

“Dug Out”

1 Peter 1:1-9

From raw material to a new birth into a living hope.

We begin as raw material for God’s project, but the Holy Spirit digs us out and sets about the work of reshaping us for the glory of God. This is our work too, but we could never accomplish it on our own. Without God, we would just stay in the ground – all potential but nothing more. In 1 Peter, the apostle aims to help believers grasp who they really are.



Introducing 1 Peter

1 Peter is a circulating letter, this one written by the apostle Peter. He writes from Rome (Peter refers to Rome as “Babylon” in 5:13) in the early 60’s AD, to encourage the Christians in central Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) who “have had to suffer various trials” (1:6) and are living as “aliens and exiles” (2:11).

These Christians are not exiles in a literal sense; rather, as Achtemeier et al write, they are “people whose commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ have led to transformed attitudes and behaviors that place them on the margins of respectable society. They have become victims of social ostracism, their allegiance to Christ having won for them slander, animosity, reproach, scorn, vilification, and contempt.”¹

As difficult as such ostracism might be in our world, it was much more powerful in the New Testament world, a social world driven by status and community. This ostracism created profoundly serious economic problems for the believers, especially for those in urban settings. Customers and employers might well want nothing to do with someone who would pledge allegiance to a man named Jesus and not to Caesar. In the face of these trials, Peter urges Christians to “rejoice insofar as you are sharing in Christ’s sufferings, so that you may also be glad and shout for joy when his glory is revealed”(4:13).

How are these Christians to respond to their persecutors? “Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called – that you might inherit a blessing.” (3:9). Peter goes so far as to instruct these believers to “Honor the Emperor” (2:17).

Despite increasing hostility toward Christianity in some portions of our culture, we are not suffering because we are being persecuted for our beliefs. Nonetheless, many of us are surely uncertain and apprehensive about the future. The question for those believers in Asia Minor and for us still is where we turn to find a renewed hope.

“Born anew into a living hope”

In the salutation of his letter, Peter reminds the Christians that they, despite all their difficulties, have been “chosen and destined by God the Father.” They have been sanctified (set aside for God and strengthened for holiness) by the Spirit for the purpose of being obedient to Jesus, an obedience which is possible because they have been “sprinkled with his blood.” To use the over-arching metaphor of this series, these Jesus-people had been *dug out* of the ground, like raw ore, so that they

¹ Achtemeier, P.J., Green, J.B., & Thompson, M.M. 2001. *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans

could be refined and reshaped by God into new people, the old into the new. As Peter puts it, they have been reborn² into a living hope, the ground of which is the truth of the resurrection (v. 3). It is the proof that justifies our hope and our confidence that our trust in God is well-placed.

As the children of God, we have an inheritance that can never diminish nor be taken away. God protects our inheritance, our salvation, for us, locking it away in the vaults of heaven.

Peter wants us to rejoice in this knowledge, especially when we are going through difficulties (v. 6). A young woman in a class I once taught, told me of a saying that she learned from a former pastor: “Christian belief is knowing that the worst thing is not the last thing.” What a superb summary of the Good News. Peter reminds the believers that even though they may be suffering in the present, God is providing for them a glorious future when God’s “Last Thing” will be revealed for their everlasting joy.

Indeed, Peter writes, tough times test us, they challenge our faith. Such times can be a trial by fire, revealing the genuineness of our faith (v. 7), just as fire proves the genuineness of gold. We may not have seen Jesus, but we love him. We have faith and we rejoice in it, for our very salvation is its result (v. 9).

An enduring inheritance

The inheritance of which Peter speaks is our salvation, our eternal life with God and those we love. This inheritance cannot be touched by the troubles of this world or our suffering. As David Bartlett writes,

The qualities of this heavenly inheritance, that it “can never perish, spoil or fade” (NIV), suggest what it means to say that Christians are born anew to a living hope. It is a hope that no power can destroy, tarnish, or mar. What can keep believers steadfast while they await their heavenly inheritance is faith. Faith is, in part, the confidence that believers do have a treasure laid up for them that neither moth nor rust can corrupt. The letter throughout helps its readers to find what does not perish in a perishable and perishing world.³

A question for us to consider is what sort of inheritance we will leave those who come after us. Too often we think of this inheritance in terms of money or property – things that will not endure. But we are called by Christ to do all we can to foster faithful discipleship in all those we can possibly reach. It is easy to look at the beautiful building we have and conclude that First UMC is a building, but, instead, we are a fellowship formed by the Holy Spirit. It is this fellowship that will endure this time of physical separation. This fellowship is the most important inheritance any of us will leave for those who come after us.

Daily Bible Readings - *These readings are usually a sample of related passages.*

During this series, try reading 1 Peter in its entirety each week, followed by a psalm on Saturday.

Monday	1 Peter 1	A living hope
Tuesday	1 Peter 2	A chosen people, called to serve
Wednesday	1 Peter 3	Living as exiles, part 1
Thursday	1 Peter 4	Living as exiles, part 2
Friday	1 Peter 5	Tending God’s flock
Saturday	Psalm 90	God’s eternity and human frailty

² All Christians, all those who have faith in Jesus Christ, have been “born again”/ “born a second time”/“born from above.” See John 3 and elsewhere. Using the words “born again” to refer only to a subset of Christians is a mistaken use of the phrase and clouds one’s understanding of the New Testament.

³ David, B. L. (1994–2004). The First Letter of Peter. In L. E. Keck (Ed.), *New Interpreter’s Bible* (Vol. 12, p. 250). Nashville: Abingdon Press.