

INTRODUCTION

We are in a new teaching series from 1 Peter I’m calling “Aliens.” Two thousand years ago, Jesus Christ invaded planet earth. He didn’t really fit in because He was from heaven. Anyone who is a follower of Jesus is like an alien because we don’t really “fit in” down here—this world is just our temporary home.

A couple received an email from their daughter at college that read: “Dear Mom and Dad, Thought I’d drop you a note to let you know what’s been happening. We had a fire at the dorm the other night and it was destroyed—but don’t worry because I moved in with a nice guy I’ve been seeing named Jim. He quit high school after the 11th grade to get married—but don’t worry because he’s divorced now. I think I may be pregnant—but don’t worry, we’re talking about getting married.” The parents were reeling with shock when they scrolled down a little farther and read: “Don’t worry—everything I’ve written is false. There was no fire and there’s no Jim, but I did get a C- in French and I flunked Calculus. I just wanted you to put everything in its proper perspective.”

If you are a child of God and you aren’t rejoicing today it’s because you don’t have everything in the proper perspective. Have you ever noticed how much easier it is to complain than to rejoice? All you need to complain is a bad feeling and there are thousands of things in this life that can give you a bad feeling—all the way from an ingrown toenail to an obnoxious person. Rejoicing requires faith.

Are you rejoicing today? You may be saying mentally, “Just give me one good reason to rejoice.” I’m not going to do that, instead I’ll give you *five* good reasons why you should rejoice. They’re found in 1 Peter 1:3-6 - see if you can pick them out. As he writes this, Peter is so excited that he bursts forth with praise:

“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- 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. In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”

Please allow me to examine these five reasons why we should be rejoicing. First:

(1) GOD HAS GIVEN YOU A NEW BIRTH - YOU GET TO START OVER!

Sometimes you hear people use the phrase “Born-again Christian” as if that’s a unique kind of Christian. The only kind of genuine Christian is one who has been born again. The phrase “Born-again Christian” is a redundancy. It’s like saying “wet water” or “hot heat.”

In John 3 a hyper-religious man named Nicodemus came to ask Jesus about how have eternal life. Nick came to see Jesus at night. You might say it was the first Nick-at-night! This man was a Pharisee and who fasted two days a week, gave alms to the poor, memorized much of the first

five books of the Old Testament, and attended synagogue religiously. Yet Jesus pointed out to Nick that something was missing. He told him religious activity would never get him into heaven. He had to be born again. Nicodemus didn't catch it at first and asked the obvious question, “Can a man go back into his mother's womb?” Jesus pointed out that Nicodemus was talking about physical birth and He was speaking about a spiritual birth. In John 3:5-7, Jesus said, “Unless a man is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. Flesh gives birth to flesh and Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You MUST be born again.’”

If you are true follower of Jesus, you have two birthdays. You have a physical birthday, and you have a spiritual birth day. In our first birth we are born with a birth defect: Sin. When we approach Jesus in faith and repent of our sin and trust Him for forgiveness He allows us to start over—but without the birth defect of sin.

If you asked me, “David, prove to me you've been born physically.” I wouldn't have to dig out a copy of my birth certificate. Birth certificates can be faked. No, I'd simply say, “I know I was born because I've alive right now!” Look at me, listen to me, touch me—a dead person doesn't do these things.

In most churches if you ask someone, “How do you know you've been born again?” they'll talk about some time when they walked down an aisle and shook the pastor's hand or they'll show you a baptismal certificate. Many people have walked down an aisle and met the pastor but they never met the Master. And you can baptized so many times until you're waterlogged and still not have a personal relationship with Jesus. The best way to know you've been born again is because you have life in Christ—right now!

You may not remember the exact time when you crossed the line from spiritual death to spiritual life, but you know for certain right now you're experiencing life in Jesus. How can you know? There's a difference between how you are now and how you used to be. The Bible says, “If any person is in Jesus Christ, they are a new creation, old things are passed away, behold all things have become new.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) When you are born again, you don't want to talk the way you used to talk, you don't want to do the things you used to do—it's like starting over!

