christ, you can endure all things and still have joy. (read text again, or song Come Rejoice.)