

As we begin to look at this letter of hope that the apostle Peter wrote to the church, to God's elect, believers that are now scattered all around. This is written not long after Nero the Emperor had burned down Rome, and blamed the Christians for the despicable act. As a result, the followers of Jesus lost any favor that they had as being a part of Judaism, and are now looked on as troublemakers. Even though they are scattered because of persecution, think of it in terms of how scattered our own families are, how we long to see those we are separated from and be with our loved ones, so Peter speaks hope to the hopeless. He begins by saying that the Trinity of God, chose us, to be obedient to the Father, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit, and sealed us with the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus.

It is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in us that causes us to be like Jesus. The Spirit's prompting and moving in our lives, as we stay close to the Lord and in His Word, allow us to become Christ-like and even have a desire to take as many people to heaven with us as we can, in as Christ-like condition as possible.

It is the mercy of God, and mercy is God's supply system for every need everywhere, that gives us a new birth into a living hope! This is all made possible because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus from the dead! Our real hope is an inheritance, not the financial insecurities of worrying about markets, whether it's Wall Street, the housing market or even the credit market. Our real hope is in all the promises of the Word of God, kept in heaven for each believer, and you have to get this—"shielded by God's power".

According to this Word of God, we are actually "shielded" by faith, in God's promises of what is to come, not in what we tangibly hold on to. In our lives today, as a church and as a nation, look at it like this—we went from calling our current economic situation a "bailout" meaning, "we hope" something good happens to, "a rescue plan", meaning we know we need help and we put our trust in our Federal government to do the right thing.

For us, and for those that Peter is writing to, we know that our leadership is not in the prophet, priest or king, it's not in the leadership team, the

pastor or anyone else, it is the very Trinitarian nature of God, that brings all of God's elect and strangers together in unity to follow Him.

The shield that God has provided is well established and all we have to do is put our hope and faith in that shield. But, we must stand behind the shield of faith, not just look at it from a distance and believe that it does work for those who believe. And, the church that Peter is writing to, and this church must stand together behind God's prepared protection.

Next, Peter helps us understand a great love-hate relationship; we love gold, it's a symbol of prosperity and power. And we hate fire, we recognize it as a necessary element, but know of its terrible destructive nature as well. But in order to get pure gold it has to withstand temperatures of up to 1,600° F.

Yet we are told that the trials and refining fire in our lives are to be seen as "golden moments" to bring us to the perfection that God requires, to make us Christ-like. It is the trials and persecutions that prove our ability to remain faithful to Jesus, not give in to the winds of public opinion. Our faith, which is of greater worth than gold, allows us to rejoice in our salvation and praise the Savior of our very lives. Jesus is already being revealed in us.

Peter, in an attempt to encourage believers is writing about hope and joy that is ours, now, because of what is actively promised in the future. We can't actually see and hold our great hope, but we can grasp it. It is Jesus in us that we love, but we can't actually see Him. The writer to the Hebrews has just stated, "We fix our eyes on Jesus".

By looking to Jesus, by believing that He really is the sum total of our faith, we are "filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy" (v. 8).

I am not speaking from some sort of Pollyanna attitude here that says if we wish hard enough everything will be just fine. Spiritual problems are only met by biblical obedience to the Father.

Throughout the Bible, God's rescue plan has always been, and will always be obedience and repentance from thinking and trust that we can use the right people and the world's ways to right ourselves. When we become Christ-like, we begin to see ourselves the way Jesus sees us, not as we are told to see ourselves by a corrupt world view. When we have Jesus, we are filled with that joy, even in uncertain times, and we know that we are "receiving the goal of our faith, we are being saved.

We are here to serve Jesus and each other. Just as the prophets of old came to understand that the things they were prophesying and doing were not for themselves, but for the future generations, so we too must realize that we are here to serve others. We have the Holy Spirit to lead us and guide us, but it starts with a heart change, to knowing that we are not trying to please others, we are here to serve the Lord and people as a result of our love for God.

It is all summed up in the life of Jesus, who came to give Himself for each one of us. He didn't flinch at the trials, but he was kind enough to let us know that at times we would also experience times that we will not think we can get through, or even want to get through. But, in the garden, Jesus ended with, listen to this again: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done. An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him." **Luke 22: 42-43**

It was after he prayed this prayer and was strengthened that he prayed with such intensity that he sweat drops of blood. Our hope in life does not come from the easy way always, but from persistent trust in the Godhead dwelling in us.