Chuck Colson was arrested and spent time in prison for his role in the Watergate scandal under President Nixon. Since his release, he's led a ministry called Prison Fellowship. In his book, *The Body*, he writes about Bob McAlister, who worked on the staff of the governor of South Carolina and also served as a Prison Fellowship Volunteer. Once when visiting prisoners on Death Row, Bob encountered a repulsive sight as he looked into the cell of Rusty Woomer. Bob wrote:

“Rusty, his face the color of chalk, was sitting on the floor—motionless. Dozens of roaches covered the wall and floor. But what froze my soul were the roaches crawling on the man—his lap, his shoulders—and such was his despair that he did not flick them off.” Bob began to visit Rusty and tell him about God's love and the hope that he could find in Christ. Eventually, Rusty's heart softened and finally through tears Rusty prayed this prayer: “Jesus, I've hurt a lot of people. Ain't no way that I deserve You to hear me, but I'm tired and I'm sick and I'm lonely. My mama's died and she's in heaven with You,

and I never got to tell her bye. Please forgive me, Jesus, for everything I’ve done. I don’t know much about You, but I’m willing to learn, and I thank You for listening to me.”

The next time Bob McAlister visited Death Row he described a different scene: “I walked up to Rusty’s cell. It was spotless. Gone were the dirt and roaches and porno magazines. The walls were scrubbed, the bed was made, the scent of disinfectant hung in the air. Rusty himself was smiling and enthusiastic. He said, ‘I spent all weekend cleaning out my cell because I figured that’s what Jesus wanted me to do.’” (Chuck Colson, *The Body*)

Even if you aren’t a murderer or a bank robber you need a new birth. Have you come to place in your life where you know that you have eternal life and that you’ll go to heaven when you die? If you can say, “YES” to that, it’s because God has given you a new birth—and that’s a reason to rejoice!

(2) WE HAVE A LIVING HOPE—JESUS IS ALIVE!

Peter writes in verse three that we have “a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” We have something the rest of the world doesn’t have—Hope. When the Bible uses the word hope, it’s speaking of a certainty not a possibility. Have you ever heard someone say, “I hope I pass the test” or “I hope I win the lottery” or “I hope I get a job?” Those are all uncertainties. But for the Christian, our hope is a certainty.

People hope for the strangest things. When I was a teenager there was a British Rock Band called The Who. Peter Townshend, the lead singer wrote a hit song called “My Generation.” The lyrics said: People try to put us d-down (Talkin’ ‘bout my generation); Just because we get around (Talkin’ ‘bout my generation); Things they do look awful c-c-cold (Talkin’ ‘bout my generation) I hope I die before I get old (Talkin’ ‘bout my generation).” Did you catch that last line? When you’re young and restless, you want to live it up and never get old. Today, Peter Townshend is 60 years old—what he hoped for didn’t happen. He got old. That’s the nature of the hope outside of Jesus—most of what people hope for never happens.

Here’s a good acrostic for Biblical hope: **H**aving **O**nly **P**ositive **E**xpectations. Are you going to heaven? You don’t have to say, “I hope so!” or “I think so!” You can say, “I know so!” In I John we read, “I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life.” (1 John 5:13)

We need to be like the little boy who was in his backyard with a baseball, a bat and a cap. He kept saying, “I’m the greatest hitter in the world. I’m the greatest hitter in the world.” Then he tossed the ball up and took a mighty swing—he missed. He said, “I’m STILL the greatest hitter in the world.” He tossed the ball up again and missed again, and said, “I AM the greatest hitter in the world.” He missed the next three swings. Then he smiled and said, “Wow! I’m the greatest pitcher in the world!” That’s hope!

As part of the Body of Christ, we have something this world desperately needs. We have Hope. People are hurting because they feel they are in a hopeless marriage, a hopeless job, or have a hopeless health problem. But Peter wrote our Hope is secure as the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That’s the message we ought to be shouting from the rooftops: Life IS tough, but there’s HOPE in Jesus Christ. Gilbert Beenken wrote, “Other men see only a hopeless end, but the Christian rejoices in an endless hope.” That’s another reason to rejoice; we have hope!

