

Greek Word Studies:

Reserved (5083) (tereo from teros - a guard or warden) (4 more times in 2 Peter) means to keep an eye on, to keep something in view, to hold firmly, to attend carefully, or to watch over it (watchful care - Jesus' prayer to His Father for His disciples - Jn 17:11). Tereo speaks of guarding something which is in one's possession. It means to watch as one would some precious thing. The idea is to observe attentively, to heed, to keep watch over and to retain in custody.

Tereo with the idea of obey - Mt 19:17, Mt 23:3 (tereo = observe), Mt 28:20, Jn 8:51, 52 (one who keeps Jesus' Word = a believer = one who will never see the second death in hell), Jn 9:16 (keep = observe the Sabbath), Jn 14:15 (description of a genuine disciple - love is not just with one's lips but is validated by one's life lived in loving obedience to God), Jn 14:21, 23, 24 (no love = no obedience = not a believer - Note Jesus is not talking about legalistic obedience but Spirit enabled obedience which is the only obedience that pleases the Father!), Jn 15:10 (used twice), Jn 15:20 (used twice), Jn 17:6 (the 11 disciples), Acts 15:5, 1Ti 6:14, James 2:10, 1Jn 2:3, 4, 5, 3:22, 1Jn 3:24, 1Jn 5:2, 3, Rev 1:3 (heed), Rev 2:26, 3:3, 3:8, 3:10, 12:17, 14:12, Rev 22:7 (heeds), Rev 22:9.

Tereo with idea of keep watch or guard - Mt 27:36, 27:54, Mt 28:4 (guards = tereo), Jn 17:11, 12, Jn 17:15 (with nuance of protection from Satan), Acts 12:5, Acts 12:6 (watching), Acts 16:23, Acts 24:23, 25:4, 25:21 (held in custody), 1Jn 5:18, Jude 1:1, 6,

Tereo in the sense of to preserve or maintain -Jn 2:10, 1Cor 7:37, 2Cor 11:9, Eph 4:3, 1Th 5:23, 1Ti 5:22, 2Ti 4:7, James 1:27, 1Pe 1:4, 2Pe 2:4, 2Pe 2:9, 2Pe 2:17, 2Pe 3:7, Jude 1:13, 21, Rev 16:15

Jesus uses tereo in his "job description" of a genuine Christ follower (disciple) in Mt 28:20 , where tereo "does not merely speak of the act of obeying His commands, but of a solicitous desire that we do not disobey any of them but on the other hand, that we obey them perfectly." (Wuest)

Tereo -71 times in 64v in the NAS - Matt. 19:17; 23:3; 27:36, 54; 28:4, 20; Jn. 2:10; 8:51f, 55; 9:16; 12:7; 14:15, 21, 23f; 15:10, 20; 17:6, 11f, 15; Acts 12:5f; 15:5; 16:23; 24:23; 25:4, 21; 1 Co. 7:37; 2 Co. 11:9; Eph. 4:3; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 Tim. 5:22; 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:7; Jas. 1:27; 2:10; 1 Pet. 1:4; 2 Pet. 2:4, 9, 17; 3:7; 1 Jn. 2:3ff; 3:22, 24; 5:3, 18; Jude 1:1, 6, 13, 21; Rev. 1:3; 2:26; 3:3, 8, 10; 12:17; 14:12; 16:15; 22:7, 9 and is translated in as: continue, 1; guard, 1; guards, 1; heed, 2; heeds, 1; held in custody, 1; keep, 27; keep watch over, 1; keeping, 1; keeping guard over, 1; keeps, 9; kept, 12; kept in custody, 3; observe, 3; preserve, 1; preserved, 1; reserved, 4; watching over, 1.

Tereo - 35 times in the non-apocryphal Septuagint - Gen 3:15; 1Sam 15:11; Ezra 8:29; Pr 2:11; 3:1, 21; 4:6, 23; 7:5; 8:32; 13:3; 15:32; 16:17; 19:16; 23:18, 26; 25:10; 31:2; Eccl 11:4; Song 3:3; 7:13; 8:11f; Jer 20:10; Dan 6:11; 9:4

The literal sense of tereo is seen in the action of...

the centurion, and those who were with him keeping guard (tereo) over Jesus" (Mt 27:54)

After the Philippian chief magistrates had Paul and Silas beaten with rods

and...inflicted many blows upon them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to guard (tereo) them securely (Acts 16:23).

