

Chosen People, Blessed Assurance - 1 Peter 1:1-12

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Preacher: Dan Oosthuizen

[0 : 00] Thank you.

And we're going to look at the first 12 verses. So Peter writes, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood. Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you who, through faith, are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is to be ready to be revealed in the last time. In all of this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

[1 : 58] Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Even angels long to look into these things. Let's pray once more. Father, thank you for the privilege to gather in your name and be with us, Holy Spirit, as we continue our time of worship through the word.

Unlock the meaning of the text to us, Lord. May your words be lifted up. May what I have to say die. And may it be your truths that are implanted on the hearts and minds of your people.

[3 : 16] So speak to us this morning, Lord, and lift our eyes to heaven. In Jesus' name, amen. Those of us with any kind of theological training have had to read people like Calvin, Luther, Spurgeon, great theologians and preachers over the centuries who have really captured the essence of what it means to be a person in this world that we live in where sometimes things go well and sometimes things go badly.

But outside of guys like that, who would have thought that one of the key theologians of our time would be Frank Sinatra, who had these famous words to say, which I won't sing, don't worry. We've had to struggle through that enough for my own voice this morning, so I'll just speak it for you. Frank said this, that's life. That's what all the people say. Riding high in April, shot down in May. But I know I'm going to change that tune when I'm back on top in June.

Now it's simple, but that song sums up a lot of the human experience. Sometimes life is easy. Family is healthy. House is comfortable.

No one left the immersion on when you left the house this morning. You've got a good job, which pays well. Loads of friends. You're the star of the school of rugby team. Life is good, and you expect life to be good and to keep going and to be easy and comfortable.

[4 : 38] But then, just like that, things fall apart. Sickness, poverty, even homelessness, as we were talking about, unemployment, loneliness.

Maybe things get better. Maybe they don't get better. Maybe you look around and you see other people whose lives are together. Other people who maybe don't love the Lord in the way you do. Who don't serve the Lord in the way you do. And maybe you start to think, like I have, things like this. Lord, it's not fair. Did I do something wrong?

Is God punishing me? In fact, where is God? Now this isn't a subject we can ignore. Suffering is part of the human experience, and indeed is part of the Christian experience.

The Lord himself said this, in this world, you will have trouble. If they hated me, they will hate you. Blessed are you, when, not if, when people insult you, persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

[5 : 47] Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven. Now the letter of 1 Peter, which we'll see over the coming weeks, addresses this subject of suffering.

Not the kind that would come later when the Roman emperor decided to blame Christians for burning down Rome. Not imprisonment, not torture, not execution, not the kinds of things that you see in China and Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and places around the world where our brothers and sisters are suffering.

Nothing specific, but this general, all-encompassing kind of suffering. Now we'll see, as we go through the letter, Peter talks about things like insults, mockery, intimidation, harassment, bullying. He talks about the workplace, what it means to be a Christian employee. What does it mean to be a public citizen? What does it mean to be a husband, a wife, a father, a mother?

What does it mean to minister to one another in the church in light of all these things that go on around us? So Peter is concerned, first and foremost, with what is the daily conduct of the Christian in the midst of suffering.

[6 : 53] So he wrote this letter basically to encourage and to comfort the believers as they experience these trials. In the text today, he lays the foundation and we're going to build on that foundation over the coming weeks.

And in doing so, he doesn't dismiss the church's suffering. He doesn't say, pull your socks up, build a bridge, get over it, get your act together.

He doesn't do that. He encourages the believers by reminding them of their living hope. It's not vain hope. It's not like, yesterday I had hoped that Ireland would make a decent fist at playing the All Blacks and that kind of fell apart after the first 30 seconds, but there we go.

That happens sometimes. Not speculative hope. Literally, hope that lives. Assurance that will never die. But this letter, it doesn't just apply.

If you're one of the ones reading this in Greek, I say that personally. My Greek is terrible, by the way. It applies wherever you live. Whether you live in Carragalline, Middleton, Cork City, anywhere else, this letter is for all of us because at some point or another, if you haven't found life difficult, I can assure you, you will at some point because as Frank says, that's life.

[8 : 15] So we can look to the same living hope as the original readers of this letter. So I've broken up the text into three points. If you have one of the sheets, I apologize, there's probably not enough of them to go around, but if you're taking notes, I've broken up the text into three points.

Peter says three things about this living hope. One, it is predestined. Two, it is precious. And three, it is prophetic.

So this living hope is predestined. It is precious and it is prophetic. My particular cross to bear is a compulsion towards alliteration, as you can see, but nevertheless, bear with me, I plead you.

