

## Exiles: Indestructibly Saved

### 1 Peter 1:3-5

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Last week we began our new series in 1 Peter entitled, *Exiles*. The title is taken from the first verse of the book, "*Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ. To those who are elect exiles.*" (1 Peter 1:1 ESV) We saw that Peter wrote to Christians who had been part of the common Roman practice of colonizing conquered territories (the Dispersion). They were geopolitical exiles from Rome to Asia Minor. Peter takes their geopolitical reality and makes spiritual application. All Christians are spiritual exiles. We live in a world whose values and driving priorities are so antithetical to living to the glory of God that it ought to make us feel like Romans living in Asia Minor. Exiles.

Peter's encouragement throughout the letter will be that these feelings of estrangement and even suffering are part of God's plan to change us within. Exiles want to change *where* they are; God wants to change *who* we are. God places us where we are that all our exile experiences might change us into people for his own possession (chapter 2).

What might exiles need to know? They won't always be exiles. Someday they will be where they belong. Be where they are welcomed. Be where they long to be.

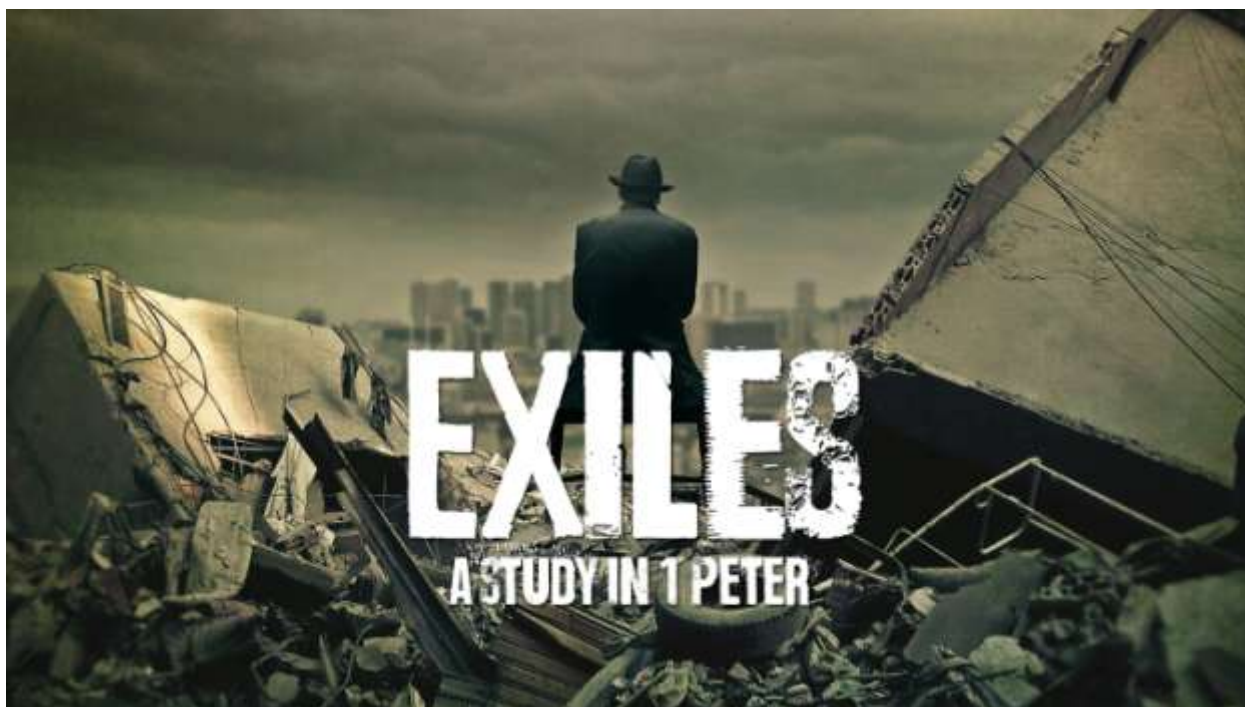
*"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* (1 Peter 1:3-5)

Remember I told you that 1 Peter is a letter about enduring suffering. Notice how he begins it. "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" That's not exactly how you'd expect a book on suffering to begin! Praise God!

This echoes Job's response to terrible tragedy in his life. "*The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD*" (Job 1:21). Note Peter's letter on suffering doesn't begin with a lament or a dirge or even a complaint, but with praise and thanksgiving to God.

Verses 3-5 are a precious jewel of gospel description. It outlines our salvation in terms of our past, present, and future. The truths here only apply to genuine Christians. Perhaps you are here not yet trusting in Jesus. I hope that God might use the amazing spiritual realities and promises that come with faith in Jesus to draw you to put your trust in him today.

If you are an exile far from your homeland, you are faced with accepting certain realities. Your homeland felt safe but this new place is strange and a bit creepy. Your homeland was your security. There you had family and friends, property and possessions, identity and safety. To be in exile is to live without these things. Our graphic for the series shows a man sitting on a pile of rubble looking at a faraway city. That's not a bad picture of an exile (see next page).



Peter wants them, and us today, to realize that what we have in Christ, even in exile, is far greater than anything we had prior to Christ. He describes this in terms of past, present, and future.

### **Past: Born Again to a Living Hope**

*"According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."* (1 Peter 1:3)

If their exile was by God's choice (verse 1), their new birth was by God's mercy (verse 3). *Born again? What?* That's what Nicodemus said in John 3 when Jesus spoke of new birth. Nicodemus was a religious leader among the Jewish people. He came to Jesus stealthily in the night seeking spiritual answers. Jesus' response was, *"Unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."* (John 3:3) Nicodemus was confused. *What? We are only born once and you are saying we must be born again?*

What was Jesus talking about? New birth. Born again. Regeneration. All of these biblical terms describe what God does in the heart of the sinner who believes in Jesus as their personal Savior. A miracle takes place within us. The Bible describes our natural spiritual condition as "dead." It follows that for us to live spiritually, we must be born again spiritually. This is what Peter describes. In God's mercy he has caused us to be born again. Where does this new life come from? *"He has caused us to be born again."* (1 Peter 1:3) Regeneration is something that God does. We are passive. New birth is not something we can do any more than we cause ourselves to born physically. Have you ever heard of a baby coming out of the womb shouting, "Look what I did"?

Neither can we claim to regenerate ourselves. God does the miracle and by it, we are made alive spiritually. But the change affects our whole being. We are new creations, "the old has passed away; behold, the new has come." (2 Corinthians 5:17). It's like a switch is turned. We become aware of spiritual truth, the presence of God, the presence of sin and its

forgiveness. We develop an interest in Scripture and prayer, and a host of other things begin to spring to life. Salvation is more than new birth, but it most certainly begins with it.

I heard recently about Rosaria Butterfield. She is very upfront about her sexual life as a lesbian and liberal professor at Syracuse University. It's a great story of a normal local church caring for her and introducing her to Christianity. She writes,

"The church that had been praying for me for years was there. Jesus triumphed. And I was a broken mess. Conversion was a train wreck. I did not want to lose everything that I loved. But the voice of God sang a sanguine love song in the rubble of my world. I weakly believed that if Jesus could conquer death, he could make right my world. I drank, tentatively at first, then passionately, of the solace of the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup> (Rosaria Butterfield)

She is now the wife of a Presbyterian pastor.

"You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen [College], night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me. In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed: perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England." (C.S. Lewis)

Christian, think of your own life story. Why are you interested in Christianity? Something changed. Something deep inside. Something that wasn't sourced in you but has changed the whole trajectory of your life. The only explanation is that God did it, isn't it? You were born again.

*"Born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"* (1 Peter 1:3). Why does he call it a living hope? Because our hope is in a living Savior. Do you see the parallel? "Christian hope is ever living because Christ, the ground of that hope, is ever living." (Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, p. 85)

So why is it so important to look back? What do exiled Christians living with all the uncertainty of refugees need? Hope. Our hope is a living hope because our Savior is a resurrected Savior.

### **Present: Heirs of an Inheritance**

*"To an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith."* (1 Peter 1:4-5)

We also have been born again "to" an inheritance. We are probably familiar with the concept of an inheritance. An inheritance is something that comes to us by virtue of a relationship, normally a family relationship. When a person dies, there is a reading of the will where the deceased explains how they want their assets distributed. If your name is in the will, you have an inheritance.

What is true about inheritance? They can be very slippery. Your name may be on the will but it can be removed. So be careful what you say at family Christmas gatherings. An

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/january-february/my-train-wreck-conversion.html>

inheritance can shrink in value. Grandma spent a hundred thousand dollars on collectible Cabbage Patch dolls in 1981. She has given you the whole collection. It used to be worth something, but not anymore. Your sister got the diamonds and you got the dolls. Thanks Grandma.

People can steal inheritances. There is a story or two in my family tree of inheritance stealing. Unscrupulous lawyers can diminish an inheritance. Thieves can steal grandma's jewelry—your inheritance.

