

Our Birth: Cosmic

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. I'll be reading today's scripture lesson from the first letter of Peter, chapter 1, verses 1 to 5, and 23 to 25, and chapter 5, verses 12 to 14.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exile 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 ready to be revealed in the last time. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

[1 : 38] For all people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers, and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.

Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Good morning, Christ Church.

As we gathered together last Sunday, we introduced the themes of this great letter of 1 Peter, and we looked at those first two verses.

And today, I want you to notice the way that this Christian, one of the first Christians, and this great apostle of Jesus Christ, notice how he speaks as he begins this letter.

[2 : 43] He says in verse 3, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter can barely start talking. He can hardly get past his introduction, and he's just bursting forth in praise at the beginning of this letter.

And in this, he's doing what all the early Christians did. The moment he mentions the triune God, the moment he says the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, he's like a little child on Christmas morning who can hardly contain herself.

He says, Praise be, glory be, thanks be to God. And this is characteristic of the early church, and it's been characteristic in all the periods of reformation and revival and renewal in the church.

There's just this sense of joy, this sense of praise that comes bursting forth from God's people. And Peter, to remind you, he's writing to these Christian exiles and foreigners who are living in, quote unquote, Babylon, who are suffering many trials, suffering a lot of grief and difficulty because they're following the way of Jesus.

And he's writing to them saying, Here is something that you can greatly rejoice in. Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And what is Peter responding to?

[4 : 05] What's causing him to just burst forth in praise and worship and adoration and thanksgiving? It says in verse 3, 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. He's rejoicing in the great mercy of God.

He's rejoicing in this God who has mercifully given us these three glorious gifts. And that's what we want to explore today, these great gifts from this merciful God.

And what Peter is telling us is that Christianity, biblical Christianity, historic Christianity, rejoices in a living hope, a new birth, and an eternal inheritance.

Christianity, Christianity rejoices in a living hope. First of all, Christianity rejoices in a living hope.

[5 : 05] Again, this is what he says, In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is vital and central and foundational to the Christian faith.

In fact, there's no Christianity apart from the resurrection of Jesus. And as we think back to those events at that time, we remember that Peter himself, Peter who's writing this letter, Peter disowned Jesus three times.

And in that moment, when he was disowning and denying Jesus, he called down curses on himself and he said, I don't even know this man. I don't even know who you're talking about.

And in that moment, we're told in the gospel that he broke down and he wept. And he was utterly downcast in misery and sorrow. And then shortly thereafter, Jesus died on the cross.

And in that moment, Peter's hopes came to an end. Peter was stuck in his failure. Peter was condemned in his guilt and his shame and his fear of what is it going to be like now to stand before the judgment of God.

[6 : 19] And so what was it that relieved Peter of his misery? What came in to Peter's life to give him relief from his great failure and his great condemnation?

Well, it was this, that on Easter Sunday morning, Peter himself went and saw the empty tomb. And he heard the message from that tomb that he's not here, he's risen.

And Peter later on that day, he went and he saw Jesus that night. On Easter Sunday night, he heard Jesus and he touched Jesus. And he ate with the resurrected and living Jesus.

And this happened over the course of those next 40 days until Jesus' ascension into heaven. In fact, we're told in the gospel of John, this great story at the end of John's gospel, that last chapter, chapter 21, Jesus asked Peter three times, Do you love me?

Do you love me? Do you love me? And in that moment, he's restoring Peter for his threefold denials. And he's saying to Peter, feed my sheep. Feed my sheep. Feed my sheep.

[7 : 24] Feed my sheep. So what was it that transformed Peter? How did hope come alive for Peter? Well, he had these encounters with the living Lord. And what was it that happened to Peter then when the Holy Spirit came, when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost?

Peter, he gave the first Christian sermon in Jerusalem. And here's just a little portion of what he said in that sermon to this gathering of Jewish people. He said, God raised Jesus Christ from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

God raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. Exalted to the right hand of God, he, Jesus, has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

What is Peter saying? Well, he's saying that if Jesus has been raised to this new sort of bodily life, this new sort of transphysical life, then we can have the confidence that this crucified man is actually now the living Lord and that he now occupies the highest place in the cosmos, that he's exalted to the throne of God the Father himself and that he is even now pouring out the Holy Spirit upon his church as his people are praying for the Holy Spirit.

What Peter's saying is that the resurrected Jesus is alive and he's active in our lives even now. He's not just a figure of the past, he's our living contemporary.

[9 : 04] He's the living focus of our lives. He's the living reality of our worship and our fellowship and our mission. The historic Jesus is the contemporary Christ, and he's filling his disciples with this electrifying intensity of his resurrection power.

Now, that's how Peter preaches to Jewish people, but what about when he's not with Jewish people? How does he preach? What does he say to non-Jewish Greco-Roman pagans?

