

# ***“Joy Out of this World”***

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***“Speak well of God, because he speaks well of you.” (Sinclair Ferguson)***

**1 Peter 1:1-12**

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(Corinth sermons are available in audio and print forms at [corinthtoday.org/sermons](http://corinthtoday.org/sermons).)

***Almost perfect (Pastor Bob)***

Most of you know that Linda and I were out of town last weekend for our youngest daughter’s wedding. When asked this week how it went, I often said, “98 percent perfect.”

It really was very special, and we were extremely proud of Jeni and Matt as their original wedding plans were delayed to the fall by the coronavirus. They reacted to each change with maturity and grace, but they still wanted to make their legal and formal commitment on the planned date of April 18 with ten people present. It was beautiful and memorable, and they even had a little fun with the changes.

The story we haven’t told as much is about the 2% that wasn’t perfect. We had all gone together to Brunswick Nature Park two days before to select a spot for the ceremony overlooking the river and marsh. I had said, “I know there will probably be other people around on a Saturday, but I’m sure they will respect a wedding.” Well....

Linda and I arrived alone about 45 minutes early on Saturday to hang lace and flowers in the trees as a backdrop, and to spread rose petals on the grass as a processional aisle. About the time we were finishing up, a couple showed with three large dogs. In a cheerful voice, I said, “We’re getting ready for our daughter’s wedding here in a few minutes.” The first hint we had this wasn’t going to go well was the response: “It’s a *public park*.” True enough, and those who walked through that area in the next few minutes were met with aggressive barking. We texted our daughters and

said, “It’s probably not a good idea to bring your dogs.” Linda immediately started praying silently. Through the years I’ve wished that were *my* first reaction.

Linda and I offered some pleasant greetings along the lines of, “It’s a beautiful day, isn’t it?” That was met with, “You can’t even have a conversation around here without being interrupted,” and then, gesturing to Linda, “That goes for this hag too.”

We were stunned. I’d like to tell you that my first thought was, “How can I best represent Jesus?” Before you imagine what you would have said, let me remind you of two things. First, three very aggressive dogs are tied to a picnic table about 15 feet from us. Second, the last thing Jeni and Matt needed on their downscaled wedding day was an ugly confrontation. Still alone, Linda and I realized that setting would not work.

We quietly removed lace and flowers. Jeni’s best friend and her husband, who arrived next, even gathered rose petals off the grass. We intercepted Jeni and Matt in the parking area. We all reset on a nearby dock and enjoyed that 98% perfect wedding.

Why do I share that story? Because, brief as those moments were, that situation for Linda and me was a microcosm of what we’re all feeling these days – unsafe, uncertain, and isolated. It’s even worse when you’re caught off guard.

The book of the Bible we call 1 Peter is a letter, or maybe even a sermon, written to Christians who are unsafe, uncertain, and isolated. Peter writes to say, “Cheer up; it’s going to get worse! Don’t be caught off guard.” It all sounds very relevant for us.

### ***Apostle to the exiles (1-2)***

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ” (1), he begins. When we hear the name “Peter” connected to the New Testament, we don’t usually think of a letter. We think of the Galilean fisherman who left everything to follow Jesus, of the disciple who walked on the water with Jesus, of the first disciple to say, “You are the Christ, the Son of God!”

Always impulsive, Peter was usually the first to step out or speak up, whether with wisdom or overconfidence. “I will *never* deny you,” he said to Jesus, then did it three times within hours and wept bitterly. But on Sunday morning the angel told the women, “Go tell his disciples, *especially Peter*, that he is risen.” Jesus himself dubbed him “Peter,” which means the Rock. On the day of Pentecost, he preached Christianity’s first sermon and 3000 were saved. He became the fearless leader of the church in Jerusalem and as “an apostle of Jesus Christ” took his wife on missionary journeys.