Massive inheritances can be squandered. A series on the History channel entitled *The Men Who Built America* got me interested in the family story of the famous Vanderbilts. The family was once worth \$300 billion in today's money. Bill Gates is only at \$70 billion. If you've toured the Biltmore mansion, there was just one descendant who built that. The Vanderbilt fortune dwarves anything the world knows today. Yet in 1973, just 75 years from the height of Vanderbilt wealth, there was a gathering of 120 direct descendants of Cornelius Vanderbilt and not one of them was even a millionaire. Even the greatest material inheritances in history can simply disappear.

Contrast that with the four indestructible qualities of our inheritance as Christians:

### **Imperishable**

To perish is to die. Decay and death is part of everything we know in this world. We can hardly conceive of something that doesn't ultimately die. But our inheritance is imperishable.

### **Undefined**

This speaks to its moral quality. It won't be tainted by sin. There is nothing unseemly or deceptive about it. It is eternally pure and good and beautiful.

### **Unfading**

The flowers fade and the grass withers. Human beauty, fame, and accomplishment fade. The stars of today are forgotten tomorrow. Everything fades. But our inheritance experiences no fading. Time has no corroding effect.

Our inheritance is God and all the eternal blessings which are ours as children of God. Eternal life. Heaven. New Earth. Rewards for the quality of service on earth. Bliss. Beauty. And most importantly, seeing and savoring Jesus and experiencing the fullness of his presence and love.

### **Guarded by God**

The verse goes on, "*kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith.*" (1 Peter 1:4-5)

This inheritance is located in heaven. Jesus described it as "*where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.*" (Matthew 6:20) That's a pretty good bank vault, isn't it?

There is a subtle shift here. "*Kept in heaven*" is our inheritance. The next word is "who." So he is no longer talking about keeping our inheritance but keeping us. The inheritance is kept

in heaven; we are kept on earth. How? *"By God's power...being guarded through faith."* (1 Peter 1:5)

The word there for guarded means *garrisoned*. It's used of guarding the city walls from within. It also can refer to protecting from escape. God's power does both. It keeps us from attack and it keeps us from fleeing.

Here we have a clear statement of the doctrine of preservation. How do Christians stay saved? We are preserved in our salvation by the power of God.

*We are exiles by the choice of God. We are born again by the mercy of God. We are kept saved by the power of God.* Our faith is guarded. The tense of the verb means this is an ongoing activity of God. Always guarded, 24/7.

An example of this in our culture is the Secret Service guarding US presidents. You've seen this. Dark-suited men walking near the president. Talking into their hands. Wearing sunglasses. Looking ultra-cool and dangerous. Why are they there? To provide 24/7 protection. They have incredible power at their disposal. Firepower. Technological power. Air Force One. Agents, money, and missiles. America goes to great effort to guard the life of the president. But as history shows, they can't guarantee it. Even the best of the best can't perfectly protect the life of the president.

What does Peter say here? Our salvation is kept by the infinite power of God. It's like we each have our own spiritual secret service detachment. *She's about to speak to Ms. Gossip, move in. He's leaving on a business trip with Mr. Skeptic and Mrs. Temptation, all units, code red! He's in church but not listening, taze him!* God's power is at work always to sustain our faith. Every day. All the time. 24/7. God has marshaled all his power to ensure that our faith, more precious than gold, will remain alive within us.

"God keeps the inheritance for us, and he keeps us for the inheritance." (Daniel M. Doriani, *1 Peter*, p. 17)

In the past, we were born again. In the present, we have an inheritance. In the future...

### **Future: Salvation Fully Revealed**

*"Who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."* (1 Peter 1:5)

This future aspect of our salvation is when our inheritance becomes our possession. An heir is no longer an heir when the awaited inheritance is finally owned. Think of poor Prince Charles, heir to the throne of England. Talk about waiting. Presumably, the day will come when he will no longer be an heir. He will be king. The titles and the crown jewels and Buckingham Palace and all the other things will finally be his. He is already royalty, but the full experience of his royalty awaits a coronation.

Our salvation is like that. We are already saved. We are already children of God. But the full experience of our salvation is yet to come.

But some day we will possess our inheritance. *"In the last time"* refers to the future consummation of history upon the return of Christ and his final and ultimate victory. Our ultimate inheritance is Christ himself.

*"For time without end, we will see, know, and worship him.  
For time without end, we will serve him fully and faithfully.  
For time without end, we will be in awe that the holy Son of God died for sinners like us."*  
(Author Unknown)

We will never get over that all we have been given has been given to us by the mercy of God.

The Vanderbilts had their fortune by family right. Prince Charles has his inheritance by birth right. We will have our inheritance forever by the mercy and power of God. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

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