Let's take a look at the first one. Believer's living hope is predestined. Verse one, Peter describes the Christians to whom he's writing as elect. Now that's a word that means chosen. In fact, verse two says, Christians have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God.

Some of your Bibles might say something like God's chosen people, elect exiles, those who are chosen. In any event, it means exactly the same thing. The Taoiseach who we were just praying for has announced we're likely to have an election in May.

[9 : 21] That is, when we will elect or choose our next government. So that's just another word for it. To elect is to choose. To choose is to elect. We all know what that word means. There's no confusion about it.

So what Peter's picking up here is what we've come to call this doctrine of predestination. Or election. Now that is, you're a believer not because of something you have done, of something that made you please God, but because of something God was pleased to do.

Now I need to be really clear on this. And don't worry, this is not going to turn into a theological lecture. You can do that on Tuesday night or Wednesday night, whenever your home group is. But I need to be clear on this because this subject has been very poorly taught and very badly misunderstood and distorted and taken out of context.

A kind of a caricature you might have heard this. God chooses who gets saved and who doesn't so therefore, what's the point in evangelizing to people? Or, if you're part of the elect, that is, if I'm chosen, well I can do whatever it is I want to do anyway and damn the consequences.

Deliberate choice of words. Or, if God just turned us into robots, what's the point in worshipping on Sunday morning? What's the point in giving thanks?

[10:35] There's a phrase for people like that. If you came out of a Presbyterian background, you might have been at some point referred to as the frozen chosen. That's what that means. But this predestination thing is anything but ice cold.

In fact, it's red hot. Look at verse 2. Those who believe are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Now that's a funny sounding word, isn't it? So literally, to be foreknown just means to be known in advance.

Now, we're not talking about knowledge like, I know that the sky is blue. Or, it's going to rain tomorrow. Or, when I try and put Alice to bed tonight, she's going to scream her lungs out for 10 minutes.

You got a preliminary look at that this morning. This kind of known is very different. You don't have to turn to it, but Genesis 4 says this, Adam knew his wife.

Then what happened? She gave birth to their son, Cain. I remember the first time I read that and I just thought, just from Adam knowing the girl? That's some powerful knowledge.

[11:42] Thinking, Adam's son, be careful who you know if that's all it takes. But of course, we know it's a euphemism, right? Just like when the angel Gabriel said to Mary, Mary, you're going to have a son.

And you remember what Mary said? How is that possible? I have never known a man. And again, I thought, well, she must have known some men. The poor girl wasn't hiding under a rock her entire life.

But of course, what it means is, I have never been intimate with a man. So this picture of love, not the act itself, but this picture of love that lies behind it, this is the same thing that Peter is talking about here.

God has known you in advance. So what does that mean? God loved you before you ever loved him, is what that means. God has had in mind for you an intimate relationship with you since way before the commencement of history, way before you were ever even born.

And on the basis of that relationship in which you didn't even know God, but God knew you, God elected you, God chose you.

[12:51] Now think about this. This isn't just theology. Why is Peter talking about this? It's the first thing he does. The readers of the letter are going through hardship and persecution and suffering. They're wondering, just like I was asking at the beginning, have we done something wrong?

Have we done something to displease God? When we look around and we see all the suffering and all the pain, what's going on? Where is God in all this? And they're wondering, has he forgotten us? And Peter wants to encourage him. And he does that in no better way than by pointing to the fact that this living hope, this assurance of salvation is grounded not in something that they have done, but in something God did before the ages even began.

Something he purposed long ago before any of them was even alive. And not just because of some dry, stale, cold, impersonal sense of doctrine that you only find in dusty old books, but a people who were chosen by God according to his foreknowledge, desire to enter into relationship with you.

In the same way, a man knows his wife. A woman knows her husband. They have an intimate relationship that nobody else will ever have with them.

[14:11] In the same way, God knows us. And he makes this visible, not just, again, dry theology or philosophy. He makes this visible, verse 2, by sending us the Holy Spirit to sanctify us.

That means to purify us, to give us the ability to kill those parts of our flesh that don't give God glory. And look at what it says. He did this so that we would be obedient to Jesus Christ.

That means walk in a manner like the manner in which he walked, humble, faithful, devoted to the things of heaven. You know, when I hear people talk about election or predestination, sometimes

there's this arrogance that can come across when people talk about it.

But those of us who hold to this doctrine should be the humblest people in the world, because we had nothing to do with this. This is all the work of God in our lives, which would lead us to live lives like Christ, humble and faithful and devoted to God.

And because of all of this, the text says, we have been sprinkled with his blood. Not literally, that would be quite gross, but metaphorically, pardoned, ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven.

[15 : 25] No wonder, look at verse 3, no wonder it says, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He could have finished the letter at that point, and that would have been enough for me.

But he goes on. And you know, one of the people that I find the most fascinating is Winston Churchill, and he once said this, if you're going through hell, keep going.

Don't stop. When you find yourself feeling the pressure, when life knocks you for six, I've gone on to the cricket metaphors because the rugby is done and dusted as far as I'm concerned. When you get the diagnosis, when the mortgage is overdue, when you can't face going home because the house is like a war zone, whatever life throws at you, fix your eyes on 1 Peter chapter 1, verses 1 to 2.

And remind yourself, you are not alone. You're not just some isolated speck of dust in this vast universe. You have been chosen by God.

Verse 4, God's own son conquered death by his resurrection and has guaranteed this inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. It will never die.

[16 : 41] It will never go out of existence. It will never be invisible. Remind yourself when you go through these times that your suffering cannot and will not cancel out this living hope.

Verse 5, you are shielded through this faith. You remember the full armor of God in Ephesians 6? Take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. shield is the best weapon you have in this fight against suffering. So when the arrows of hardship and suffering come at you, lift up the shield as high as you can possibly lift it and just let it do its work.

Take comfort in the fact that your faith, your living hope, is predestined. So that's the first one. Let's look at the second one. Our living hope is precious.

Look at verse 6. Even though we rejoice in these great truths, you know, being chosen, God's foreknowledge, all of that kind of thing, it doesn't mean that the sufferings and trials disappear.

[17 : 47] So even though we belong to God, we're not always going to fly over the storm. I was listening to a worship song the other day and it was talking about how we fly with God over the storm. But that's not always true.

In fact, a lot of the time, we sail right into the storm. Look at verse 7. It's not unavoidable. It's not accidental. These trials have come, verse 7, so that the proven genuineness of your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus is revealed.

So I was reading a lot about gold in preparation for this sermon. We all know what it is, what it looks like, what it's worth. Many of us have it in our fingers or around our necks, in your earlobes.

Some of you might have it in your teeth, but keep that to yourself for the time being. And I looked it up. Right now, gold is worth about 40 euro a gram. Now, to put that into context, take a bag of sugar.

Empty the bag. If you want to fill that bag back up with gold, it's going to cost you 20 grand. It would be nice. It's a valuable, precious metal. It's been used for everything from currency to electronics to religious idols.

[19 : 06] And we watch movies about it, like Indiana Jones. We create myths about it, like the lost city of El Dorado, which is supposedly the city in South America that was made entirely out of gold, which is completely true, by the way.

In 19th century America, to immigrants in New York, they said that the streets of New York are paved with gold, something which also turned out not to be quite true. In the Bible, if you read the book of Daniel, you can read about the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, and he built this statue 90 feet high in the middle of the desert, totally overlaid with gold.

You could see it for miles around and said, this represents me and how valuable and precious I am. You will bow down to this statue. The Ark of the Covenant and the temple, in fact, were completely decorated with gold.

So whether as a means for greedy men to celebrate themselves or in the worship of the one true God, gold has always been valued. It's always been sought after. It's always been precious. Say, all right, thanks for the lecture about gold, Dan. What's your point? Well, this is the most valuable thing Peter can think of. So what he's describing is how precious is this faith, how precious is this living hope that believers in Jesus Christ have.

[20 : 18] This faith that's ordained by the Father, that is enabled by the Spirit, for the purpose of obeying the Son. Faith is not bronze. It's not silver.

It's gold. First place. Pole position. Medal of champions, kings and emperors. It's the most valuable possession that the believer owns.

It's a medal that, as Peter refers to here, it's purified by being put through fire. Now, I won't go through it in detail, but it's an interesting process. Basically, to get rid of all of the junk and all of the rubbish and gold, you heat it to 1,064 degrees Celsius, which is 10 times hotter than boiling water. The point is, this is not like gently reheating soup. This is violent, high energy, testing, using extreme heat.

In other words, trials that are difficult to bear, cause great pain, but which have a purpose. Now, I've burned myself a few times, not while refining gold, but usually while cooking, like maybe many of you have as well.

[21 : 27] One of them was particularly bad. In fact, it was recent. I was just there cooking, minding my own business, when this sauce decided to attack me from the pot. The ungrateful sauce, but anyway. The skin in my fingers scorched and blistered and did everything else they do when human skin gets burned.

And they were very sensitive to the touch. I couldn't touch anything for quite a while afterwards. But over time, they recovered. And the skin got stronger. So the next time, and there was a next time, it didn't hurt as much.

You see, my skin had developed, it had toughened. It could still get burned, and it can still get burned, and it will still get burned. But the pain isn't the same. So now, when I burn myself, I kind of don't notice it in the same spot anymore.

My skin has developed to the point where it just simply doesn't register the pain. That's kind of what Peter is saying. That's the purpose of suffering. Talking about gold again, there was a Roman philosopher called Pliny, and he wrote this at the same time as Peter's letter.

He said this, gold is the only thing that doesn't lose any substance by the action of fire. You throw anything else into a fire, and it's gone in a matter of seconds. But gold doesn't lose any substance.

[22 : 44] He goes on to say, as a matter of fact, it improves in quality, the more often you put it in the fire. And fire, here's the point, serves as a test of the gold's goodness.

That's what Peter is saying. Just like these trials have come to the church to purify the faith of the believers, the fire tests the gold to strengthen its purity. And apparently, Peter says, so do things like bullying, mockery, gossip, harassment, so do all of these things toughen and strengthen the faith of the Christian.

The point of the fire, Peter is saying, is that it's not there to punish you for something. The fire is there to develop your Christian character. Because it's really easy to be a Christian when life is going well.

When you've got the job, when you've got the house, when college is good, when no one is gossiping about you, but the proof of the pudding is in the eating. It's when things go bad, what way is your faith?

It's so that when the world looks at you, when the church looks at you, and when the Lord looks at you, you see someone whose faith, or they see someone whose faith is true and pure, because it's been tested by fire.

[24 : 04] To paraphrase verses 7 and 8, it's so that when Jesus comes back, or you go to meet him, but when he separates the sheep from the goats, you find yourself in the right pasture.

That's how serious this is. Because you love him, and you believe in him, that fire will have resulted in the salvation of your soul, Peter says. It is a means of grace.

We'll get more into this in chapters 2 and 3, but here's some ways in which the fire can test your faith. Maybe you're a student, whatever age you are, maybe you're a student. When your classmates call you names, or they mock you because of your faith, do you respond?

Or do you turn the other cheek? If you're an employee, when your boss rebukes you under false pretenses, as has happened to me before, unheard of in the civil service, I know. But when your boss rebukes you for something you haven't done, do you shout and scream? Threaten to go on strike? Or do you just calmly and respectfully conduct yourself as a model employee and let your life speak for itself?

[25 : 19] How about this one? This will make me very popular by bringing this up. We're all citizens. When the government requires us to pay for our water, do we disobey?

Do we refuse? Or do we render unto Caesar as Jesus commanded us? Friend, the fire is not there to punish you. The fire is there, ultimately, to make you more like Christ.

Because think about this. Christ who didn't open his mouth to defend himself. Who went willingly like a lamb to the slaughter. Christ who could have said, I'm not putting up with all of this.

I'm not putting up with being beaten and mocked and scorned and harassed and intimidated. Christ who could have called down twelve legions of angels for protection, but instead, willingly, went to the cross.

Christ who even on that cross bled for the ones who nailed him to the cross. The ones who beat him and whipped him and scourged him.

[26 : 28] And remember what he prayed? Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing. John puts it this way. You don't have to turn to it, but this is from 1 John 3. Dear friends, now we are children of God.

What we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we'll be like him. For we shall see him as he is.

And that, Peter says in verse 8, ought to fill us with joy. Because our trials, friends, are not interruptions in our Christian walk. They're not these things that happen to us that distract from being Christian.

Our trials, friends, they are our Christian walk. That's when we prove our faith. Our trials are there to make us more like Christ. And in them, verse 9, even though we suffer, and even though we don't always see God, we are receiving the end result of our faith.

The end result that is guaranteed because of this living hope. The living hope that is precious because it is refined by fire. So, our living hope is predestined, precious, and lastly, prophetic.

[27 : 42] Now, it's very easy. I wonder about this sometimes myself when I teach this stuff. It's very easy and understandable to wonder, why do we bother reading the Old Testament? It doesn't look very relevant to us.

I mean, this kind of strange collection of books of history and poetry and law seems to apply to this group of people in ancient Palestine. It doesn't seem to have a whole lot of relevance to me living in East Cork in the 21st century.

