

The Great Mercy of New Birth

1 Peter 1:3-5

Series: *True Grace - 1 Peter*

Introduction: Take your Bibles and join me in 1 Peter 1, 1 Peter chapter 1. *Read the text and pray.*

Have you ever considered how your birth has affected your life? And I mean besides the obvious that your birth was the beginning of your life. I mean – have you ever thought about how your birth into your family and into your situation at the time of your birth has had this unalterable role in shaping your life? So, for instance, your ethnicity, your social and economic status, your citizenship, your experiences and potentialities of life – all of these are shaped by your birth. Some are able to break out of the barriers and the struggles which are associated with what they were born into, but even if they do, they never move past those life-shaping realities.

I don't know if you know the name Muggsy Bogues or not, but he was one of my favorite basketball players when I was a young man. He played in the NBA and he was only 5' 3", but his career was a constant highlight reel. He was a fantastic point guard. I recently caught a snippet of a documentary about his career and Muggsy grew up in one of the most oppressive neighborhoods of Baltimore, MD. Most boys born into families in that neighborhood ended up living a gang lifestyle and winding up in prison or dead on the street. But Muggsy was determined to break out of that oppressive reality. And this is what made him one of the greatest point guards of all time. Being under-sized only fueled his fervor for playing harder and faster and smarter than anyone else on the court. In this documentary he was telling his own story with tears flowing down his face as he described the day he was selected in the NBA draft. He had finally broken out of his oppressive circumstances and had made a better life for himself. But even in this, he proves to us that our birth shapes so much of who we are.

What is true physically is also true in a much more fantastic way spiritually. Our spiritual birth has long-lasting and glorious effects on us. You will remember that Peter started this letter by pushing us into the theological deep end as he explained our calling as elect exiles. He now begins the body of the letter by spending the next 10 verses – verses 3-12 – in one very long sentence making much of the great mercy of God to cause us to be born again. He is going to let us know how we ought to live in this world as an elect exile – remember – he is going to give us over 40 commands to live by, but before he does this – he blesses God for his merciful work of regeneration. God is so good to give us a clear and understandable analogy such as birth to explain what happens to us when we receive the glorious good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The birth of a baby is a great event, and it is one that we celebrate – but it is so great because it doesn't exist unto itself. In other words, we don't celebrate the birth because the baby

is going to stay a baby for the rest of time. We celebrate because of all that this baby is going to become in the maturing process. The birth begins the process of fleshing out all that we have inherited in the very fact of us being born. This also is true with our spiritual birth – or our being born again in Christ. Our birth brings to us a glorious future full of a living hope and a sure inheritance which is beyond any hope or any inheritance associated with a merely physical birth.

Peter says in verse 3 that God has caused us to be born again to a living hope, and that he has done this by his great mercy. To have mercy for someone is to see them in a desperate situation of which they can do nothing for themselves, and be moved to help them in some way. So, God, from eternity past, looked upon what would be our hopeless and lost condition in our own sinfulness. He saw us in our rebellion against Him, and he saw us in our dead spiritual state. He knew that not one of us would seek after Him and He knew that we would be unable to save ourselves from our dead spiritual condition. And so, he was moved with great mercy and He planned how He as One God in Three persons would work together to accomplish and apply our salvation. So, the Father foreknew us in that he chose to set his love on us before the foundation of the world. And then he sent His Son into the world as an expression of His great love and as an act of His great mercy. And His Son lived the perfect life of obedience so that, like a lamb without blemish or spot, He the sinless Son of God could lay down His life on the Cross of Calvary and die the death we had earned with our sin so that we could be forgiven and cleansed and know peace with God through the blood of His Cross. But we are born into this world as heirs of sin and as committers of sin. We inherit sin and we commit sin. We are so sinful that we are dead to God with no hope of life and no hope of salvation. And so this great mercy of God has to be brought to us individually and applied to our hearts. This is the work of the Holy Spirit of God. He brings the lost and dead heart to new life through the preaching of the Word of the Gospel. The outward call of the preaching of Christ is met with the inward call of the Spirit of God to the soul to come to life, and in that moment the soul – like Lazarus from the grave – the soul comes from death to life in obedience to the commanding voice of God. As John 1:12-13 tells us – we become children of God by receiving this great mercy of the Gospel work of Jesus, and we receive it not by any will or choice of our own, but by the will of God. He effectually and completely causes us to be born again into His family as His child. Regeneration, or being born again then, is the work of God to bring eternal and spiritual life into the spiritually dead sinner.