(3) WE HAVE AN INHERITANCE IN HEAVEN—PERMANENT!

In verse four Peter writes we have “an inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade—kept in heaven for you.” An inheritance is a gift: you can’t *earn* an inheritance. Sometimes when parents die and leave an inheritance, the children fight over it as if they did something to earn it. I like the bumper sticker you see on many motor homes that say, “We’re spending our children’s inheritance.”

The hope we have in this life is fulfilled in the next world. I’d be a Christian whether there is a heaven or not because following the principles of Jesus Christ would make each of us a better person. But there is a heaven, and our hope extends into the time after we die. Paul writes in I Corinthians 15:19: “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.” (1 Corinthians 15:19)

That’s why a Christian should never get discouraged by the problems and pains of this world, because we know there is a future life for us after this life is ended. During a little league baseball game, a man arrived late and asked a kid in the dugout what the score was. The little boy responded, “eighteen to nothing—we’re behind.” The man said, “I’ll bet you’re pretty discouraged.” The kid smiled and said, “Why should I be discouraged? We haven’t even gotten up to bat yet!” That’s true for a Christian, too. We haven’t even gotten up the plate until we realize our permanent inheritance in heaven!

I like the word “permanent.” So many things in life aren’t permanent. I have pants that claim to be permanent press, but I doubt they’ll still have their crease in a hundred years. Ladies go the beauty salon and get a permanent on their hair. Ladies how long does a permanent last? There’s something new called permanent cosmetics in which lipstick or other cosmetics are surgically applied to the face—see if that’s permanent in 1,000 years. Permanent markers aren’t really permanent either. But our home in heaven is as *permanent* as God Himself. You can rejoice that you have a permanent home in heaven. Jesus said, “In my Father’s house there are many rooms. I am going there to prepare a place for you.” (John 14:2) There is no inheritance tax, and no probate court can ever take it away from you. Your title and name have been recorded in the Lamb’s Book of Life in heaven. That’s a great reason to rejoice!

(4) WE ARE SHIELDED BY GOD’S POWER—UNTIL THE END!

In verse five speaks of us “who through faith are shielded by God’s power.” The word “shielded” is the Greek word *phroureo*. It was a military word used to describe soldiers who would gathered around their camp to protect it from attack. In the first war with Iraq, our military launched Desert Shield followed by Desert Storm. Desert Shield was the gathering of troops and supplies as the air assets attacked targets within Iraq. Better than Desert Shield is Divine Shield.

The idea is that your heart is guarded just as a military post is guarded by soldiers. God sets up a military guard in our hearts; so no one can interfere with our salvation. You are saved by His grace, and you are *kept* by His power. The Psalmist writes: “You are a shield around me, O Lord, my glorious One who lifts up my head.” (Psalm 3:3)

Once God has placed you into His family by a new birth, no one or nothing can cause you to lose your relationship with Him. You don’t have to work to keep your salvation, He is keeping you. Jesus compared us with sheep in John 10. He said, “My Father who has given them to me is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.” (John 10:29)

I’ve told the story before about the time when my daughter Laura Grace and I were walking out of a stadium after a high school football game. She was holding on to my hand, and we were walking on some gravel. It was a hot night, and our hands were sweaty. Suddenly she lost her grip and her hand slipped out of mine. She fell and hit her head on a sharp piece of gravel. And although it was only a minor cut, her forehead was soon covered with blood. As her father I felt terrible that she slipped out of my hand. I made sure after that incident that when we were walking together I would gently close my hand around hers hand and even extend my grip over her wrist. Her hand was inside my hand, but she really wasn’t holding on—I was the one who was holding on. If she lost her balance, I could just hold on and she was okay.

When it comes to our salvation, we’re not the ones holding on to God. He is holding on to us. Our salvation is not dependent on our power to please or obey God. Our salvation is dependent upon God’s Power to hold onto His children. Once you are in His hands, nothing or nobody can snatch you out of His grip.

Ray Stedman wrote, “Ask yourself the question, ‘How long will my children be my children?’ They may disobey you. They may leave home. They may disappoint you. But they are still always your children. Such is the case with those God calls His children.”