And sometimes, I'm guilty of this, we can take the stories of Joseph and Daniel and Moses and all of them and we can kind of take life lessons for us. And that's not wrong, necessarily, but it's not the point of the Old Testament.

You see, the point of the whole Bible is that it's part of this one big story. And the story goes something like this. God created a perfect universe. Through mankind, sin came in and corrupted it. And one day, God will restore the universe to the way it was in the very beginning. That's the whole Bible in a nutshell. It's not much more complicated than that. Basically, the Bible is a story about how God is going to sort out sin.

[28 : 50] And all of these parts of the Old Testament, you know, Exodus from Egypt, the Promised Land, Moses, the Kingdom of David, all of these things, they're pictures which point forwards to what it's going to look like at the very end when this sin is eradicated.

And none of these things were going to get rid of this sin. Ultimately, there was only one way in which this sin was going to be destroyed. And verse 10 says the prophets, the guys in the Old Testament who spoke the words of God, they searched intently for this.

They wanted to know, they yearned to know, how was this going to happen? What's it going to look like? When is the Messiah coming? What's he going to do? And they wrote things like this.

Isaiah said this, The Lord himself will give you a sign, O Israel. Behold, which just means, look, the virgin will give birth to a child. Jeremiah, I will set up over them one shepherd, and he shall feed them and be the good shepherd.

Micah, you, Bethlehem, from you will come forth for me one who is to be the ruler in Israel. Zechariah, behold, that word again, look, your king is coming to you, righteous and having salvation, humble and mounted on a donkey.

[30 : 16] David, I looked for pity, but there was none. For my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink. Now those are five.

One source I read said there are over 350 prophecies in the Old Testament that are directly fulfilled by Jesus Christ. 350. Those are just five.

And the prophets only saw these things through the lens of their own time and their own experience, but we have the benefit of history. So we know Jesus was born of a virgin.

We know he was the good shepherd who quite literally fed the sheep. We know he was born in Bethlehem. We know he entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey.

And we know that the Romans gave him sour wine to drink when he was hanging on the cross. And these are things that are not accidents. They are the fulfillment of thousands of years of biblical prophecy of God's plan.

[31 : 14] And we know verse 12 that these prophets were not serving themselves, but they were serving us. That's you and me. That's the people who live on this side of Calvary.

You see, the prophets, friends, their very words were pointing towards a picture of the fulfillment of Jesus Christ, God's plan to send his own son into the world to purchase for himself a people, a bride.

And that bride is the church. Not just abstract, by the way. This church, here, this morning, in this literal room, with this literal people, listening to this literal sermon, this living hope, friends, that you have, this is not God reacting to something.

He's not reacting to Brexit. He's not reacting to Islamic State. He's not reacting to all of the other things that go on in the world that make us really uncomfortable and make us wonder what's going on, Lord.

This is something that stretches back hundreds and hundreds of years before the prophets to the Garden of Eden itself, where God promised, one day, from the seed of the woman, will come the one who will crush the head of the snake, the one who would destroy sin, the one who would conquer death.

[32 : 32] We should read the Old Testament, friends, because these things remind us God is in control, even when things don't go the way we want them to go.

when we lose our job, when we're sick, when my two-year-old daughter is screaming here on my first Sunday in Carragalline, when all of these things happen that don't go according to plan, God's plan will not get interrupted.

That's why we should read the Old Testament. And here's what Peter is basically saying. Brothers and sisters, I know you're feeling the heat. So am I. So is Paul. So are all the other apostles.

So are all the other believers. But friends, long ago, and in many ways, Hebrews 1 verse 1 says, God spoke to us through those prophets who we just read about. But in these last days, he has spoken to us, who?

Through his son, whom he has appointed heir, king, emperor, ruler, over all things. And Peter says, this is astounding, even angels long to look into these things you can read a lot about angels.

[33 : 42] They're stronger than we are. They're smarter than we are. They're better looking than we are, according to the Bible. But even angels long to look into these promises made to you and me.

Because even the most beautiful, the most strong, the most angelic angel is still not one of the people about whom the prophets were speaking, whom the prophets were serving.

That's you and me. And that's incredible. So don't stop witnessing. Don't stop loving one another. Don't stop serving one another. Husband, keep on being gentle.

Wife, keep on loving. Parent, keep on being devoted. Employee, keep on being faithful. Master, keep on being kind. Be the light of the gospel.

as in really be that light by nature of your life in a world of darkness that desperately needs that light. Because Christ has destroyed death.

[34 : 49] And Christ will bring us to him one day. It's not up for debate. It's done. It's been purposed long ago and now we know it for real.

