

Weirdos but Wealthy - rejoice because it's worth it!

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[0 : 0 0] which may be familiar to a few of you. Saturday, July 29th. 8 stone 11. VG. Alcohol unit, 7. Calories, 6245.

10pm. Cannot believe what I had been through. I drove for two hours, parked at the front of the Alkenbury's house, hoping I looked okay in my bunny outfit.

As I started to cross the lawn, they all went quiet. And I realised to my horror that instead of fancy dress, the ladies were in country casual style, calf-length, floral, two pieces, and the men were in slack and V-neck sweaters.

I stood there, frozen, like, well, a rabbit. And then, while everyone stared, Unit Alkenbury came flapping across the lawn. I thought it was supposed to be a fancy dress party, I hissed.

Oh dear, didn't Jeff call you, she said. I'm so sorry, darling. Well, even if we've never had a Bridget Jones-style shocker, I guess that as women we can relate to the fear of looking inappropriate.

[1 : 1 0] Have you ever had one of those chats before an event where you compare outfits with your pal? Because, obviously, it would be a total disaster to rock up and find that you were the only one wearing jeans when everyone else was in a frock.

We don't like being different, do we? Generally, we prefer not to look odd. And for the first readers of 1 Peter, not fitting in was a bit of an issue.

And if we're honest, it's the same for us. Sometimes, as Christians, we can go around feeling exactly like Bridget Jones. We aren't part of a gang.

We look different. And it's unsettling. But Peter wants us to feel positive about being the weird ones. Now, for those of us who were here last night, Fiona was explaining how Peter addresses his audience as elect exile.

In verse 1, he uses these two contrasting words. Elect, meaning chosen, and exile, people who aren't at home in this world.

[2 : 1 7] Weirdos. Oddballs. And for Peter, feeling like an alien outsider in this world is not an accident. He is defining these first Christians as people who've been chosen to be weird.

This isn't something they're getting wrong. Like us, they were finding that a struggle. So Peter's writing this letter to reassure them. He's saying, look, I know it's tough to be a Christian, but you've got ground for huge optimism.

And his argument goes something like this, and this you'll find on your handout. Don't wobble when you feel like a weirdo. Rejoice. It's worth it, because you're wealthy, and you're living in the most wonderful time.

So firstly, don't wobble when you feel like a weirdo. I want to spend a few minutes up front just thinking about the background to this letter. Because if we do that, I think we'll see that actually the Christians in Peter's day had good reasons, perhaps, you'll think, to be wobbly in their face.

As we've seen in verse 1, he calls them exiles, and in biblical terms, that is a bad thing. Peter says, the experience of these early Christians is like that of God's people scattered among enemy nations in the Old Testament.

[3 : 33] They're among people who don't respect their faith and think that they're a bunch of losers. I don't know about you, but I always find it really encouraging to bump into someone from church when I'm out and about in Dulwich.

Not just meeting on Sunday, but seeing you in the wild, as it were. And still, I feel like an oddball. But it was even worse for these guys. They were isolated. Just a few Christians dotted here and there in Asia.

Plus, they were being persecuted, we're told. Look at verse 6, because this is a really critical verse. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.

They're going through trials. And the kind of persecution is debated, but it probably wasn't the threat of execution, because Peter lived before the worst persecution started in Lithuania.

I've put some quotes from the rest of the letter on the handout, so you can have a look later. But at this point, it seems probable that the persecution would have been more a kind of subtle marginalisation.

[4 : 39] Later in the letter, Peter talks about people abusing them because they won't go along with the crowd and it's wild living. Perhaps, you know, the way they're so straight-laced and they won't get drunk or bend the rules or watch a dodgy TV show or take part in that office gossip.

It's the persecution of being muttered about and feeling like a loser. And to make it worse, when they're trying so hard to live decent and honourable lives, people are bad-mouthing them as evil-doers, saying that they're the ones who are in the wrong.

And that's interesting because it seems as if their struggle was similar to ours. I wonder if you've ever been out with friends when the topic of homosexuality or gender dysphoria comes up.

You make a big effort to stand up for God's good and loving values and suddenly you're the one labelled an intolerant, uncharitable bigot. Or perhaps, for some of us, we're so frightened of looking weird that we don't say anything.

We tell ourselves it's safer to be a camouflaged Christian and keep our heads down. But this passage shows that's not even possible. We are by nature elect exiles, chosen to be weird and different.

[5 : 50] And like the Christians in 1 Peter, that can make us feel marginalised and insecure. The other written can feel relentless. But Peter doesn't want them to feel wobbly.

And on the contrary, he says that they can be rejoicing. And that's my second point. Rejoice. It's worth it because we're wealthy. And we're going to look at verses 3 to 9.

So these Christians don't feel special and they don't look special to the world around them. But in verse 1 Peter calls them elect. They are the chosen ones.

In God's eyes they're highly esteemed. Dear marginalised Christians, God thinks highly of you. So don't wobble. It's time to rejoice. Even in the midst of your trials it will all be worth it.

But how will it be worth it? I mean, is this just blind optimism detached from reality? Peter, don't you get it? His readers might be thinking. Life is really hard right now.

[6 : 48] Well, in verses 3 to 4 Peter explains the reasons for rejoicing. He says, God has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading.

Even if life is hard and you feel like weirdos now, you can rejoice because in the future you'll inherit untold riches. In 1999, an Argentinian woman called Eva Paoli was working as a maid when she discovered her birth father was actually a wealthy landowner.

And eventually, after a 10-year litigation battle during which they had to dig up and exhume his dead body and the remains of his mother, a court found that her DNA matched and they upheld her claim and she inherited a \$40 million estate.

All the while she'd been grafting as a maid worrying about money, she had an incredible inheritance ahead of her. Depending on the future can seem a bit risky, aren't it?