Herod after putting James to death with the sword, seized Peter and he

was kept (tereo) in the prison, but prayer for him was being made fervently by the church to God." (Acts 12:5) (Comment: As an aside, remember that prisons are no match for prayers, however, as both friend and foe soon learned - read Acts 12).

As used here in first Peter, the idea of tereo is that our inheritance is being kept, held, preserved for a definite purpose and a suitable time. Furthermore Peter uses the perfect tense which pictures the reservation made in past (it already exists) and being held for each believer, awaiting our arrival at the "box office" so to speak to pick up our tickets! It won't be like human hotel/motel reservations or airplane reservations where sometimes we discover to our dismay that the reservations have not been held for us but have been given to someone else! This won't happen with the believer's inheritance!

Jesus prayed to His Father on behalf of His disciples (which includes us) declaring...

I am no more in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father (Holy speaks of One who is infinitely high. Father speaks of One Who is intimately nigh!), keep (tereo - aorist imperative) them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as We are. (John 17:11)

So here we see Jesus pray for the eternal security of those who had placed their faith in Him. In fact Jesus used the verb tereo 3 times in His high priestly prayer --

While I was with them, I was keeping (tereo) them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. (John 17:12)

I do not ask Thee to take them out of the world, but to keep (tereo) them from the evil one (John 17:15)

In a parallel thought Jude speaks of believers as

those who are the called, beloved in God the Father, and kept (tereo - preserved, held firmly, perfect tense = the permanence of the keeping) for Jesus Christ." (Jude 1)

In other words, the saints have been kept guarded by God the Father with the present result that they continue to be the objects of His permanent, watchful care! Are you wrestling with your eternal security? Then go back over Jesus' prayer in John 17 and if you're still not convinced meditate on the promise in Jude. Better yet commit these verses to memory so you can recall them to mind when those doubting thoughts begin to assail you.

In somewhat of an opposite thought, Peter declares that "the present heavens and earth by His word are (continuously) being reserved for fire, kept (tereo) for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men" (2Pe 3;7-note) on the day of judgment of ungodly men, the Great White Throne judgment which will occur at the close of the Millennium, at which time the wicked dead, fallen angels, and demons will be judged, to be sent to an eternity of suffering, banished from the presence of a holy God (Re 20:11, 12, 13, 14, 15-see notes Revelation 20:11ff)

In Jude 6 the angels "keep their own domain" and thus did not exercise watchful care. In other words, they "did not fulfil their obligation of carefully guarding and maintaining their original position in which they were created, but transgressed those limits to invade territory which was foreign to them, namely, the human race." (Wuest)

Paul knowing that his time to leave had come reminded Timothy "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept (tereo - watched over, heeded, preserved) the faith." (2Ti 4;7-note) Paul "kept the faith" not only by continuing to believe in and obey the Gospel, but as a good steward by guarding the standard and the treasure of the Gospel which had been entrusted to him to pass on in its original purity to faithful men who would be able to teach others also (2Ti 2:2).

John writes that

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments." (1Jn 5:2).

Wuest comments that tereo: in (1Jn 5:2) speaks of a watchful, solicitous guarding and care of God's commandments lest we disobey them, with the thought that we are concerned with His honor and glory and our Christian testimony to the same. It is a jealous safe-keeping of His commandments lest they be violated. The words "love" (second occurrence) and "keep" are in the present subjunctive, speaking of continuous action." (Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English reader. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans)

In a similar thought Jude exhorts the saints to

keep (aorist imperative - command to do this effectively. We obey this command by continual surrender to the Spirit and His enabling power) yourselves in (within the sphere of) the love of God (they were to stay within the

circle of God's love), waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life." (Jude 1:21)

Tereo used with the idea of protection...

«We know that no one who is born of God sins; but He who was born of God keeps (present tense = continually, all the days of our life beloved! The NET helps understand the intended meaning - "God protects the one He has fathered") him, and the evil one does not touch him. (1 Jn 5:18).