Virtuous pagans, but pagans. Well, we're told that when he goes to the Gentile centurion of the Roman army, his name's Cornelius, and he goes to his family, his extended family, his whole household, probably a hundred different people of all his employees and the folks who are related to him, and here's what Peter says in that message in Acts chapter 10.

He says, They killed Jesus by hanging him on a cross, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen, by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.

He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead, and all the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

[10:32] Again, what Peter's saying is that even now, Jesus is alive and Jesus is active, and he is the one who's orchestrating the preaching of the gospel. He's the one who's enabling people to believe.

He's the one who's doling out the forgiveness of sins, and he is the one, Peter says, who will judge the living and the dead as the one whom God has appointed to that awesome task, and that all people, all the people that have ever lived and all the people you've ever met are going to stand before this Jesus and look at him in the eyes and given accounting to him as the judge of all the earth.

Christians are people who believe objectively that Jesus has been bodily raised from the dead, and we're people who experience subjectively that Jesus is among us, giving us his life and his power. And this is why he says in verse 3, in his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Peter is encouraging these Christian exiles and foreigners who are experiencing a very hard time. They're suffering great trials because they're being faithful to the ways of Jesus in their culture, and what Peter is saying to them is that your hope is not a dead hope.

[12:05] Your hope is not a lifeless hope. Your hope is a lively and a living hope. It's not shadowy. It's not uncertain. It's not nebulous or indefinite. Your hope is as vibrant as Jesus Christ, the resurrected Jesus, is full of life and power.

And this, my friends, is not mere optimism or cheerfulness. This is not the power of positive thinking that minimizes our problems and our difficulties and our trials.

No, what Peter is saying is that however badly you are treated because of the way of Jesus, what's more true than all of that is that you have a living hope to sustain you, is that you have a living hope that can enable you to endure, that you have a living hope that enables you to live as more than conquerors, a living hope in which you share in the triumph and the victory of Jesus himself.

And again, this does not negate any of our negative experiences. This does not mean that we will not continue to feel all those basic human emotions of sadness and anxiety and all the rest, but what Peter is saying is that there's just a deeper and a wider reality that we've all come to live in. That this Jesus, the Lord Jesus, who was crucified on Friday, came out of his grave on Sunday.

And Peter says, that is what is gripping me.

[13:38] That's what is moving me and thrilling me and making me cry out, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. blessed because Jesus didn't remain in his grave.

Jesus was brought out from his tomb and he conquered over death. And if Jesus is not dead, Peter implies, then he went through sin and he went through death and he went through hell back into that eternal realm of glory from whence he came to us.

He vanquished sin and he conquered death and he triumphed over hell and he's gone victoriously through all of those things for us to the other side where he rules and he reigns in glory as the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

This, Peter says, is our living hope. Our living hope is not a thing that can be dashed and lead to disappointment. Our living hope is a person who is indestructible and who can deliver, therefore, on all of his promises.

In most churches, that's where you say amen. Amen. If you're here exploring Christianity and you have questions about the resurrection, as we said on Easter Sunday, there's a lot of wonderful, rich resources for you to examine the evidence of this.

[15:03] And I'd point today to a book. Unfortunately, I gave out all my copies in this Easter season, but Rebecca McLaughlin has a great short little book called *Is Easter Unbelievable? Four Questions Everyone Should Ask About the Resurrection Story*.

And if that's you and you're exploring that, I commend that little book to you. *Is Easter Unbelievable?* But if you're a Christian and Jesus is your living hope, I guess my question for you is, what is your plan to spend time with your living hope this week?

How will you listen to what your living hope has to say to you through his word? How are you going to talk to and respond to your living hope about all the concerns of your life this week?

Christianity rejoices in a living hope. But Christianity not only rejoices in this living hope, Christianity rejoices also in a new birth.

Christianity rejoices in a new birth. What Peter's saying is that we have a living hope not only because Jesus lives, but because by God's great mercy we also live.

[16:08] We sang about this just a little bit ago. That God has not only given new life to the resurrected Jesus, but he's given new life to us. Again, Peter says, in his great mercy, verse three, in his great mercy he's given us new birth.

And then down in verse 23 he says, for you have been born again not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God.

Some of you might say, oh dear, is this one of those churches where we're going to talk about being born again? I thought that was just for certain types of people with big time troubles, not us educated, put together folks.

I thought that was just for certain kinds of churches, certain kinds of Christians who need sort of an emotional, cathartic experience, not for us. But I think for many Christians and especially among our friends and neighbors here in the East Bay, there's a lot of discomfort with and even confusion by this language of the new birth and being born again.

So I just want to ask the questions, what is the ancient biblical meaning of this word? Anaganeo.

What does that mean? And why is the New Testament saturated with this doctrine that's so central and vital to the Christian faith?