If this has happened to you, if you have been born again and have responded to the call of the Gospel to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved, then this is completely of God's great mercy toward you. Just like you did not cause yourself to be born physically, you also do not cause yourself to be born spiritually. Just like a baby gasps for its first few breaths of life outside the womb, so spiritually you show the evidence of spiritual birth by crying out in faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. And all of this happens because God is a God of great mercy! He saw you in your pitiful and eternally damning condition and He pitied you and had compassion on you and

showed great mercy to you. He chose to act and He chose to rescue you by paying for your redemption with the high price of the blood of His Son.

If we know this new birth then we should be full of great praise and honor and blessing of the God Who has shown us such great mercy. This is what Peter is modeling for us here in verses 3-12. As Jesus tells the Samaritan woman in John 4 – we have been rescued from our sin because God is seeking true worshipers who will worship Him in spirit and in truth, rather than in a place and according to a set ritual. But in order to get true worshipers God has to show great mercy on us by causing us to be born again. And so, being born again, we should be those who like Peter are blessing God for the great benefits of our new birth. One of the ways we extol the greatness of God, one of the ways which we bless God – is that we rehearse the glorious results of this new birth. As we rehearse them we are blessing God's name for His great mercy. As we grow in our understanding of what God has done in causing us to be born again then we will be all the more frequent and all the more authentic in our true worship of this God of great mercy. So, let's bless God by considering the two results of our regeneration that Peter lists here in this text. If we are born again we have a living hope – as we see in verse 3 – and we have a sure inheritance – as we see in verses 4-5. Before we jump into those please note that these benefits are only for those who have been born again by the great mercy of God. Not everyone in this room has been born again. But you must be born again. It is only in this new birth that you will have eternal spiritual life. So, as we consider these great blessings I call you to faith in Christ. May the external call of the Gospel be matched by an internal call of the Gospel as the Spirit of God says – let there be life!

If we are born again:

I. We have a Living Hope – vs. 3

- a. The first glorious result we see in verse 3 of our spiritual birth is that we have a living hope. There are all kinds of hopes out there for this life. We hope that we will achieve greatness or fame. We hope that our rich uncle will leave us all of his money when he dies. We hope that our grades in school will be enough to get us a scholarship. We hope that our country improves so that our children and grandchildren can live in a better place. We even hope against hope that something will happen as we desire. But these hopes are pretty faltering and failing and hopeless, really.
- b. But when we are given new life in Christ through this regenerating work of the Spirit – we are born again into a new reality – a new and living hope.
- c. *Because we have a Living Christ*
 - i. And this is true because Christ has been raised from the dead. So, we are born to a living hope because Christ has been born from the grave through resurrection. Because He lives, we can now live. Because He lives we can have endless and living hope in Him.
 - ii. Just think for a minute about the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. His life – the whole of it – is a microcosm of what happens

throughout Scripture. God speaks, and there is life for the very first time. Sin enters in and brings death and the grave. God speaks again and life is brought once more, and this life is eternal and unending. This was Christ – God spoke and He came as the Living Word of God. Sin entered upon Him on the Cross and caused His death which was confirmed by his burial. And then God spoke again and the lifeless body of our Lord was raised back to life – to a new and glorified and eternal life which will never and can never end. Because He overcame death through resurrection, he is now the foundation of all overcoming of death through spiritual rebirth.

- iii. This is what we see with the nation of Israel by the way. They are brought into existence through the Word of God coming to Abram and making out of him a great nation. But they slowly died through their own sinful apostasy and to this day they lie spiritually in the grave – dead to God. But there is coming a day during the Great Tribulation which is foretold in Ezekiel 36 and 37 in which God will speak again into a valley of dead and dry bones and will raise those bones up into life once again. He will do that through the work of His Spirit cleansing them and taking out their hearts of stone and replacing them with a heart of flesh. In other words, God will regenerate the Israelites to be His people once again – as a spiritual nation, a regenerated people.
 - iv. This is also what we see with the world at large. The whole of creation was spoken into existence by the all-powerful and life-giving Word of God. And all creation was then cast under the dark curse of the sin of mankind. And now all creation groans as it awaits the full redemption from sin. This will happen after the Second Coming of Christ at the end of His Millennial reign. The old Heavens and the old Earth will pass away and the New Heavens and the New Earth will be created by the powerful Word of God.
 - v. So, too, this is what happens with the individual soul. We have been brought into existence by the sheer will of God. Sin has entered in and we are now dead in our trespasses and sins. But God speaks and makes us alive again by causing us to be born again. And this being born again is to a living hope of eternal life.
- d. Notice that this living hope is based upon a past reality – that Jesus was raised from the dead. And it is sustained by a present reality – that Jesus lives. And it is propelled into the future by a coming reality – that Jesus is coming again! His past, present, and future life are the guarantee of our living hope!
 - e. As we will see in a moment – this living hope is coupled with a future inheritance which means that by this new birth we are guaranteed an eternal and unchanging future reality. In that future reality we will see and know all things made right