People say it's just pie in the sky when you die. Because will that fantastic future actually materialise? I mean, what's the guarantee that if I live my life detached from this world and storing up stuff for the future, that that doesn't let me down somehow?

[8 : 15] But our inheritance doesn't depend on risky litigation. It's been secured by Jesus' resurrection. Death wasn't the end for him and through his resurrection we've got the sure hope of the same thing.

Resurrection life. Living hope in verse 3. That is our future. So Peter says, don't worry. your future wealth is safe. Your inheritance is imperishable.

Even if the struggle is hard, nothing will happen to your hope of life. Look at verse 4 again. It will not fade or spoil. In fact, it's even better than that.

Because it's not depending on the future that's risky in reality, but depending on the present. Everything that seems so solid to us today will get trashed. I'm wearing here my favourite trainers.

And you can see that they started off white, but even though I put them through the washing machine two days ago, they are far from pristine and they're wearing through on the soles. I can feel all the pebbles and soon I'll have to bin them for good.

[9 : 18] Because nothing in this world lasts forever, does it? Not for us, not for our families. Covid showed us that. And if we were beginning to forget then we had the war in Ukraine to remind us.

Everything we cherish decays. Everything we know perishes. And that's true for the next generation too. The longings that we have for our children or nieces or godchildren, whether it's a school place, a terrific friendship group or a set of glowing exam results or a place on the first team, these things have got little lasting value.

I've got here, does anyone know what this is? This is a single tulip bulb and it will come out a very nice dark pink. But in 17th century Holland, people started to fall in love with these flowers that had been newly introduced from the Ottoman Empire and they became the ultimate status symbol.

Fortunes were made as prices escalated. It was the very first financial bubble. And at one point a single bulb like this was able to buy four tonnes of wheat, a thousand pounds of cheese, a suit of clothes and a silver drinking cup.

But the following year, people, not surprisingly, began to see through the hype, prices collapsed and the value fell to nearly zero. People who'd sold everything to invest in tulips lost the lot.

[10 : 40] And if we place our hopes on education or money or on our reputation in this world, we too are betting on tulips. When Jesus returns, the true value of those things we thought looked so solid will be revealed and we'll have lost everything.

It's betting on this world that's the risky choice. Placing our hope in Jesus is faithful. Because, verse 4 says, this life we're waiting for in the future is imperishable.

It has lasting value. It's in a secure place because it's stored in heaven. Now that might sound a little bit kind of otherworldly, but that doesn't mean it's not real because Jesus is in heaven and that's the place he'll return from in his resurrection body, bringing our inheritance with him.

Our inheritance is safe. But hang on, you say, what if something happens before that? My inheritance may be safe, but what if I lose my faith in the Lord Jesus, which is the very thing that means I have a share in his inheritance?

What if I fall away before I die? And you can imagine that Peter's first audience were really worried about that as they became increasingly pressured. What happens if they can't keep going and keep up?

[12 : 00] But in verse 5, Peter wants to reassure them that their faith is also safe. Because that's being kept in heaven, too. He says, don't worry about your faith in these trials because God is shielding you by his power.

He will keep you, Christian, through the struggles he takes. You're being shielded. Plus, for the Christian, trials won't destroy your faith. Instead, they'll refine it.

If you heat impure gold in a fire, it melts and all the impurities float so you can cut them off and the gold ends up more pure. Fire doesn't destroy gold.

So if you're trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection, you needn't worry because with God's power working in you, trials will simply refine your faith. Take a look at verse 7.

Peter says, therefore, on the day you come into your inheritance, when Jesus Christ is revealed, there'll be praise and glory and honour. So there's no need to wobble, even when we're surprised by the reality that people hate us for being Christian.

[13 : 11] Despite trials, verse 8 says, we can rejoice with joy inexpressible because we've got a great future and it's safe and we trust in Jesus and our faith is safe and our trials will only refine it.

And he goes on to say that it isn't just the future that Christians can rejoice in because that future wealth is anticipated in the present. In verse 9, Peter says, that they're already obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

So salvation is future when Jesus returns, when we'll experience rescue from judgment. But for Peter, salvation is something also that we're already obtaining because the heart of salvation is knowing God.

That's what's going to make our inheritance glorious. We'll see him face to face and we'll be with him. The knowledge of Jesus starts now. Have a look at verse 8.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[14 : 25] Already we love him and believe in him because we know the gospel, the good news of his life and death. And Peter says this relationship is key. The fact that these early Christians lived in an era where they can know Jesus makes their time the best time ever.

And this is my third point. The most wonderful time. Verses 10-12. I think it's really important for us to see that we live in this time too. We live after Jesus' death and resurrection.

We have heard the gospel. We can know Jesus. Verse 10 says that this is something which prophets in the past desperately long to know but only glimpse which verse 12 says that angels even long to look into.

Are any of your families here, I wonder, Doctor Who fans? I've got a big Whovian in my family. The idea of having a time-travelling TARDIS at your disposal is kind of amazing, isn't it?

Imagine you could set the time dial anywhere in history. The headlines right now are pretty grim, so maybe we'd be tempted to turn and just head elsewhere. But it's striking that Peter says that this is the best time right now between Jesus' resurrection and his coming again, even though life is so tough, even though they're unfairly treated.

[15 : 47] This time in history, he says, is the envy of all God's people because you now know the good news. It's being preached so you know the Jesus who loves you and you love him.

So when we're exhausted by feeling different and tempted to wobble, let's rejoice because it's so worth it. We have a living hope now and we can be sure that we'll inherit great wealth.

Those around us who look so sorted are investing in tulips. Our faith is safe. Our salvation has already begun because the Jesus who we'll spend eternity with is the one who loved us enough to die for us and he has the power to keep us.