

Message 1

Introduction

The theme for these messages is based on I Peter 5:12b **“I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.”** In our study we will think about the grace of God, emphasize encouragement in faith and ministry, and our need to stand firm in the face of opposition.

Most of you are laboring under less than ideal circumstances. Many of you are in isolated locations, in pioneering situations, perhaps with small congregations, limited resources, limited opportunities to network and interact with other Christian leaders, and probably confronted with opposition and hostility.

The Apostle Peter was familiar with these kinds of circumstances. He was the first evangelist after the birth of the Church (Acts 2). He was also the first evangelist (the pioneer missionary) to bring the gospel to Gentiles (Acts 10). He had faced opposition from the Jewish religious leaders (Acts 4). He was imprisoned and flogged because of his boldness and zeal for the Lord (Acts 5, 12). Within the Church he dealt with dishonesty and dissension and criticism and heresy (Acts 5, 6, 11, 15). There was a time when most of his friends were forced to flee Jerusalem because of persecution (Acts 8:1). And he knew that when his time of ministry was completed, he was going to die by crucifixion, just like the Lord Jesus (John 21:18-19). Peter had a wide range of experiences. He could have been easily discouraged. However he was a faithful believer and strong witness for Jesus Christ until the end of his life. Hence I think he was qualified to write a letter of encouragement to other believers, including us.

There is another way in which we can identify ourselves with Peter. Consider his background. He was an ordinary worker, a fisherman. He was not a highly educated man, although he was familiar with the Old Testament Scriptures because of his Jewish cultural background. His Christian spiritual education was the result of three years spent with Jesus. Some of those days were surprising and awe-inspiring, and some of those days were not so pleasant because he made a number of bad choices and Jesus had to rebuke and correct him. Generally speaking, Peter was a slow learner.

If Peter, an ordinary man, could become a leader, and be used by God in church work, then there is hope for us. Turn to Acts 4:13. The key to Peter’s courage and success as a minister of the gospel is explained in this verse. **“When the members of the Jewish ruling council saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus.”**

Not many of us here have superior training. Most of us are “ordinary” people. What will be the secret of our successful ministry? Answer: Time spent with Jesus. That is the most important qualification to be an effective pastor, evangelist, or leader of the Church.

We are spending time with Jesus this week. We will allow Him to speak to us, change us, and to train us and make us more courageous for the spiritual battles in our future days.

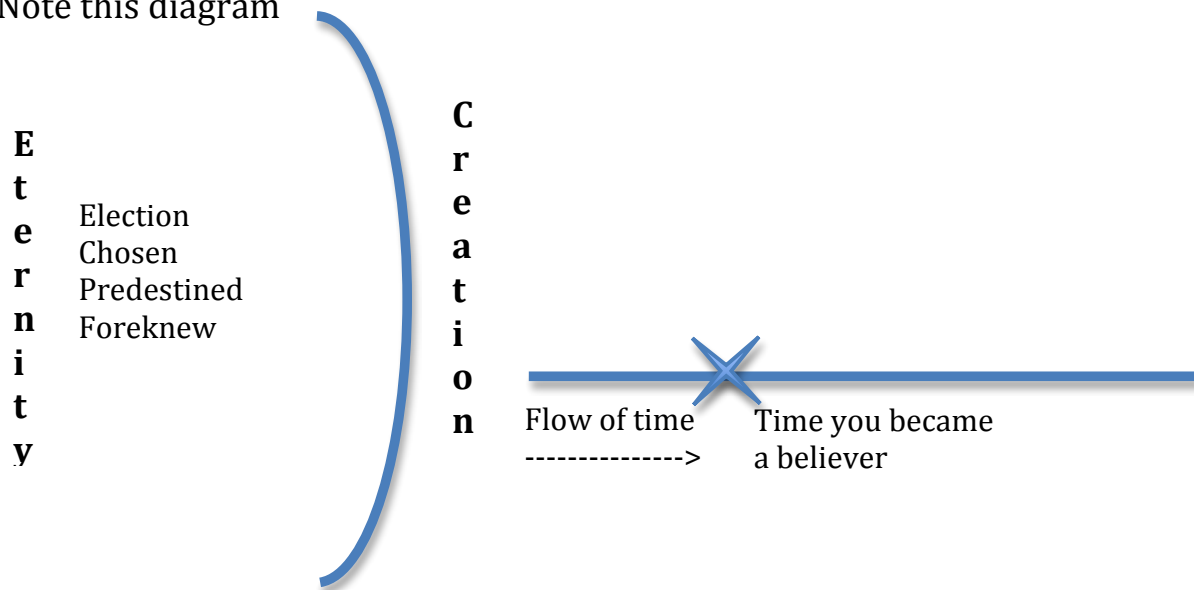
The general title of this series of messages is **“Living and Ministering Under Pressure.”**

Read I Peter 1:1-2

I Peter 1:1 This letter was written for “God’s elect.” In verse 2 they are called “chosen.” Specifically these words refer to individuals who “have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” The “foreknowledge of God” is more than God’s knowledge of what will take place in the future. “Foreknowledge” is a theological term which describes choices God made before creation. God had an eternal plan before the beginning of creation. Concerning Christ see I Peter 1:20. Concerning believers see Ephesians 1:4-5 and II Tim 1:9-10. God had knowledge of us before creation. He lives outside of time. Time is always the present time with God.

His plan of salvation was not put in place after the sin of Adam and Eve; it was in place before creation. The words “elect” and “chosen” indicate that God made deliberate spiritual decisions concerning our lives.

Note this diagram



Explanation of Diagram

The line represents the level where people exist. The “X” on the line indicates the point in time when a person acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord, is “born again” by the Spirit of God, and becomes a member of God’s family (John 1:12-13).

The words on the left side of the diagram represent God’s planning in Eternity Past. Before the creation of space, time, and the physical world He had a plan for His people. He elected, chose, predestined, and foreknew who they would be. See Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:4-5; II Timothy 1:9-10.

Scripture indicates that God sovereignly and irresistibly drew us (pulled us) to Himself. Peter begins his letter with the information that we are “chosen according to His (God’s) foreknowledge.” This should give us a great appreciation of God’s grace and how He applied it to our lives. It should give us a sense of privilege because God wanted us and selected us and called us out of all the other people on earth to be His children.

Verse 1 reminds us that we are “strangers” or “sojourners” in this world. This world is a temporary residence away from our real home. Peter will later describe our real home which is in heaven.

Notice in verse 2 that believers have been “chosen for obedience to Jesus Christ.”

Read I Peter 1:3-9

These verses describe the status of the believer. You will notice that both rejoicing and suffering are described. You will also note that the believer must have a dual focus: toward both heaven and earth.

I Peter 1:3-4 These verses begin with praise. Our prayers and our praises are directed to God the Father because He is the member of the Trinity who took the initiative in salvation. The Father sent His Son to be the Savior. It was the Father who raised Jesus from the dead and seated Jesus at His right hand in heaven. It was the Father’s love and mercy which moved Him to provide new spiritual birth to mankind.

According to Peter, there are two results of the new birth: first, “a living hope” and second, “an inheritance.” Our hope is a “living hope” because of the “resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Christ is the “firstfruits” of those who have had the resurrection experience. Because He lives, we know that life after death is possible, and this is the basis of hope. In the Bible, hope is not wishful thinking but a firm conviction based on specific facts. There is no doubt about the resurrection of Jesus. He was seen by many people after His crucifixion.

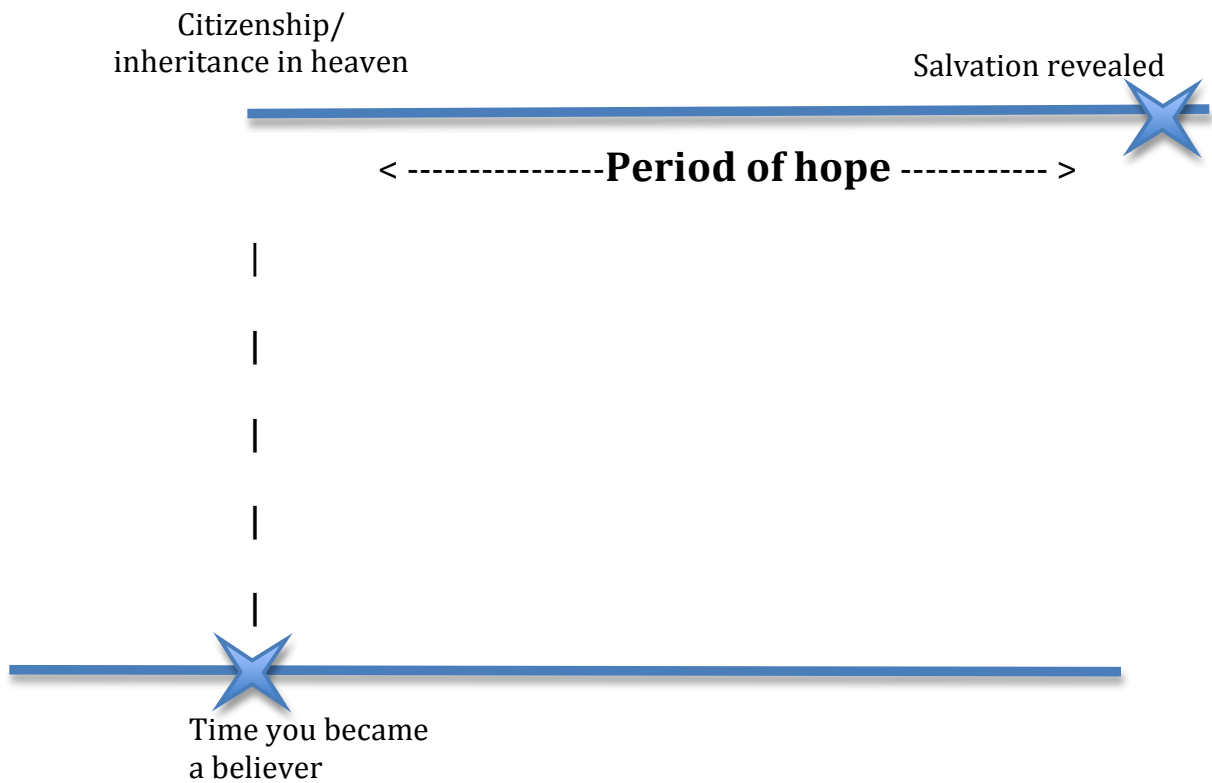
The second benefit is that our new birth provides us with a special kind of inheritance, one “that can never perish, spoil or fade.” Our inheritance is not at risk because it is “kept in heaven our us.” It is not at risk because it is eternal and because God is keeping it for us.

I Peter 1:5 Notice the first phrase in verse 5. We are “shielded by God’s power.” We are shielded throughout the circumstances of the present time, all the way until the time when our salvation is revealed in the last time. According to Hebrews 11:1 “faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” We cannot physically see our inheritance. However, there is an objective basis for our faith and beliefs. Our expectations are based on the promises of God. Faith is our response to what God has said. What has God said? We have an inheritance, and we are protected by God’s power. Do we believe this?

Our “living hope,” and our “eternal inheritance” are kept secure by God’s almighty power. Our knowledge and understanding of these things is an important factor. Knowledge leads to faith. God’s power does not work apart from our personal faith, but when we place our faith in God’s ability, our future is secure.

God will need to protect our inheritance only “until the coming of the salvation that will be revealed in the last time.” We can only hope for something until we receive it. Once the reality is in our hands, it becomes a hope fulfilled. The word “salvation” here refers to our full realization of what God has promised to us.

Let me add more information to the earlier diagram.



I Peter 1:6 There is a day coming when God’s divine program of redemption will be completed. It is our hope for that future day which sustains us through our present difficult times. The phrase “greatly rejoice” is very unusual; it literally means “a joy out of this world.” It is a jubilant and thankful exultation for God’s actions, for what He has given to us. It refers to a deep spiritual joy. It also means a continual rejoicing, not intermittent or occasional.

However, there is downside to life here on earth while we are waiting for our salvation to be revealed. Believers “may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” We will experience simultaneous grief and joy. We live in a fallen world, and people who live pure, righteous lives are a threat to non-believers. See John 15:18-21. We must not be surprised by the disrespect and contempt pointed toward us. We “may have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.” The words that Peter uses emphasizes the short duration of the trials. This is in comparison to the everlasting inheritance which we will enjoy as the result of new birth.

I Peter 1:7 Peter is an honest person — he knows that God’s people will have difficulties in this life. However, Peter is also a very positive person. In his opinion, there is something good that can come from trials and difficulties. He declares that there are positive results which can come from negative circumstances. How is this possible? What is the positive result?

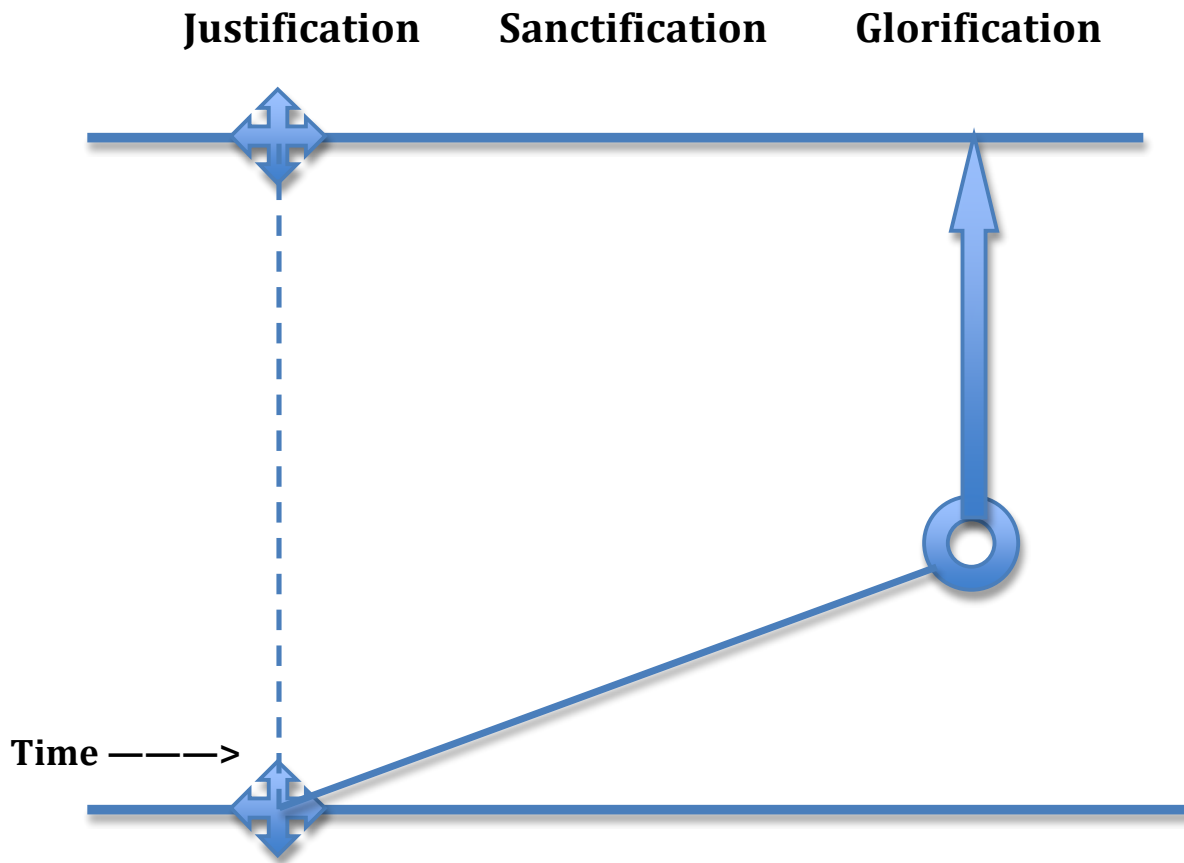
Trials come so that our “faith may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory, and honor.” Our faith will not be rewarded at this present time; rather it will be rewarded “when Jesus Christ is revealed.” How do you feel when the circumstances in your life turn bad? Do you continue to greatly rejoice? Does your faith, your hope and confidence in God remain strong when you are under pressure? According to Peter, negative circumstances are opportunities which prove the genuineness of our faith. The way we act when under pressure is proof of our faith.

Peter compares our faith to gold. Gold is, of course, very valuable and durable, but it is perishable. Faith is even more valuable than gold because it does not perish. According to Peter, the resources which survive the longest are the most valuable. When it comes to our inheritance in heaven, faith is much more valuable than gold.

I Peter 1:8 This verse explains that we have love and faith for Jesus Christ even though we cannot see Him with physical eyes. It is by faith that we believe in Him. Remember the definition of faith we used earlier? “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Faith sustains us until the coming of our salvation, which is the same time when Jesus Christ will be revealed, when we will be able to see Him as He really is in all His glory.

As Peter states, if we “believe in Him,” we will be “filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.” We will “greatly rejoice” in this life with the joy which is “out of this world.” We will rejoice because we “are receiving the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls.” We must be careful to put these thoughts in the correct context. Peter is not writing about salvation some day. He is describing salvation, joy, hope and faith in our present situation here on earth. The point is that we can be hopeful, secure, and joyful people in the midst of trials and difficulties. Our faith and confidence in the power of God should sustain us no matter what problems we have.

We need to complete the diagram



Explanation of Diagram

The top line represents the level where God exists. The bottom line represents the level where people exist. In actuality, there is an infinite distance between these two levels because God is holy and people are sinners.

The “X” on the bottom line indicates the point in time when a person acknowledges Jesus Christ as Lord and is “born again” by the Spirit of God. At that instant, the individual becomes a member of God’s family (John 1:12-13) and the believer becomes a citizen of heaven (Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 2:6). This is the believer’s spiritual position even though his/her physical presence remains on earth. The theological term for this change is “justification.”

The new believer is called “a babe in Christ” and “a child of God.” Spiritual babies are expected to grow spiritually in the same way that physical babies are expected to grow physically. From the moment of justification, the new believer is expected to have a normal spiritual development; that is, to grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and to begin to live according to the behavioral standards of Scripture. This process of spiritual growth and maturity is indicated by the line which slants upward. This process of growth is described in Romans 8:28-30 Those “who have been called according to his (God’s) purpose ... he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son.” The theological term for this process is “sanctification.”

The “O” in the diagram indicates the moment when physical death occurs. At this moment the believer enters the presence of the Lord and the believer’s position (granted at the time of justification) becomes reality. The theological term for this change is “glorification.”

The Bible doesn’t have a lot of information about justification and glorification. The New Testament is mostly concerned about sanctification, about how we live.

I hope you are encouraged by these words. Let me try to summarize some of the important points:

We are discussing how to live and minister under pressure.

God the Father has given us a high privileged position through new birth. The resurrection of Jesus Christ has bestowed on us a “living hope.” New birth has also granted to us a secure eternal inheritance.

As a result of this new birth, we are shielded and protected by God’s power irregardless of our present circumstances.

We should have great joy because of the Father’s mercy.

Our present difficult circumstances are opportunities to strengthen our faith.

We live by faith and not by sight. Our faith is based on information given to us by God.

There will be a day in which Jesus Christ will be revealed. Our salvation will be completed on that day. In the meantime, God is protecting our inheritance.

Our vision, our thoughts, our lives should be primarily focused on the future and to heaven, not limited to the earthly circumstances around us.

End message 1