1 Peter is such a deep and rich letter that some critics have said there’s no way that uneducated Galilean fisherman could have written it, especially in such excellent Greek style. But many a brilliant mind doesn’t have the luxury of a formal education, and Peter’s trade would have put him in early contact with both Jews and Greeks all around Galilee. By the time he writes the letter he’s had thirty years to grow and learn.

Peter addresses his readers as “God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” These places don’t mean a lot to most of us, but they are all provinces located in what we call Turkey. Three of these locations are listed in Acts 2:9, meaning that Jews from those places heard Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost. The gospel spread there like the coronavirus, first imported by travelers, then spreading locally.

“Exiles scattered” makes us think at first his readers were Jewish. The Jews hadn’t been concentrated in their homeland for almost 800 years. However, later in this letter Peter says his readers were formerly ignorant of God (1:14), living in spiritual darkness (2:9), and living like pagans (4:3-4). That sounds more like Gentiles. More than likely Peter’s readers were both Jew and Gentiles. This is a letter for all Christians. Every Christian should know that in this world we are aliens, strangers, foreigners. Right now, “scattered,” socially isolated is quite familiar.

In verse 2, Peter reminds them that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are each involved in their lives. God the Father chose us according to his foreknowledge. Don’t get hung up on predestination v. free will. That’s only been an argument since about the 16<sup>th</sup> century when John Calvin expressed God’s sovereignty so strongly that others reacted, pushing the pendulum to the opposite extreme. New Testament writers understood the both-and. God is totally in charge and we are fully responsible for obedience.

The Holy Spirit “sanctifies” us (2) – meaning he sets us apart. Jesus “sprinkled (us) with his blood” (2), very graphic language to describe Jesus’ death in language that echoes the Old Testament temple.

I love that my colleague Kevin begins each prayer, “Father-Son-Spirit.” The doctrine of the Trinity can be hard to grasp or explain, but part of the purpose is so that we can see the different ways God works on our behalf. We pray to one God, but that one God is too wonderful and complex to be thought of or even addressed in one word.

“Grace and peace be yours in abundance,” Peter says, in language that is based on Aaron’s benediction in Numbers 6: “The LORD bless you and keep you. The Lord be gracious to you and give you peace.”

### ***Speak well of God***

One of my favorite moments from last weekend was when Jeni looked up at Matt right after the ceremony and exclaimed, “We’re married!” His grin stretched from one side of his shaved head to the other. There’s a sweetness in knowing you fully belong. It’s a done deal, and it’s permanent. Even if you got married on a dock next to a swamp with only ten witnesses (plus, of course, a few hundred on Facebook).

That's the tone of verse 3. "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" This is another idea borrowed from Peter's Jewish roots. A common prayer begins, "Blessed be God....!"

The word "blessed" means to speak well of. As Sinclair Ferguson says, "Speak well of God, because he speaks well of you." When you feel unsafe, uncertain, and isolated, you might be tempted to blame God or insult him.

If Peter's readers are isolated and suffering, why should they speak well of God? There are more reasons than a bride and groom can count on their wedding day!

*A new birth!* Peter knows what joy a baby brings into the world. He wants his readers thrilled not so much by having or seeing a new baby, but by *being* one. When you imagine God, think of him smiling at you like you're his newborn.

*A living hope!* You probably haven't seen our church sign as much lately, but currently it says: "H.O.P.E. – Hang On. Pain Ends." That's actually a fairly common belief right now, even in the world. Peter says we don't just have hope – we have a living hope based on "the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." It's hard to imagine any disciple more profoundly changed by seeing Jesus alive on Easter Sunday.

*A secure inheritance!* I'm among the fortunate ones whose current income hasn't been affected by the pandemic, but I've looked at my quarterly statement and I can tell you my future income has been! Whatever you and I think we've laid aside for retirement or for our heirs, we've never in our lifetimes been more aware that the things of this world are not secure. Peter says that in Jesus we have a guaranteed inheritance in heaven – one that is "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading" (NRSV).