and all wrongs made perfect again. This is really crucial for these elect exiles who are beginning to face the tremors of opposition because they have been called by God to faith in Christ. They will endure unfair and unholy treatment. They will go through the fires of suffering the attacks of their own flesh and their own world. And their hope in all of that is not that they will get to see all of that made right in this life. This is where so many religions and pagan philosophies get it wrong. They try to copy this hope of a New Day by bringing Heaven to Earth through religious activity or through social justice or through some man-centered experience where pleasure is king and no lust is denied. But these are all vain hopes which bring no lasting joy. The hope for the elect exile – for the spiritual refugee – is not that life here and now will be great by following Christ. No, their living and sure hope is that they will one day know the fullness of their redemption as all things are made new for all of time and eternity!

II. We have a Sure Inheritance – vs. 4-5

- a. If we have been born again we have a living hope. We also have a sure inheritance. This final and eternal day and all the hope it brings are the focus of verses 4-5. God should be forever blessed and fully worshiped because He has caused us to be born again to a sure inheritance. Being born into God's family means that we now partake in the family inheritance. This family inheritance is the fullness of salvation which is coming to all those who are in Christ Jesus by grace through faith. This sure inheritance is surely eternal.
- b. *Surely Eternal*
 - i. Peter uses three adjectives to describe this inheritance in verse 4. He knows that we only know inheritances which are the opposite of these things, so he has to describe our inheritance in negative terms because we don't have the capacity to understand it in positive terms. All three terms combine to let us know that this inheritance is surely and completely eternal. It is not perishing, it is not defiled in any way, and it is not fading.
 - ii. This is different than anything we know when it comes to inheritances. In human terms we are born into an inheritance as well – but those inheritances are given to us upon the death of a loved one, and immediately they start to lose their value and worth. They are defiled and they are passing away and they are themselves perishing.
 - iii. But not so this inheritance reserved for the children of God. It is imperishable. In Romans 1 the Scriptures describe all of creation as perishing. In 1 Corinthians 9 an Olympic wreath used to crown the victor of a race is described as perishing. In verse 7 in this chapter we are told that gold is perishing. But this is not the case with our inheritance won for us through our new birth. It is imperishable.
 - iv. It is also undefiled. This speaks of something which is beyond the reach of decay. It is not diluted or soiled or stained in any way. It is not something

which is mostly pure, but something which is entirely and completely pure of any flaw or of any blemish or spot. This same idea will come up in verses 18-19 where we will learn that we have been redeemed by the undefiled Lamb of God who was completely without spot or blemish – therefore He could die in our place and take our sin because He had no sin of His own. In Hebrews 7:26 we learn that Jesus is our undefiled High Priest which allowed him to offer himself once for all for sinners. The text goes on to say that he has been made perfect forever because His perfect sacrifice was accepted. He was an undefiled sacrifice for sins, and those who are forgiven are completely and totally forgiven in Him. We then, in Him, inherit an undefiled eternal joy.

- v. This inheritance is also unfading. This word is used to describe a flower that never fades. Unlike the rose those slowly wilts and fades – this inheritance never dims in beauty or glory. It doesn't start slow, show great beauty in the middle, and then fade in the end. If it did we could say that we have a partial hope, but not a living hope. But rather, this inheritance is as strong now as it will be in 60 million years. It is unfading!
- vi. This means then – that we can endure light and momentary affliction as we take up our cross and follow Jesus our Lord. These light and momentary hard things will fade and they will pass away. But beloved, our endurance of faith will bring us into an eternally unfading and blessed hope. Being born again has given us an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. In other words, it is surely eternal.

c. *Surely Kept for Us*

- i. It is also surely kept for us, and we are kept for it. It will never pass away, and we will be sure to actually inherit it. In verse 4 he says that this inheritance is kept in heaven for you. This is a divine passive here. We do not keep this inheritance safe by our own doing. We do not earn it by our own good living. We do not add to it by our own wonderful religious achievements. No, it is kept for us by God. He is keeping it preserved perfectly for us. Think of Jesus' words to Thomas in John 14. He predicted his soon departure to return to His Father and prepare a place for us so that where He is, there we may be also. This is our inheritance. He was preparing it for us and now we learn in this text that God is keeping it in heaven for us.
- ii. This is far from the defiling and corrupting realities of this world. All the troubles which plague our every move in this sin-cursed, devil-dominated world – all those troubles are not in any way affecting the inheritance that God is right now protecting for you. It is surely kept for us.

d. *Surely Guarded for It*

- i. And we are surely guarded for it. That is what verse 5 is all about. We who have been born again, are being guarded by God's power through faith for this salvation which is ready to be revealed at the last time. This is another ongoing divine passive. God is doing this for us. We are contributing absolutely nothing to this. It is like spiritual protective custody as God stands guard over us to ensure that we fully attain our inheritance. It is God's power which is doing this for us. We who have been born again by his great mercy are now given this great comfort of protection by God's great power. So, He starts it and He sustains it and He will finish, or complete, it.
- ii. The instrument he is using to complete our pilgrimage through this foreign land is our faith. So His divine power is guarding us through our faith in Him as we take one step after another ever closer toward this salvation which is coming. We know from experience and from the rest of this letter that God does not guard us on this journey by keeping us from peril and suffering. He does not make our path smooth and free from opposition. Rather, he powerfully works in us to produce the faith which will persevere through the hard things as we look to Him. God keeps us hemmed in and protected by faith as we walk through hard things which are in our life because of our faith. If we had never known the kind mercy of God to make us His children, then we would never have known the difficult journey of walking in this world as a spiritual refugee – looking for and longing for another city. But the faith in God which put us into the suffering is a faith which is divinely empowered to keep us through the suffering. He holds us and protects us and causes us to persevere.

Conclusion: So, this journey of faith in Christ Jesus our Lord is not one you would ever choose, but rather it is one that you are chosen for. God in His great mercy puts his love upon you and causes you to be born again. And of the many great joys of being born again, this text tells us that we have a living hope and a sure inheritance. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth, and the Life – and if we are in Christ by faith, then we are right now recipients of this life. He is life, therefore we know life. Maybe you are here this morning and you have never been born again. Maybe you are like Nicodemus in John 3 and you know all the right religious answers and you may even be a teacher of others, but you have never actually known eternal life. You, my friend, must be born again! Or maybe you are more like the jailer in Acts 16. You know very little about God, but having heard His Word proclaimed today you realize that you need rescued from your sin, and you are wondering, what must I do to be saved? The answer – believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved! May today be the day of your salvation!

If you know Christ because you have been born again to this living hope and this sure inheritance then let me leave you with two ways in which this matters to you today.

From this text we can know that one of the marks of being born again is true worship. Peter blesses the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for this great mercy of his own new birth. If you know this new life in Christ through this new birth then you resonate with this. You don't just want Peter to tell you what to do as a Christian, but you want God's great name to be magnified through your redeemed life. Your heart believes that there is no greater privilege and purpose than for you to bring blessing upon your God of great mercy. And so, all of the ways in which we will be called to live as elect exiles in the world – all of these things will be the ways and the means of worship. This makes our redemption all about God. This turns our focus from our rescue to our rescuer. This removes us from the middle of God's plan and puts God Himself there. This great mercy which has caused us to be born again will evidence itself in a life longing for God to be honored and extolled and made much of no matter the personal cost to me. God becomes the focus of His own saving work in our hearts, and we long to bless His name!

From this text we also can see that we need to interpret our present circumstance with our future promise. We are told about this sure and eternal inheritance so that we can walk according to this living hope in the face of circumstances which would otherwise be hopeless. We are prone to do the exact opposite. We take our past and our present and by them we interpret our future. We look to ourselves as the captains of our own fate and this is incredibly discouraging and hopeless. This is what we saw from the book of Ecclesiastes several weeks ago. But being born again gives us an eternal hope and a sure inheritance. Our present struggles are light and momentary afflictions which are producing for us a greater and eternal weight of glory. Being born again we now see this life through the great promises of the next life. We must interpret our present through the lens of our great and eternal future. And this gives us great joy in our living hope and our sure inheritance. And this gives us a Christ honoring focus as we no longer seek to lay up for ourselves treasures on earth where moths destroy and rust corrupts and where thieves break in and steal. Rather, we lay up treasures in heaven by walking as elect exiles – spiritual refugees – looking for another city, hoping in a sure inheritance. Let's pray!