OUR HEAVENLY "SAFE DEPOSIT BOX"

Do you have your will (to be read when you die) and other valuable possessions in a safe deposit box? Peter is saying here that Heaven is the safe-deposit box where God is guarding our inheritance for us under constant surveillance. Furthermore, tereo in the perfect tense speaks of the permanence of this keeping because the perfect tense defines a past completed action having present results. The perfect tense indicates that the heavenly inheritance became ours at the moment we believed in Jesus and that it is being kept reserved for those who themselves are now being guarded (1Pe 1:5). This phrase could be translated, "has been laid up and is now kept guarded in safe deposit." No burglars or bandits can break through where this inheritance is kept. It will not be given to someone else by mistake. It cannot be devalued by taxes. And title insurance is provided.

In our travels we have all arrived our motel, only to discover that the reservations have been confused or cancelled. This will not happen to us when we arrive in heaven, for our future home and inheritance have a guaranteed reservation. The recipients of the letter were undergoing persecution for Christ's sake and Peter was informing them of their "reserved" eternal inheritance so that they might look past their troubles. We all need this "future tense" vision don't we?!

"There are plenty of ways to lose money, but not many ways to replace it. However, the government will replace currency that has been waterlogged, burned, torn, or otherwise marred, provided certain criteria are met. The Treasury will replace damaged bills if more than half of the bill is identifiable. If less than half remains, Treasury officials will replace the money if they are satisfied it was destroyed. Bills that are so damaged that their value is unrecognizable must be redeemed by the Bureau of Engraving. We can thank the Lord that no such restoration or reclamation project will be necessary for our "heavenly currency," the inheritance God has reserved for us in heaven." (Today In The Word)

1 Peter 1:4 says the inheritance is reserved for us, whereas 1 Peter 1:5 assures us that we are reserved for the inheritance! In this life an heir may die before an inheritance is divided. But the same grace that preserves the heavenly inheritance preserves us as heirs to enjoy it. God's election of His people can never be frustrated. Those who were chosen in eternity past are saved in time now and kept for eternity to come. The believer in Christ is eternally secure (cf Col 3:3-note).

The Land of Cabul - "An incorruptible inheritance." 1 Peter 1:4

All earthly inheritances are liable to corruption; they are true gardens of Adonis where we can gather nothing but trivial flowers, surrounded with many briars, thorns and thistles.

Oh, the hands, the hearts, the thoughts, the lives which have been corrupted by earthly inheritances! Oh, the impure love, the carnal confidence, the vain boastings, the sensual joys which have been the products of earthly inheritances!

If a man's estate lies in money that may rust, or thieves may break in and steal it. If a man's estate lies in cattle they may die, or fall into the hands of the Sabeans and Chaldeans. If a man's estate lies in houses they may be burnt. Witness the recent dreadful fire that turned London into a ruinous heap! If a man's estate lies in lands a foreign enemy may invade them and conquer them.

All earthly inheritances are no better than the cities which Solomon gave to Hiram, which he called Cabul, that is, 'worthless, good-for-nothing, displeasing, dirty.'

"But when Hiram went from Tyre to see the towns that Solomon had given him, he was not pleased with them. 'What kind of towns are these you have given me, my brother?' he asked. And he called them the Land of Cabul,

a name they have to this day." 1Ki 9:12, 13

Earthly inheritances do but dirt, daub, and dust people. It is only the heavenly inheritance which is incorruptible.

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J C Philpot...

Whatever you may have in this world, be it much or little, you must leave. And if you have no other inheritance than earth gives, where will be your portion in death and to all eternity? But if you are begotten again unto a lively hope, even if you do not enjoy the full assurance of faith, you have before you an inheritance which fades not away. We imagine sometimes how happy we would be if we had this man's fine estate, or that man's large property; how much better we would spend it than he does, and what good we would do with it. And do you think that these men are happy with all their possessions, and that you would be happier or better if you had them? It is not in nature to be happy. These rich men have a canker which eats up all their happiness. And even if free from the heavier troubles of life, all satisfaction of the flesh fades away, for possession of itself rubs off all the bloom, and with possession come all the anxieties and cares connected with it. But this eternal inheritance "fades not away." The sweetest flowers fade and are thrown away as they become nauseous to sight and smell. But there is an abiding freshness, a constant verdure, a perpetual bloom, an unceasing fragrance, a permanent sweetness in this eternal inheritance, so that it is never flat or stale, but remains ever the same, or rather is ever increasing in beauty and blessedness, as more known, believed in, hoped unto, and loved. (March 1)

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Our Daily Bread - Amazing Good Fortune - Columnist L. M. Boyd recently described the amazing good fortune of a man named Jack Wurm. In 1949, Mr. Wurm was broke and out of a job. One day he was walking along a San Francisco beach when he came across a bottle with a piece of paper in it. As he read the note, he discovered that it was the last will and testament of Daisy Singer Alexander, heir to the Singer sewing machine fortune. The note read,

To avoid confusion, I leave my entire estate to the lucky person who finds this bottle and to my attorney, Barry Cohen, share and share alike.

According to Boyd, the courts accepted the theory that the heiress had written the note 12 years earlier, and had thrown the bottle into the Thames River in London, from where it had drifted across the oceans to the feet of a penniless and jobless Jack Wurm. His chance discovery netted him over 6 million dollars in cash and Singer stock. How would you like to have been making Mr. Wurm's footprints on that San Francisco beach? What a find! Now let's compare Jack Wurm's inheritance with yours if you are trusting Christ as your Savior. You have become an heir with Christ. Your eternal future is secure! Think about what you have. Think about what it will mean to you 100 years from now. Try to imagine the eternal life, the eternal happiness, the eternal gratitude, the eternal peace, the eternal profit. The psalmist said that this inheritance shall be forever. Six million dollars doesn't even begin to compare with our spiritual inheritance! - M. R. De Haan II (Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

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J R Miller Devotional - The children of God are heirs to a glorious inheritance. It is not an earthly inheritance, but a heavenly. It is not given to them in full possession in this world, but is reserved for them in heaven. They could not receive it here - they have a pilgrimage to make to get to it.

But while the inheritance is securely kept for them in heaven, they have the promise of guardianship on the way. They are kept by the power of God through faith.

All our life in this world is intended to prepare us for receiving our inheritance. If we have troubles, we need not be afraid - we may rejoice in them all. If we have dangers, we need not be dismayed - we have the promise of protection.

Some day we shall see Christ, whom now we love but cannot see. Heaven is sure for all who are faithful in this world. If we do God's will and do not lose faith, we shall be kept in safety through this world and brought at

last home to our inheritance.

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OUR INHERITANCE

Untouched by death
Unstained by evil
Unimpaired by time

It will always be new; it will never decay.
No night ever comes; it will always be day.

How it gladdens my heart with joy thatâ€™s untold
To think of that land where nothing grows old.

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Here is a well done sermon by Ray Pritchard...

God Guarantees Our Salvation - 1 Peter 1:3-5

I have two aims for this sermon: 1) That you should praise God that you have been born again by Godâ€™s mercy, and 2) that you will understand why this matters so much at this particular moment in history. Itâ€™s easy to see the first aim in the words of verse 3 where Peter explicitly praises God â€œwho has caused us to be born again.â€ We can set this off in two statements:

God has done somethingâ€œcaused us to be born again.â€

We should do somethingâ€œdeclare â€œBlessed be Godâ€ or â€œPraise the Lord!â€

As John Piper points out in his sermon on this text (â€œGodâ€™s Great Mercy and Our New Birth,â€ October 10, 1993), Peter could have written in the fashion of a bored and boring college professor: â€œToday I would like to lecture on five topicsâ€Godâ€™s mercy, our new birth, the resurrection of Jesus, our inheritance in heaven, and our security in Christ. Please take out your notebook and your syllabus, and letâ€™s begin with Point #1.â€ But he didnâ€™t do that. Peter begins his letter with an explosive statement of praise: â€œBlessed be Godâ€ or â€œPraise the Lordâ€ or, as one translation puts it, â€œWhat a God we have!â€

From the Heart to the Heart

The way he begins his letter says something crucial about how we should present spiritual truth. Biblical preaching always touches the head and the heart. It is never enough for a preacher to say, â€œWell, at least I covered those four verses today.â€ We must also convey the truth from the heart to the heart. This applies both to the way I preach and to the way you listen. I must not be content with merely imparting facts, and you must not be content simply to gain biblical knowledge. The real goal of our time together is life transformation through Godâ€™s Word in the power of the Holy Spirit. We should not be satisfied with anything less. My favorite definition of preaching comes from Phillips Brooks who called preaching the impartation of truth through human personality. Thatâ€™s excellent because it means that before I share the truth with others, it must first impact my own life. Truth that comes through human personality has the ring of authenticity about it. Itâ€™s not that human personality changes the truth, but truth that transforms human personality. So here are three questions for you to ask of the person who preaches to you:

- 1) Are you telling me the truth?
- 2) Does it matter to you?
- 3) Why should it matter to me?

The first is vital because preaching based on anything other than the truth of Scripture is dangerous and misleading. The second question reminds us that truth ought to matter deeply to those who claim to know it and share it. Third, the preacher ought to make clear why his hearers should care about the truth he proclaims. In verse 3 Peter is declaring, â€œThis matters!â€ This text is far more than a dry recital of biblical doctrine. Itâ€™s a call to praise God because of what he has done for us.

Two More Questions

And this touches how we should listen to a sermon. Here are two questions to ask yourself every time you hear a sermon:

- 1) Do I want to know what God says?
- 2) Am I willing to be changed by the truth I hear?

Peter begins by saying "Blessed be God" because the truth has profoundly changed his life. So here's the bottom line: If at the end of this message, you are not praising God, then we have both failed somewhere along the line. Either I have failed to tell you the truth in the right manner, or you have failed to hear what God is saying.

A few weeks ago I watched a video of Edith Schaeffer who is now 90 years old. In a slow, clear voice, she said, "Truth matters." She's right, of course, and if you've read anything by Francis or Edith Schaeffer, you know that truth matters because it is the foundation of all of life. God's truth is always much more than storing up intellectual information. While speaking at Mount Hermon Conference Center this week, I met a lady who showed me a notebook filled with 34 years of sermon notes from various speakers she had heard. "Here are the notes from 1983, and these are from 1987," she said as she flipped through the pages of her handwritten notebook. There were sermons by world-famous preachers, and sermons by preachers whose names I did not recognize. In a way, it was a remarkable achievement, and I congratulated her on her diligence. It is a personal treasure worth passing along to her children someday. But I wanted to ask her this question, "How is your life different for hearing all that great preaching?" Taking notes is wonderful and ought to be encouraged, but the end result of all Bible teaching is the transformation of the mind Paul talks about in Romans 12:2. Sometimes people will say to me, "Pastor Ray, I have all your books." I smile when I hear that because almost no one has all my books. I don't even have copies of all my books. But it doesn't matter anyway. You could have the collected works of Luther, Calvin, Edwards, Spurgeon, and a dozen other giants of the faith, and if you want to put my books down in the corner of the basement, that's fine with me. But the real question is not, "Do you own those books?" but rather "Have you read them and have they changed you at all?" It's not mere knowledge that we're after; it's a life so transformed that it cannot help but declare "Blessed be God" and "Praise the Lord!" and "What a God we have!"

Worship and Preaching

So we must always say that preaching and worship go together. I met a man at Mount Hermon, an older gentleman, who said the way to end the debate over worship is to restructure our worship services this way (and here I am quoting him exactly): Have 15 minutes of "preliminaries" and then preach for 45-50 minutes. I chuckled when I heard that because that wouldn't work in most churches. And I don't agree with it anyway. For one thing, when the body comes together to worship, we need to sing, we need to pray, we need to share, and we need to read Holy Scripture together. Second, it's wrong to call everything that happens before I preach the "preliminaries," as if the music and prayer is the under card and my sermon is the main event. That's not biblical. When we come together, it is not that we worship and then I preach, as if preaching were merely an intellectual exercise whereby I impart assorted nuggets from the biblical text. Everything we do from beginning to end is part of the worship service. We worship through singing the truth, and we worship through hearing the truth.

It is certainly possible to sing without worshipping, just as you can preach or listen to preaching without worshipping God. But that approach produces formalism or ritualism. It's good to say, "I went to church." That's fine, but did you worship today? That's the true question. It is dangerous to go to a worship service and not worship God when you are there. That produces cold, dead, dry, proud Pharisees who go through the motions and whose hearts are never touched and changed by the living God.

May God deliver us from handling great truth in a casual manner. William Temple, who was the Archbishop of Canterbury, gave us this stirring definition of worship: "Worship is the submission of all of our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness, nourishment of mind by His truth, purifying of imagination by His beauty, opening of the heart to His love, and submission of will to His purpose." Worship is the total response of who we are to all that God is. Seen in that light, worship is not really a "service" we attend, it's the ongoing response of the heart to the revelation of God to us.

Why This Matters

At this point, I want to stop and ask myself a question. Perhaps someone is reading this and saying, "Are

you making too much of just one phrase? After all, everything to this point is really dealing with the first phrase of verse 3: "Blessed be God." My answer is no, I'm not making too much of it because this is the way Peter begins his message so it must be extremely important. The note of praise is key to the whole book. We know that I Peter was written to persecuted believers scattered far and wide across Asia Minor. They were far from each other and far from Peter himself. They faced numerous fiery trials that were about to grow worse. I find it highly significant that Peter doesn't begin by talking about their problems. He begins by talking about who God is and what he has done for them. God comes first! And when God comes first, his people instinctively praise his name. What a crucial insight this is. When we start with God, we see our problems in proper perspective, but when we start with our problems, it's often hard to find God at all.

On Sunday morning, just as the first service was beginning, I was standing near the east entrance to the sanctuary when a woman came in. When I asked how she was doing, she told me about various difficulties in her life, her marriage, and with her children. But then she smiled and said, "I'm seeing God everywhere. Almost every day I'm having a God sighting." To use a biblical phrase, her countenance was peaceful. She has discovered the secret that when God is in his proper place, you see the problems of life in their proper perspective. That's why Peter begins with a burst of praise—not a statement of their problems.

God Did It!

And that brings us back again to Peter's main point: Praise God who caused us to be born again! Everything else in verses 3-5 relates to that main idea. Let's break down the text into five major statements:

- 1) We have experienced God's mercy v. 3a
- 2) We have been born again v. 3b
- 3) We have a living hope v. 3c
- 4) We have a guaranteed inheritance in heaven v. 4
- 5) We are kept by God's power v. 5

Here's another way to look at it:

Theme "Blessed be God who has done great things for us!"

Source "God's Mercy"

Means "New Birth"

Evidence "Living Hope"

Guarantee "Resurrection of Christ"

Goal "Inheritance in Heaven"

Assurance "Kept by God's Power"

Result "Salvation Ready to be Revealed"

What is the main point in all that Peter mentions? Verse 3 is very clear: God "who has caused us to be born again." In our text Peter explains the great blessings that are ours through Jesus Christ. And he wraps it around one particular phrase—"new birth." God has given us new birth and now we are new people. That's what everyone wants—a new start, a fresh beginning. New birth. What a wonderful idea. And God has given it to us. Sometimes we talk about a "born-again" Christian but the adjective is unnecessary. There is no other kind of Christian. If you aren't born again, you aren't a Christian at all. To be "born again" means you receive the very life of God in your soul, and as a result, you become a brand-new person. The key word is "new." Once you come to Christ, you are a "new creation" with a new hope, a new life, new confidence, new joy, and a new destiny.

God "Fathered" Us

Notice how Peter puts it: God "caused us" to be born again. That's a very strong statement about God's sovereign activity on our behalf. We did not cause ourselves to be born again. You didn't "cause" your spiritual birth any more than you caused your physical birth. Peter looks at our new birth and he declares, "God did it!" If we do not exult in this truth it is because either we don't understand it or we don't believe it. Sometimes people want to take credit for their salvation by saying things like, "I had faith so God saved me." But that's not the way the Bible puts it. Ephesians 2:8-9 reminds us that "it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast." Even the faith to believe is a gift from God.

God gave birth to us. He "fathered" us by an act of his own will (John 1:13). He acted unilaterally on our

behalf to rescue us while we were yet sinners and his enemies, estranged from him, going our own way, and rebelling against his holy decrees. He did not save us because he had to, but because he wanted to. Therefore, he alone gets the glory for our salvation.

How Do You Know You Were Born?

Let me ask a question that may help us grasp this truth. How do you know you were born? Ponder that for a moment. It's not as easy to answer as you might think. You're here so you must have been born, right? How else could you be here if you had not been born? But we can think of other answers:

I have a birth certificate that proves I was born. Those can be faked.

I have pictures of me as a baby. How do we know the pictures are really of you?

I have a paper with my baby footprint on it. Very cute, but your foot is a lot bigger now. How can we be sure it's your footprint?

I have an affidavit signed by seven people who witnessed my birth. That's impressive, but perhaps they're all lying.

And so it goes. Once you discount the outward evidence, how do you prove you were really born? There's really only one answer: I'm alive, and my life proves I must have been born. That's really an unanswerable argument.

So let me ask a second question: How do you know you've been born again? The same principles apply. You can bring forth various proofs, such as baptism, walking the aisle, raising your hand, praying a prayer, joining the church, and so on. Those outward signs are not useless, but you could do all those things and still be unsaved. The only real answer is the same one I just mentioned: I know I'm born again because I have the life of God in my soul. Last Thursday at Mount Hermon, I was asked to give my testimony at a pancake breakfast at the top of the mountain. I enjoyed sharing my story because it's been quite a while since I've talked about how I came to Christ. I told how I was raised in a Baptist church in Alabama, how I was baptized when I was nine years old and joined the church. But no one ever asked if I was truly saved. When I was 16, I encountered some college students at a youth retreat who truly knew the Lord. I immediately recognized that they had something I didn't have. I had religion but they knew the Lord. I knew all the words and the verses, but they had the life of God and it showed. So I told the group last Thursday that after the retreat, I went home and got alone to think about all that had happened that weekend. And at 5:15 p.m., Sunday, June 21, 1969, while sitting on the steps outside my house, I prayed a very simple prayer, "Lord Jesus, if you are real, come into my heart." And something happened. Though I didn't hear angels sing and no outward miracles occurred, I was aware that something had happened to me. I had been born again by the Spirit of God. That one event radically changed the course of my life. Now for those who read these words, I should add that it doesn't matter whether or not you can remember the time or the place or if you even can remember an event like that or not. But what matters is that you know that you have the life of God in your soul.

Thank You, Lord
We ought to say it this way:

Once I was blind, but now I can see.
Once I was lost, but now I am found.
Once I had no hope, but now I have a living hope.
Once I was guilty, but now I am forgiven.
Once I was an enemy, but God made me his friend.
Once I was a rebel, but now I am a servant of the living God.
Once I was dead, but now I am alive.
And God did it!

After I preached this on Sunday morning, a dear lady who has been a Christian for many years thanked me and said that she has often struggled with doubts about her salvation. It helped her to know that you don't need a time and a place. It is enough to say, "Jesus Christ has truly changed my life." That's what the new birth is all about.

Why does this matter so much? It directly impacts how you tell the story and who gets the glory. Many years ago we used to sing a chorus that goes like this:

Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul.
 Thank you, Lord, for making me whole.
 Thank you, Lord, for giving to me,
 Thy great salvation so rich and free.

That's good theology. Peter would sing it and then he would say "Amen!"

If you think you accomplished your own salvation, you will no doubt feel good about yourself. But if you think God caused you to be born again, your heart will be like Peter's "bursting with praise." It's the difference between a self-made faith and a God-created faith.

Love Lifted Me

When I got to this point in my sermon preparation, I began to hum an old gospel song. We sang it often when I was growing up, but it's not even in our hymnals any more. Probably the young folks won't know it, and the older folks will. It goes like this:

I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore,
 Very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more,
 But the Master of the sea, heard my despairing cry,
 From the waters lifted me, now safe am I.
 Love lifted me! Love lifted me!
 When nothing else could help
 Love lifted me!

There is wonderful truth in those words. After the service on Sunday, a man thanked me for the sermon, and then he said, "I had forgotten what my life was like until this morning. I had forgotten how angry I was and what alcohol had done to my life. Thanks for the reminder of what God has done for me." We all need that reminder from time to time, don't we?

Everything else Peter says in these verses flows from this truth: God caused us to be born again. Therefore

We have a living hope " v. 3.

We have a guaranteed inheritance " v. 4.

We are kept by God's power " v. 5.

Let us then never boast in ourselves. If we do anything good, it is God who enabled us to do it. If we accomplish anything great, it is only by God's help and God's grace. Let our boasting be only in the Lord. "I will extol the LORD at all times; his praise will always be on my lips" (Psalm 34:1).

Why It Matters Now

At the beginning of this sermon, I mentioned that I had two aims: 1) That you should praise God that you have been born again by God's mercy, and 2) that you will understand why this matters so much at this particular moment in history. The whole sermon up to this point has dealt with the first aim. But why does this matter so much at this particular moment? Remember that I Peter was written to Christians facing open hostility in the first century. Because they didn't follow the status quo, they were mocked, ridiculed, harassed, marginalized, and some were imprisoned, and some were put to death. Peter's message to them can be summarized this way:

My brothers and sisters, hard times are coming and are already here. Some of you are in the midst of fiery trials. More are on the way. Remember what God has done for you. He caused you to be born again. Your future is eternally secure because it rests on God himself. No one can take from you what God has given to you. If you know what God has done for you, everything else is just details.

Those words could have been written for the summer of 2004. Around the world there is a great and growing divide between men and women of faith and the secular powers-that-be. We are called to be salt and light in a

world that does not understand us, often opposes us, and in some cases actively hates us. Hard times may be on the way for Christians in the West who have had an easy road compared to our brothers and sisters around the world. Here in Oak Park we plan to engage our community starting five weeks from today over the issue of marriage, the family, moral purity, same-sex marriage, the hope for change through the gospel, and love in the place of hatred. We have no illusions that this will win us the "Most Popular Church" award. But God has called us, and we move forward by faith, firmly committed to speaking his truth because it is the only hope for new life.

And for all who read these words, wherever you may be, now is the time to get your faith firmly planted in the right place. Now is the time to stand on the rock called God. Now is the time to put your faith into action. Don't be surprised when hard times come. That's what you signed up for when you became a Christian.

And cheer yourself with these words:

We have experienced God's mercy.
We have been born again.
We have a living hope.
We have an inheritance in heaven.
We are kept by God's power.

That ought to put some steel in your soul in the days ahead.

In the meantime, let all who read these words bless the Lord and praise his name. It may be that God is drawing you to himself. Do not resist, but run to the cross and be saved. Trust in Jesus as your Lord and Savior and all will be well. May God grant you faith to believe the gospel. And for all of us, no matter what may come, stand up and bless the Lord. Amen. (Ray Pritchard - God Guarantees Our Salvation)

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J H Jowett Devotional
April The Eighth
MY INHERITANCE IN THE RISEN LORD
1Peter 1:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9.

IN my risen Lord I am born into "a living hope," a hope not only vital, but vitalizing, sending its mystic, vivifying influences through every highway and by-way of my soul.

In my risen Lord mine is "an inheritance incorruptible." It is not exposed to the gnawing tooth of time. Moth and rust can not impair the treasure. It will not grow less as I grow old. Its glories are as invulnerable as my Lord.

In my risen Lord mine is "an inheritance ... undefiled." There is no alloy in the fine gold. The King will give me of His best. "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him." The holiest ideal proclaims my possibility, and foretells my ultimate attainment. Heaven's wine is not to be mixed with water. I am to awake "in His likeness."

And mine is "an inheritance ... that fadeth not away." It shall not be as the garlands offered by men "green to-day and to-morrow sere and yellow." "Its leaf also shall not wither." It shall always retain its freshness, and shall offer me a continually fresh delight. And these are all mine in Him!

"Thou, O Christ, art all I want."

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