*A powerful shield!* Having married a guy who's been playing ice hockey for 25 years, my baby girl doesn't ever have to worry much about her physical safety. Peter says our faith in Jesus is like a shield of the strongest alloy possible – the power of God, pointing to the "salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." No current uncertainty or pain can threaten us.

Why can we "speak well" of God? Even in times of social isolation, pain, and uncertainty, we have a new birth, a living hope, a secure inheritance, and a powerful shield. And that's just for starters. Pastor Paul will pick it up from there.

### ***Knowing is believing (Pastor Paul)***

In verses 6-7, Peter begins to talk about trials and tribulations. If you asked me about my greatest trial thirty-plus years ago, I would tell you that it didn't start out looking like a trial. In May of my sophomore year in high school, I was called into the office of the varsity soccer coach. He told me "Paul, you are going to be on the varsity team next year. It's not about what position you will play but whether you will be a

starter. I want you to go to the Duke soccer camp with the rest of the team. It's not required but if you want to start, it's what you have to do."

Everyone else on the team played on the travel soccer team. My parents did not have that kind of money, and I did not have the time since I was involved in church. I was an outsider and was never received into the group. In July when we got to camp, no one wanted to be my roommate. The days were long and hot. It was about being with my team but being excluded from my team.

It was a terrible week. I don't remember anything good about it. When we got home from camp, I found out that my coach quit and went to another team. I not only did not start for the varsity team, but I did not even make the team. Why? Because I was not on the travel team. I wondered, "What was the point of the soccer camp? Why did I have to go through that mess and preparation?"

Peter says in verses 6-7, "You are not just going through a trial. You can trust that the outcome of this will be good because you are being prepared for glory."

In verse 7, he mentions gold. Gold can't buy eternity. The greatest thing of worth is nothing in terms of what eternity will be. You are being refined as a goldsmith would refine gold. It will show the worth of your faith. A goldsmith refines gold until his facial reflection can be seen in the sheen of the gold. This preparation is happening until God the Father can see his reflection in you. These trials are not easy but in reality you are being prepared for glory.

Verses 8-9 are written to those who had not seen Jesus. This also applies to us. We have not seen him but we love him. In our culture, we use the phrase "seeing is believing." The Bible doesn't actually say it that way when it speaks of the revelation of Christ being raised from the dead and the eyewitness accounts.

When we look at Romans 8:28, it doesn't say "And we *see* that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." It says "And we *know* that in all things God works for the good of those who love him." It's not that *seeing* is believing. *Knowing* is believing. We know that 2+2=4. We know though we may not see it. Christ is working through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In verses 10-12 he talks about salvation. The problem of sin, death, and the separation we have from God is not solved in a 25-step program. It is solved one time and one time only by One person. It's not just someone but the One. God gives his one and only son—his greatest and most holy, most worthy gift—so that we would never have to be burdened with the depth of our sin, guilt, and shame. We can freely come to God and belong to him.

If you go back to my beginning story about my soccer coach, it was disheartening because I was going through a trial and tribulation in the hopes that I would become

something. The beauty of what Peter is telling us is that you are not going through these trials and tribulations so that you become something. You already *are* something.

You don't have to ask "God what are you trying to accomplish?" You already are a saint, fully sanctified—the living, breathing reflection of Christ in this world. You already are the embodiment of his nature because of what Christ has done. You are already owned and purchased by God through Christ. You have already been made into the likeness and image of God and now you are being prepared to be with him fully in glory.

The other thing about my story is that I was putting my trials and tribulations in people that didn't care about me. Guess who controls the trials and tribulations? God. He will never let it go on longer than it needs to until he can see his face reflecting in you.

Finally, why are you being prepared? You are being prepared for glory, just like a bride being prepared for the moment of glory. You are not being prepared to become something you are not already. If you have given your life to Christ, you already belong to him. You already are his child; you are all saints. Amen.