[17:27] What does it mean to be begotten again or born again? What does it mean to experience the new birth? I think the best way to talk about this is to go to the Gospel of John, chapter three.

It's a famous story. It's a man named Nicodemus. And he comes to Jesus as a rabbi in Israel. He's a member of the Sanhedrin, which basically means he's a senator.

He's successful. He's wealthy. He's a pillar of his community. He knows the scriptures. He adheres to the law of God. He's a paragon of moral excellence and religious observance.

This is basically as good a person as you can think of, as good a person as you could hope to find. And he comes and he's humble before Jesus.

He's open to Jesus. He wants to learn from Jesus. And how does Jesus respond to Nicodemus in John three? Jesus says, Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they're born again or born from above.

[18:31] Nicodemus said, How can someone be born when they are old? Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother's womb to be born. He's astonished by what Jesus has just said to him.

And Jesus answered, He said, Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again.

Jesus does not say to this great man, You know what you need? You need to be topped off a little bit. What you need is to be supplemented here and improved there.

And what we need is just to kind of complete you, Nicodemus. No, he says to Nicodemus, You've got to start over. None of the good that you've done or none of the good that you might be able to do counts at all.

You've got to begin again as a spiritual baby. And this is so important because many people think that Christianity is about putting your faith in Jesus and his death and his resurrection so that you can be forgiven of your sins.

[19:38] And that's true enough. But what happens next? When you're forgiven of your sins, what do you do then? Are you just left to struggle and to sweat and to fight and to try to live a good life?

Are you left then to just kind of in your own resources follow Jesus' example and live according to the Ten Commandments and live according to this high ethical standard in the Sermon on the Mount?

If you've ever tried to do that just on the basis of being forgiven, you know that it's impossible. You cannot do it. If you try that in your own power, you're going to fail miserably and be utterly hopeless. Why is that? Because we need a new life. We need a new identity. We need a new outlook and a new power if we're going to live the Christian life.

Jesus does not tell Nicodemus what you really need is to be forgiven. That's true. But what he says to Nicodemus is you need to be regenerated with a new birth, a new beginning so that you can live an entirely new and different kind of life.

[20 : 54] And this is what the Apostle Paul is saying in 2 Corinthians 5, 17. He says, therefore if anyone is in Christ, you're a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come.

Why is it necessary to be born again as a new creation? Why is it necessary to be born again into this new life? Well, Peter says in verse 23, for you've been born again not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God.

What he's saying there is that in your first birth, that was from a perishable seed. Meaning that the seed of your parents had sin and death in it.

It was a corruptible seed. It was a poison seed because of the first Adam and Eve and all the way down there was a taint of evil and something was off in it.

And so what is needed for this new birth, this second birth, he says, is the implanting of a different kind of seed. An imperishable seed. An incorruptible seed.

[22 : 01] And what Peter's saying is that when God puts his divine life in you, when God puts his abundant and eternal life into you, you become a new person.

A person that's completely different than the person you were before. You become, as Peter will say in his next letter, you become a partaker of the divine nature.

And that means that you have a new heart and you have a new mind, a new will and a new conscience. A new outlook and a new identity and a new power, a new being because you have the life of God in your soul.

Now I want to think about this for a moment from a particular vantage point and that is to think for a second about all the baby boom that's been happening at Christ Church.

It's been somewhat prolific in this past year. Here's all our not yet one-year-olds in this church is Isabella, Robin, Meredith, Suri, Shiru, Teddy, Neri, Samuel, and Ethan.

[23 : 08] And we've even had like three kids just recently move away, three babies, but we have replacements coming. Two more are on the way in May and July. And that's almost like one baby per month that's being cranked out here at Christ Church.

So we can, if you pray for anyone, pray for their mothers today. But for each of these babies, their birth was a definite event in their lives that is going to have ongoing consequences for them.

And it doesn't really matter when they were born. You know, if they were born at night in the winter or the morning in the summer. It doesn't really matter how they were born, natural birth, C-section. It doesn't matter where they were born, at home or in the hospital or in the car from the home to the hospital. What really matters for each one of these babies is that they were born, that they have new life.

And this is the same in the second birth or the new birth. It doesn't matter how you were born. Whether it happened for you fast or slow. Whether for you it was subtle or quite dramatic.

[24 : 26] What happens, what really matters is that this new birth took place in your life. And it has ongoing consequences for you. And in the same way, you know, none of these births is something that we, you know, go and congratulate the child, like, way to go.

It's not something that the baby did. Right? No one gives themselves birth. It happens to you. And someone did it for you, which is why all of you should go call your mom and tell her how much you love her today.

And it's the same way in the second birth. In the new birth, nobody can create their own life. Nobody can bring something out of nothing but God.