(5) SUFFERING IS TEMPORARY—MAKE THE CHOICE TO REJOICE!

In verse six Peter instructs us to rejoice greatly when we experience trials. Peter doesn’t just say “rejoice” he uses an intense word for rejoice. In the Greek language, it’s the word *agalliao*. (ag-al-lee-ah’-o) It’s not the usual word found in the New Testament (*chairo*). It’s a much stronger word. It’s the word Mary used when she learned that she would give birth to Jesus she says, “I will greatly rejoice in God my Savior.” (Luke 1:47) It’s the word used in the Hallelujah chorus in Revelation 19:7, “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns, Let us *rejoice* and be glad and give him glory!”

This command to greatly rejoice doesn’t ignore pain, or deny that bad things happen. Nor is it rejoicing over the bad things that happen. This doesn’t mean you say, “I’m so happy that I lost my job!” No, you aren’t rejoicing over your misfortune, you are recognizing that in the midst of pain and suffering, God is good, and His love for you is unfailing. How can you rejoice? Because verse 6 says for “a little while” you’ve had to suffer. The next message is all about suffering, but just understand now that suffering doesn’t last forever: that’s worth greatly rejoicing over!

The half-brother of Jesus, James wrote: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance." (James 1:2-3) When trials and tribulations come our way, the natural reaction is to complain and gripe. The supernatural reaction is to rejoice. Remember the title of this series is Aliens. We are different. It's not *normal* to rejoice in the midst of suffering. As followers of Jesus Christ we don't act normally. We're like the guy driving home from work and his wife calls him on the cell phone and says, "Honey, be careful, I just heard on the news that some idiot is driving the wrong way on your highway." He said, "It's not just ONE, they're ALL driving the wrong direction!" We are going in a different direction than most people, we're marching to the beat of a different drummer. We're aliens!

You may object, "Well, I don't *feel* like rejoicing." The Christian life is not driven by feelings; it's driven by faith. You don't have to feel something before you obey God. The shortest verse in the Bible isn't "Jesus wept." It's found in I Thessalonians 5:16: "Rejoice evermore." In Greek it's only one word. God's Word *commands* us to rejoice, whether we feel like it or not!

God inhabits the praises of His people, and the Bible says in Psalm 16:11 "You will fill me with joy in your presence." That's why Peter begins this passage with this exclamation of praise: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Try repeating that phrase with enthusiasm and see if it doesn't make a difference in the way you feel.

Each time put emphasis on a different word. praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Praise be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!! Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!! Don't you feel better? Here's a principle: You can't feel your way into a blessing. But you can often bless your way into a feeling!

CONCLUSION

Are you rejoicing today? When you realize God has allowed you to start over with a new birth, that's a reason to rejoice. When you understand the living hope we have because of Jesus' revelation, there's another reason. Rejoice because you have an inheritance in heaven; And your salvation is secure, shielded by God. And the suffering you face is only temporary, so go ahead. Make the choice to rejoice.

I admire school teachers, and I want to conclude with a true story about a teacher. It took place in a burn unit in a hospital in Philadelphia. A boy had been terribly burned in a house fire and although his physical wounds were healing, it was as if he had given up hope. His school teacher stopped by to see him; she wasn't prepared for the extent of his injuries, but she successfully hid her shock. Instead she said, "Since you've missed class the last couple of months I wanted to stop by and help you learn your nouns and adverbs."

The next day the teacher returned again and the nurse asked, "What did you do that boy yesterday?" The teacher thought she was in trouble, and began to apologize. The nurse interrupted her and said, "No, he's *much* better—it's as if he decided to live." When they entered the room, the boy's eyes lit up when he saw his teacher. The nurse asked him what was different.

He said, “I thought I was going to die, and nobody would tell me the truth, but I figured that a teacher wouldn’t come to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would she?”

He suddenly went from no hope to having hope. We’re all dying. But because of Jesus, we have help for today, and HOPE for tomorrow—and that’s reason enough to rejoice!

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes