

July 19th, 64A.D, the day Rome burned to the ground. Nero sat in his Tower of Maccenas to enjoy the fire he himself had set. As the fire spread it destroyed the Temple of Luna, the Ara Maxima, the great altar, the Temple of Jupiter Stator, the Shrine of Vesta, and all the religious elements that had seemingly sustained Roman culture. The loss of their gods grew in them a bitter resentment that was deep and deadly; it left them searching for victims to blame and squalor. Nero, being a brilliant yet brutal leader, knew that he couldn't have the people's ill affections delivered back on him, so he targeted and framed a group called "Christians."

The Christians were already a natural target for Roman hatred. They were associated with the Jews, and in knowing that the Roman people were anti-Semitic, Nero knew that most of Rome already hated the Christians simply by law of association. The Christians would not participate in emperor worship and observed their own customs such as the Lord's Supper. The Christians not only observed different customs in their religion, but sacred things such as communion were closed to those who did not believe. Many of the Roman people responded defensively toward the Christian's exclusivity in this practice. Amplifying and accompanying these things, was the fact that many Roman wives were becoming Christians, and their independent action apart from their husbands was seen as insubordination and intentional rebellion in the home. To top it off, the Christians taught about the "Day of the Lord" as described in I Thessalonians, which described a day when the world would end under the judgment of God in none other than vast flames and torment.

Needless to say, when Nero's accusation went forth and he began lighting Christians on fire at his garden parties, broiling them, racking and searing them, and being entertained in their deaths, sadly no one questioned his story, or his actions. It is into this world of brutality, accusation, and falsity that we find the letter of I Peter being penned. Although the burden of the times were tough, Peter begins his book by giving believers hope and a promise amidst their current fight and persecution. This letter went out to the elect—Christians—in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. They were the *Diaspora*, or the scattered. All throughout the region and throughout the empire of Rome, there were Christians living in specific areas. By the focus of this letter, and Peter's initial comment we can assume that all of them were experiencing suffering in various degrees.

Today this letter goes out to believers in the United States, Canada, South America, Africa and the rest of the world. This letter addresses many of the same issues in the human heart as it did in ages past. This letter is going to assume something about YOU! It's going to assume that you have suffering and trial and that to various degrees, this letter is going to assume that you can relate to the Christians from the ancient past. You may be asking the same questions that Peter addresses here: How do we/you respond to a time of suffering and trial? How can you/we continue to worship God in the midst of suffering and devastation?

Your suffering may not be to the severity of the aforementioned, but you are suffering. You may be having lapses in doubt caused by looming unanswered questions. You may be enduring abuse. You may be struggling to beat an addiction, or you may even be struggling to survive your current situation.

Perhaps your suffering is not drastic. Perhaps you're just struggling to live righteously. You're struggling to be thankful, servant-hearted or compassionate. Maybe you have currently lost ground on a dream you've been pursuing, or maybe you have experienced a setback. Perhaps the anxiety, stress, worry, or fears of life have simply begun to overcome you. Everyone has bills to pay; everyone has to feed themselves and their family. Everyone has immediate needs and hopes for the future. This book addresses you. It is going to come from God's Word. It's going to come to us by way of the authority of Peter. Peter is someone we can trust. He's someone who gets his authority and words from the Holy Spirit Himself. Peter, by the Spirit's power, is going to take the helm in this letter. Through its pages the Holy Spirit is going to lead us to God's grace amidst life's daunting journey. If we heed his instruction—God's Word—we'll get solid answers and resolve in our battle with suffering—whatever the ailment may be.

"Peter an apostle of Jesus Christ." Peter speaks with the weight of an Apostle. To be an apostle meant that you were one who witnessed Christ with your own eyes. Peter had seen Jesus before His death. He had witnessed the healed piercings after Jesus rose again. He had witnessed Jesus, as Jesus healed his (Peter) own Mother-in-law (Mt. 8:14). He had seen Jesus exalted on the Mount of Transfiguration (Lk. 9:28-36), and Peter was among the Core disciples that Jesus brought along with Him to witness a little girl being raised from the dead (Mk. 5:37). We need to remember that Peter was not merely a spectator at these miracles, but he was personally chosen and asked to be there by the hand and voice of Jesus. Jesus acknowledged Peter as the first of the apostles, or the "first among equals"—meaning all the disciples had authority, but Peter was

Jn. 6:1), Peter is always named first. Peter was chosen to have seniority. Although we'll see that Peter was far from refined in his leadership, Jesus still chose to use him in extraordinary ways.

Peter from the beginning was designated as a leader. In this letter, we see him leading through the initiative of writing the Scriptures—which in fact, is another identification of an apostle. An apostle did not write their own words, but were the designated vessels by which God revealed His Word to man. We see him in this letter, and in the GOSPELS, not only leading and writing Scripture, but building the church and acting as an elder, an overseer, and a head missionary (Gal. 2:7-8, Mt. 16:18). Peter was the man to reach the Jewish people. In his unadulterated fearlessness and “big-mouthed” nature, Peter was the man for the job. Peter was a man who for better or for worse got people's attention. If this is not enough to establish the reliability of Peter, we see him in Acts 1:15 choosing the New Disciple to replace Judas after his betrayal of Jesus, and in Acts 2:14-17, the greatest revival in history—the church—started with Peter's Holy Spirit filled message.

Take a look at this man. Think about the things he must have seen. He had walked with Jesus. He even had the opportunity to be yelled at by Jesus...I'd take it! Peter was privy to miracles you or I could only imagine witnessing. Have you ever had someone get healed simply by having your shadow pass over them? Peter did. Peter must have been something special. He must have been one of those super peasant fisherman guys who merely moonlighted as such. Really he must have been much more spectacular than you or I. Right?

Is this who Peter was? He exemplified amazing leadership, but is there anything that sets Peter apart from you or I?

If we remember, Peter not only exhibited authority, expertise, and prowess, but throughout Scripture he also models a constant example of suffering, humility, and experience. He's not writing this letter as one who is going to beat you over the head with truth. Peter had suffered. He'd denied Jesus three times (Mk. 14:27-31), he'd known the dark days between Jesus' death and resurrection—he possibly knew a depth of failure and despondency that you nor I will ever know. He knew what it was like to walk in the joy of living with Jesus and then lose Jesus without knowing that there was a hope that Jesus would come back to life. Peter knew depression. Peter knew suffering, and Peter died a martyr's death—requesting to be crucified upside down; not feeling he deserved to die in the like manner of Jesus. He went through the emotional roller coaster of the cross, but not only did it not stop him, it motivated Him to share with the world the good news of Jesus, even to the point of brutal death.

Peter shows us in many other places where he failed, like when he fell asleep in the Garden when he should have been watching in prayer with Jesus (Mt. 26:40-41). Later, after he'd been anointed by the Holy Spirit, and given boldness to reach the lost, he was found in Galatians 2:11-21 being confronted by Paul because he again resolved to cowardice and was scared to stand up for Jesus in fear of rejection, retaliation, or argument.

As we read this letter, and take in the insights that it's going to bring, we have to first identify with Peter. Does any of his experience, personality, or situational encounters sound like yours? Even though Jesus exalted Peter to high places of authority, try to find yourself relating to this man in his idiosyncrasies, his frailties, and his humanity.

Peter was a man of the ordinary...just like you.

&

Peter was chosen for the extraordinary...just like you.

Peter goes on to encourage the suffering believers in the various regions around Rome. Peter doesn't state his authority in an arrogant attempt to exert his influence. He states his authority as one who cares about those who are hurting. He wants to assert His pastoral heart, and tell people that he is “chief among the hurting.” Peter is sharing with them, as one who knows their pain. He wanted them to hear the message he was about to present in this letter. By stating his apostolic position first, he got their attention. He then encourages them by reminding them that they too had been “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.” Peter initiates the conversation by reminding the scattered Christians of a powerful truth. It's a powerful opening truth, yet it is filled with much hope and much controversy. Peter uses Biblical language that many even today have trouble understanding. My question is this, when it comes to Peter's encouragement and

Introduction, “Why start here?” Why does he use this hook in order to get the attention of his listeners? Why does he use this opening line?

We start with God’s choosing and foreknowledge. God’s choosing—election—and God’s foreknowledge have been highly debated and exhausted to the point of division throughout history and even in our present time. The gifted Bible teacher, scholar, A.W. Pink who, once began a sermon by saying this, “I am going to speak tonight on one of the most hated doctrines of the Bible, namely that of God’s sovereign election.” He was right. It is a hated doctrine. These hated words have come to be associated with debate, hostility, and disagreement. However, in Peter’s mind, these concepts were to ring loudly and joyously in a believer’s ear, as a beautiful anthem of freedom sounded in the midst of suffering. These two terms can ease the heart in the sweetest of ways. Peter doesn’t begin his encouragement with these words to the suffering *Diaspora* in order to evoke and spark more debate and division, thus causing more suffering from within the Christian ranks. He cited them first because he knew that these two terms have the potential, when understood correctly, to bring the most joy to the Christian. Like the choosing and special rendering of the OFFICES of APOSTLE, the believer has been chosen and elected of God as well—unto salvation and good works. I would like to debate and show how understanding this very fact, can empower the believer through any kind of trial or trouble.

The word elect is synonymous with saved, or born again—Christian. It is as simple as that. This is how “elect” is used in Scripture. Peter, in his greeting, is extending a hand of brotherhood to those who believe. His desire is to create community, and to address the family in the kind of way that a Father would. But, for some reason when the human mind hears this word—election—it does not evoke feelings of community and belonging, but often an instant battle begins to rage between our heavenly mind and flesh. Our minds are fallen and we do not think pure thoughts, so we instantly combat this idea that God could or would choose some to be saved and not others. In doing this, we miss the beauty and magnificent joy in knowing this part of the story of God—He chose us.

We are finite in our understanding, so we will do anything to try and philosophize away this reality to prove that there is a better way. Whatever rationale it is that we use to explain this doctrine away, it has one common root, and that’s pride. We are merit-mongers on a trip against grace. It’s hard for us to accept that we were gifted something as big as salvation without our involvement or abilities bringing about God’s favor. But the truth still holds, that without God’s grace our hostile nature is constantly battling to work against God. We want the credit for what we do, and we want our works to be noticed over the overarching work of God. We are perpetual Tower of Babel builders, and we constantly are reverting back to their mentality—“Let them look at us, and see how great we are.” Our pride is the stench in God’s nose, and it’s what drives us to erect our brilliance to the heights of the tallest tower, so that everyone can see what we’ve accomplished.

In our fallen state, we are desperate to wrap our identity up in our will. Satan grabbed us with his subtle hand in the garden when he deceived us into thinking that God doesn’t know what He’s doing, and we’ve carried this accusation with us into the present. Satan’s seed was buried deep in us. It wove in us a deep distrust in God’s ways, and it caused us to question His goodness. When we approach Scripture, and anything that it teaches, we have to be aware of our sinful flesh and bias. Our tendencies and flesh are warring with God. We’re constantly going to try and subtly assert ourselves in the places of His glory and mystery because this is what we fell into at the fall. We have to be aware of our tendency to want to teach Scripture, rather than letting it teach us.

Our fallen intellect instantly rears its ugly head at the doctrine of election. I’ll admit that it’s taken me many years to come to peace with this aspect of God’s word. But for a long time, my argument was; “well if God doesn’t elect some, He’s unfair—He plays favorites.” In my way of thinking, I reasoned that if God was unfair in how He handled election and the salvation of believers then there would probably be many other facets of God’s character that also needed to be called into question. This led me to many years of doubt, perpetual ups and downs in my faith, and constant joylessness. If like me, you/we fall into a place of questioning one attribute of God, like His justice, we ultimately fall into battle with ourselves, with the history of the Bible, and with the character of God.

God's election is clear throughout Scripture. It's a historical fact presented about humanity in Scripture, and election itself points to some of God's most poignant attributes. Psalm 135 verse 4 says, "For the Lord has chosen Jacob for Himself, He has chosen Israel for His own possession." God elected and chose Israel. His election was Geographical in nature in the choosing of the Promised Land, and Theocratic as He took the lead of the Jews. He also made vocational/job elections such as choosing the tribe of Levi to play the priestly role in the temple.

Even further back than this we again see election—in the Garden. Adam and Eve sinned against God and were cast out of the garden. But were Adam and Eve the only ones that sinned in the garden? No. The serpent did as well. However, God promised that a "seed" of redemption would come through the women in the person of Jesus and would provide salvation for Adam's line. Although sin was sin in the garden, God didn't choose or plan a road of redemption for Satan. Why? Was this unjust? Satan was God's creation as well. He was once a beautiful and perfect angel that was filled with purpose and design. Why didn't God restore him after his rebellion? Could He have done it? Yes. But why didn't He? It was and is Election. Sovereignly, God demonstrated from the beginning His ability to choose some and not others.

This election then follows suit in the New Testament as we look at John 17:9, Jesus shows us that he believes in election; "I do not ask on behalf of the world but of those whom You have"...what?... "given Me." In the very words of Jesus, we see the precious doctrine of His sovereign choice. Again when Jesus prays in Matthew 11:24-26 he prays; "I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because **you have hidden** these things from the wise and learned, and **revealed them to little children**. Yes, Father, for **this is what you were pleased to do**." When we look at the heavenly language of Jesus in His prayers, we see that election is heavily woven in. Jesus did not expect or even try to reach everyone; He did as His Father instructed. He simply preached the good news and taught the truth. In doing this He knew that the Father's hand would use wisdom in awakening some hearts and not others. In this statement in Matthew, Jesus is simply observing the evidence. He's seeing that some are believing and some are not, and instead of chalking it up to his insufficiency as a preacher, or doubling His efforts to chase after the rebellious, He simply identifies that the truth has been spoken clearly and plainly and it has accomplished its work.

In the early church, this doctrine continued, for the disciples started to preach, and in Acts 13:48 "as many as had been appointed to eternal life...what?...believed." ISRAEL WAS ELECT...IS THE CHURCH. YES. Not all were or are appointed, but the one's who were, were brought into salvation. John 8:47 clearly tells us that those who hear are the ones that belong to God.

This does not negate that of John 3:16 where God "loves the whole world." It simply makes a distinction about the nature of God's atonement and love. I Timothy 4:10 gives us a key; "Christ is the Savior of **ALL**, but **especially** for those who believe." Please be careful not to misinterpret this. God died in His love for the **WHOLE** world, but His blood purchased the belief of the select few who are called His sheep—his church—his elect. This is the hope for you, and the church, because if you believe in Jesus today you are elect. There's a security in your believing, and as we're going to continue to see, this is what Peter's trying to communicate. It's our security before God—our election—that produces confidence and joy through any trial. If we dispute this, then there are implications for us. God hasn't changed His plan. God hasn't changed His method.

If God changed His plan, then we have grounds to again question His character. We have to question His immutability (unchangeable nature), we have to question His Omniscience (Ability to know all things), and we have to call into question His Holiness (Set Apart). If God truly made some errors in language, then He loses His Holiness, and He becomes just like us. If God is not set apart from humans and is not Holy and Perfect, than neither can our hope be perfect. This would make our hope in times of suffering null and void. Jesus is the object of our faith. If our object becomes corruptible like every other object in the world, than this destroys our hope. This makes Christianity worse than that of other religions, for at least other religions state to some effect their shortcomings, but in this case, our God would have flat out lied.

If God lies about His ability to freely choose and save us, and he lies about our inability to save ourselves, then we have grounds to earn our way to Savior-like status just like what is presented in many other world religions. By this reasoning we diminish God to the very level of a human. He can't save us, and now

He's a liar, so He can't save Himself. This would in turn, leave Him in need of a Savior, and He would be waiting for the Messiah right along with us.

The logical conclusions of throwing out election, in light of what Scripture teaches, can produce staggering results. But Peter is here to remind us, and defend the truthfulness of God's character to us. Peter knew this choosing. He knew this grace and rescue. He knew that election was a mirror image that reflected back to all of humanity the nature and character of God.

Peter, who was once known as Cephas was saved and given a new name. We see clearly that when Simon was being an idiot or he was caught in disobedience (Mk. 14:37), God would identify him by his earthly brand—Cephas. Jesus constantly switched back and forth from referring to Peter as Cephas and then Peter. Why? It was to demonstrate in Peter's life, what is true for us. The OLD has gone and the new has come. Your old nature (flesh) is referred to when you're acting disobediently—sinner. Paul however, refers to you as "saint" by the work of Jesus. A new name, and a new nature were given to you through the choice of God.

But when did this happen? When did our choosing take place? Ephesians 4:1-3 tells us that "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him, **before the foundations** of the world." II Thessalonians says we should always give thanks because God has chosen **us from the beginning**. It is in this moment that we move past God's choice in electing us to His means by which He used to choose us before the creation of the world; His foreknowledge.

Many people will say that, "we were chosen because God knew beforehand that we would choose Him." Have you ever heard that? This is an opinion I used to hold before I began to be challenged in my view by others who were more Biblically astute. For if we are correct in assuming that God looked down the hallway of time and saw all the perpetual doors of choice that we would open or not open, and that He saw the choices that you or I would make or not make etc., and in response He simply wrote it down beforehand—thus choosing who would CHOOSE Him—this would first make man sovereign. Right? This would totally negate John 15:16 where Jesus said, "You have not chosen Me, but"...what?... "I have chosen you." Secondly, this view also gives man the credit for his salvation in some way and allows him to share the glory with God. And if God were to in some way share His glory with us—by glory here I'm referring to His absolute claim in all things—than we would have to accept that God is sadistic and intentionally hurtful...

God's glory is what we were made to know and live for!!! God created our heart to be filled and satisfied solely in our making much of Him. If He were to let anyone else get the final say or make his or her reputation or grandeur final or supreme, He would by definition be giving us over to what is imperfect. Thus depriving us of perfection. In essence, He would be hating us and intentionally depriving us of our highest good.

The third problem with this view of foreknowledge, is that it assumes that man can seek after God out of his/her own volition or self-willing. Romans 3:11 clearly tells us that without God's grace and His first initiation to give us the faith to even WANT Him, we are lost and incapable of making ourselves alive. We are in essence bound to be DEAD in our transgressions. And dead people can't choose.

Fourthly, the preceding view makes salvation a result of a human work, and thus gives us reason to boast. This negates that we are saved by grace through faith alone, so that no man can boast. And fifthly, this perspective makes God a victim of man's choice. In this view, God would have willingly placed Himself in a position of submission to the fallen will of man. Is this true? Is God affected by the compiled sinful history of man?

If this is true, think about its implications. Think about how sin has multiplied. Think about how it all started with the first murder of Cain killing Abel. Now we sit on decades and millennia of murder, deception, fabrication, un-thankfulness, self-promotion, covetousness and embezzlement. We're only affected for 90-100 years max by the compiled evil "telephone" that has notoriously passed down skewed message after skewed message through the ages. But we as humans are not eternal, God is. God does not become a victim of 90-100 years in this scenario, but He becomes an eternal victim. He would forever be in the process of becoming more and more limited and bound by our compounding choices and ill-will, making Him the most skewed in his

perspective due to the amount of influence He's been subject to. This would make God the least free of any of us.

But we know Biblically this cannot be, for God acts with an unaffected will, strictly on the basis of sovereign grace. There is no person who moves the will of God to help Him make the choice. There is no circumstance that in any way provokes God's choice. Daniel 4:35 says, "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, What have you done?" No one can question it.

If we accept a "man-centered" view of foreknowledge, it puts humanity above God, our control above His control, and then the pattern of good works and performance religion makes Christianity no different than that of the world. Not to mention that this view shoots sharp arrows at the character of God.

Psalms 97 verse 2; "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne." What is divine justice? It is an essential attribute of God whereby He is infinitely and perfectly just in Himself, of Himself, for Himself, from Himself, by Himself and none other. That's a heavy-duty theological definition. We are presumptuous in thinking we are correct to expect that God SHOULD save and choose us...we call this justice...WHY? Because in demanding that God choose us because of our willing, we are saying that we deserve it—it's just.

What we don't realize is that we have made an injustice in this very statement. We're telling God He has an obligation to save us. Well let me tell you something, without Jesus it is UNJUST FOR GOD TO SAVE ANYONE. We have willingly chose to sin and we have brought down judgment on our own heads. We deserve hell and judgment. The only justice in light of this fact is that we get what's coming to us—namely the anger and wrath of God.

On the other hand, the only justice in God saving anyone is that there was a cross. He took our punishment in the personal work of Jesus. In fact, if we want to talk about injustice, that's unjust—a perfect God taking the blow for us?? That's the injustice we should talk about. Yet somehow, even God doesn't call this just, He calls this Kindness. This is His character. He'll go to every link to purchase the few. Him having this ability depends on Him being unencumbered in His justice, thereby leaving Himself free to act as He wishes. Again, if we hold to foreknowledge as being something I've been currently describing, we shackle God with our chains of bound choice!!

Why do I belabor this point? Why do I systematically touch on each objection and each bias to these ideas of election and foreknowledge? It's because, as we're going to see, that it has profound implications on our joy, especially in suffering.

The Biblical view of foreknowledge gives us a grand hope. **For God has truly chosen the ordinary, to be used for the extraordinary.** Please notice; "foreknowledge" is the word *prognosis*. *Prognosis*, is a very important word. Peter also uses it one more time in this same chapter, please notice it (vs. 1:20) Verse 19, ends with the word "Christ," then it **says of Christ**, "For **He was foreknown** before the foundation of the world." It is the same word here...form of *proginosko*. Does it mean foresight here? Does it mean God was up in heaven looking down the road and said, "Oh I see what Christ is going to do? Oh, I see...I get it." Is it God looking down the path of history to see what Christ will do? Hardly. Well, whatever *prognosis* means in verse 2 it means in verse 20—Peter's certainly not going to try to confuse us. And if Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world and I was foreknown before the foundation of the world, then I was foreknown in the same way Christ was foreknown, right?

I am to understand this as they did in Acts chapter 2. In verse 23 of this chapter, Peter uses the word *Proginosko* again when speaking of Jesus. He must like this word. Peter is speaking on the day of Pentecost. And he says in verse 23 of Acts 2, "This man delivered up"...listen to this... "by the predetermined plan and"...what?... "foreknowledge of God." He was nailed to a cross by the hands of Godless men and put to death. Now wait a minute. Christ was delivered up to die by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God?

Foreknowledge can't originate in man. It is linked to the mind and plan of God. Foreknowledge was God's deliberate choice to predetermine relationship with you. It doesn't mean he observed you in a Petri dish beforehand, and then took notes on your brilliance. It means He planned YOU before YOU were even YOU. Foreknowledge does not know in a sense of OBSERVATION, as a man-centered view of foreknowledge would

propose. It knows in the sense of BRINGING into reality. An example of this is God telling Jeremiah that He formed him in his mother's womb and before that, he what... "knew him." (Jr. 1:5). He predetermined relationship with Jeremiah. He decided beforehand that Jeremiah would be His.

Can you handle that thought? God's VERY forth knowing, brought forth your VERY forth-comings. Your life would not be here if He hadn't foreknown it. You would not believe, unless He first acted in relationship. Can you grasp this?

Arthur Pink again said, "The only reason anybody believes in election is because he finds it taught in God's Word. No man or number of men ever originated this doctrine. Like the doctrine of eternal punishment, it conflicts the dictates of the carnal mind and is repugnant to the sentiments of the unregenerate heart and like the doctrine of the holy trinity and the miraculous birth of our Savior, the truth of election must be received with simple unquestioning faith."

But Peter, in stating the benefits of this seemingly humanly repugnant doctrine, shows us the reward of true understanding. God's choice and election of YOU occurred before you ever did anything. Therefore, doing MORE isn't going to make Him love you any more. And YOU doing LESS and not living up to some standard, is not going to make Him love YOU any LESS. His love is based on HIM, not you. This is the securest hope you can get!!!! It can't spoil or fade.

It secures for the believer, the sanctifying of the Spirit. This is what Peter tells us. He not only tells us about the benefit of election and foreknowledge in and of themselves, but also he goes on to describe their greater and far reaching benefits. Our election now locks us into the Spirit's counsel, conviction, encouragement, leading, filling, blessing, empowering, sealing, ownership, indwelling and holiness—for eternity. The Holy Spirit now commits to the process of making us Holy. Ephesians 1:4 says that we were chosen in order that we should be holy. Hebrews 12:14 says, "Pursue holiness without which no man shall see the Lord." Holiness is not being perfect, it's being set apart. Chosen. I Peter 2 tells us it's to be his "royal priesthood, a people belonging to God..."

This should bring incredible confidence to your heart.

You were ordinary, chosen for the extraordinary...

...To proclaim what is primary...

Peter now launches into an epitaph on salvation. Before he addresses the people's sufferings—the burnings and the murders. Before he addresses the injustices, the rapes, robberies and rebellion. Before he addresses their marriages, the husbands, the wives, and their children. Before he addresses the government, the kings, the slaves, and the economy. Peter hits salvation.

Peter doesn't take the gambit of most pulpits and ministries today. He doesn't focus on being practical. He doesn't give bullet points, action steps, and positive life coaching tips. He doesn't primarily counsel marriages and seek to bring social justice into the political, social, technical, and entertainment arena. Salvation is deeper. He realizes the GOSPEL is deeper than these things. Peter goes for the deathblow. He focuses on what's PRIMARY, and he invites us to do the same.

"You've been given new birth INTO a living hope." He implores them to remember that they were put into something. Our being placed INTO something, is again a work of God. It again gives us confidence that if we're placed INTO His grace, He won't remove us...that's not in His character. If we were to embrace the popular argument of today that we can somehow lose our salvation, would our "being birthed INTO hope" be of any comfort to anyone in the midst of suffering? No. It wouldn't be a hope at all because at any moment the letter's recipients, and we reading it today, would be worried that we were going to somehow sneeze in a sinful way, and lose salvation. This would only bring more suffering—a deeper suffering. If we could lose our salvation would Peter have referred to it as "Birth?" We cannot be born and then die, and then be born and then die, and be born and then die. This view of losing your salvation and getting it back over and over again is closer to reincarnation than biblical Salvation.

No. We've been born INTO something. God refers to Himself as the Eagle's Wings, a Shield, a Fortress, and a Strong Tower etc. We are born into this bejeweled and protected Kingdom of His hand, and nothing can take us from it.

We've been born "INTO an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—KEPT in heaven for you." This word kept is *tēreō*. This word refers to careful keeping, and is used in I Peter 2:9; "The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to *reserve* the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." In the same way God preserves our salvation and inheritance in heaven, He is also ready to judge evil and give wrongdoers over to the torments of eternal hell. To say that somehow God can lose His ability to keep us, is saying that God can somehow lose the battle in the end. It may even imply that we can't trust God to keep the promise of His second coming. In doubting eternal salvation, we slander the very name of God and completely erode our foundation in our fight against evil and its temptation. For if Jesus can't fight and keep the end firm, then He surely has lost His ability to save us in the present.

But He surely has KEPT us and will KEEP us. The Holy Spirit is our deposit and our sign of ownership. The word used in I Timothy 1:14 for "deposit" is *parakatathēkē*. It implies that our inheritance has been consigned over to a faithful holder and its payout is coming and assured in the future. There is no doubt!! God has opened an account for us, and He promises to dispense to us eternal life at the appropriate time.

This appropriate time is what Peter refers to when he says, "revealed in the last time." Salvation is not as small as your heart, and it is not just about the here and now. The Gospel is the renewal of all things. God is bringing it about in your heart and in the world right now, and into tomorrow—next year, and 100 years from now. Romans 8 tells us that even the creation groans and tarries in anticipation and agony for the sons of man to be revealed. It waits not only for the SAVIOR, but also for the sons of men. YOU! It's sick of you destroying its oceans, chemicalizing its ozone, and endangering its species. This is a result of the fall of man. You were created to rule in glory like in the Garden of Eden. God gave us the plants of the field and animals to steward. Creation waits for the enemies' stewardship to end, and the believers in Jesus Christ to resume their role. Creation groans and waits for your salvation too. Imagine the disappointment that's at stake if the saved lose their salvation status along the way. There's no hope in that, just disappointment for everything.

Therefore God in this passage is speaking of a choosing unto salvation, that was known from before the world was created. This passage is speaking of a new birth and a keeping, that was known from before the world was created. This passage implies that salvation is completed at the Second Coming of Jesus, and that this completion was determined, scripted and outlined before creation was set in motion. HUGE!

The pinnacle that Peter is driving at, and the thing I believe God and Peter would both want you to take from this message, is found in I Peter 1:6a; "In this greatly rejoice." This is a beautifully short doxology—*Logy meaning logic, and doxa meaning to praise*. The author is trying to get us to come to a logical conclusion to the statements that have just been made. Our **logical** response to the truths we have just heard should be to react in unadulterated and exuberant worship and celebration. Some of you idolize logic. You're always up in your head, and you operate by what you can understand. This message probably frustrates you a bit, because it can only be comprehended in part—it's just too big. Well, now's the moment. If you don't respond in worship right now to this magnificent God and this profound story, then you would be foolish and acting illogically.

Peter wants us to hold nothing back. Nothing can be held back if you get these truths. Beloved, Peter ought to know. He suffered failure, defeat, mistreatment, outspoken pride, athlete's tongue from sticking his foot in his mouth so many times, and he came out on the other side. If any man lost his salvation, it was Peter. BUT NO! Peter speaks with Apostolic, Experiential, and God-like authority. He speaks as one who has felt the suffering of Jesus. Peter offers you the message of real JOY. Not happiness that's based in happenings. He's offering you joy. Joy in your hope-filled salvation. This JOY can out perform any storm that seeks to submerge your ship. It's transcendent above any circumstance.

Take a look at your circumstances right now. What is it that's got you walking the tight rope of despair? Take a look at the changes going on in your life. If any of them are causing you to doubt your position and choosing in God's Kingdom, then you've put something in your life above God's Word over your life. Now, are you letting something play God in your life, and you are giving it control over your JOY?

God tells you, you are chosen and that you are foreknown. This is where you need to look for your joy. Let that sink into the depths of your psyche. When you look at what your life: your accomplishments, the opinions of others, the shift and flow of life, the trial and tribulation etc. you can only arrive at worldly conclusions without having God speak into the situation. One of those conclusions is the world's concept of

self-esteem. People like you and me are looking to place our hope in our own selves. This is what brings foundation to our life. Let me tell you, get rid of self-esteem. That's old news and old hope. Get rid of as much self-esteem as you can. It's not biblical. God didn't choose you to feel good about your accomplishments or feel bad about your lack there of. Feel free that HE chose you BEFORE all that. Hallelujah. Before you could fail or succeed He placed His ring of commitment and death on your finger. This is what should drive your confidence. God places your confidence in your election, foreknowledge and salvation.

So repent of how failed your systems are, and of how little hope they offer. Rejoice and have God-Esteem in His abilities, His work, and His accomplishments. Relish His choosing you. **He has taken what's ordinary, made it extraordinary, so that you can proclaim what's primary, with joy REVOLUTIONARY.** Let me say it again: **He has taken what's ordinary, made it extraordinary, so that you can proclaim what's primary, with joy REVOLUTIONARY.** No assurance is more assured than the one that God's hand secures.

And don't let yourself get caught in the lie either; "Well, I'm elect, I guess I don't need to get saved." Make your calling and election sure. God may be drawing you, but without confessing Him and believing on Him in your heart, your not saved yet. Remember His choosing includes the preceding PURSUIT as well. He purchased a chance to pursue you. Submit to His Lordship and be grafted INTO a hope that is KEPT for you, that will be fully REVEALED to you throughout and at the culmination of history.

How do you know you're saved, or elect? Do you want God? Do you have a conscience awareness of your sin and frailty? Are you afraid of being without God? Are you constantly finding yourself aware that you need Him? Are you looking at me as I speak this message and feeling a kick in your heart—an angst and a fervor? If you are wondering these things, than you probably just need to stop wondering if your saved and start standing in WONDER at Him. For without Him you wouldn't want to ask these questions.

I want you to feel the weight and impact of this. Feel the weight lifted from your life. Feel the joy fill your heart. But also feel the burden that you carry now for your neighbor. Evangelism and sharing Jesus with others should not seem like such a weight now, but a completion of your already increasing joy. You get to partner with God in making **ordinary people, into the extraordinary, so that they can proclaim what's primary, with JOY revolutionary.**

Let's purpose together to let Him take what's ordinary, make it extraordinary, so that we can proclaim what's primary, with JOY Revolutionary.



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