And this is what James says in his great letter in James chapter 1 verse 18. He says, God the Father chose to give us birth. You didn't choose that. God the Father chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be kind of first fruits of all he created.

So what I'm trying to tell you today is that a Christian is a person who's been born not one time but two times. And so my question is, have you experienced the new birth? And if you haven't experienced it but you want to, ask God for his mercy.

[25 : 47] In his great mercy, Peter says, he has given us new birth. Ask him to mercifully put his divine life into your soul today. Because your greatest need is to know God as your Father and to know him as a child of God so that you can call on him and be blessed by him.

And if you have received the new birth, then again, I want to ask you what is it going to look like this week to begin your day saying, Abba Father. Abba Father who gave me birth.

Holy is your name. Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me new birth and new life into your kingdom. I want your heavenly kingdom to come into the earth through me today.

Lord, Abba Father, let your life flow through me today. Christianity rejoices in a living hope.

And Christianity also rejoices in a new birth. And finally, I want to end by talking about how Christianity rejoices in an eternal inheritance. Christianity rejoices in an eternal inheritance.

[26 : 57] What does this new birth and this being born again lead to? It's just the beginning. But what does it lead to? He says in verse 3, in his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And here it is, 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 ready to be revealed in the last time.

What Peter's talking about here is not about life after death with God in heaven as great as that is going to be. What Peter's talking about here is the God who made the world as a perfect paradise.

And this God who's not going to be satisfied until all of his creation has been fully and beautifully restored. He's talking about how the Lord is going to renew his whole creation and he's going to destroy everything that's evil, everything that's sinful, everything that's stained and ugly and foul in that creation.

and instead he's going to establish the kingdom of God fully and finally and forever on the earth.

What Peter's describing is a coming new birth not just of individual people but a new birth of the whole universe.

[28 : 22] A new birth of the universe that's going to include the resurrection of our bodies where we are going to be delivered from all the vestiges of illness and of weakness and of sin and of shame and we like Jesus are going to have a glorious body.

That's your inheritance. That's the coming salvation that's ready to be revealed at the last time. And what Peter's saying is that this same power that's going to renew the whole world at the end of history is the same power that comes into your life now through faith in Jesus Christ.

Christ. And how do you know that that power of God has come into you? How do you know that you have the new birth and the living hope? He says ask yourself this very simple question.

What am I looking forward to as my inheritance? What am I looking forward to as my inheritance?

Am I looking forward to things that are going to perish or spoil or fade?

Am I looking to things that are going to be subject to disappointment and disorder and darkness and depression and disease and death? Peter is telling us that we need an inheritance that's impervious to all of these inevitabilities in this world.

[29 : 48] And Peter's saying I want you to look for a moment dear friends at an inheritance that you did not earn and that you cannot lose. He says there's a salvation for you that's finished and it's perfect and it's unchangeable and it's being kept by God for you.

And what he's doing is he's encouraging these Christian exiles these Christian foreigners living in quote unquote Babylon who are suffering grief in all kinds of difficult trials.

People who literally have been displaced from their homes because of Jesus. People who have lost their inheritances because they're following the way of Jesus and what he's telling them is that this world and your life in this world as important as it is is not your true home.

It's not your true inheritance. We are living and we are waiting for the new creation to come. And what's so great about your inheritance Peter says is that it can never perish or spoil or fade.

It's imperishable meaning that it's free from death and decay that would ruin it. It's undefiled meaning that it's free from evil and sin and impurity that would spoil it. It's unfading meaning that it's free from the ravages of time that would make it faint and feeble and ultimately to fail.

[31 : 16] You know many people think that the gospel is if I just try to be good then maybe someday something good will happen to me God will be good to me and bless me but friends the gospel is so much more sure than that.

The gospel says that because of Jesus and what he's done on my behalf not only am I accepted by God now but there's a salvation that's being kept for me in a way that's utterly safe and secure in a way that's untouched by death and unstained by evil and unimpaired by time a salvation for me that is guaranteed and not only is our inheritance and our salvation kept by God but Peter says we

ourselves are being kept by God even now shielded guarded by his power until the day when we inherit our great salvation.

so friends have you been born again into this living hope and this great inheritance this great salvation?

Have you been born again out of this lifeless hope and perishable inheritance and unreliable salvation that this world offers to you?

the gospel says that God has an inheritance that's waiting for me that I'm going to receive it from him and I'm going to be raised up to see his face and I'm going to be like him and I'm going to have a glorified body in a renewed earth and living in a realm that's incorruptible and I'm going to reign with him forever.

[32 : 59] Have you been born again into that inheritance? Have you experienced this new birth into a living hope? An imperishable inheritance?

A secure salvation that Jesus has won for you? And if you say yes I have then the right thing to say today the right way to feel today is praise be to God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ praise him for his great mercy toward us in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen.