

## **Fullness of Joy**

April 16, 2023

### **Psalm 16**

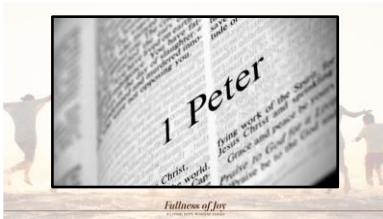
<sup>1</sup> Protect me, O God, for in you I take refuge. <sup>2</sup> I say to the LORD, “You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you.” <sup>3</sup> As for the holy ones in the land, they are the noble, in whom is all my delight. <sup>4</sup> Those who choose another god multiply their sorrows; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names upon my lips. <sup>5</sup> The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. <sup>6</sup> The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage. <sup>7</sup> I bless the LORD who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. <sup>8</sup> I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. <sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. <sup>10</sup> For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit. <sup>11</sup> You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:3-9**

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the genuineness of your faith — being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup> Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.



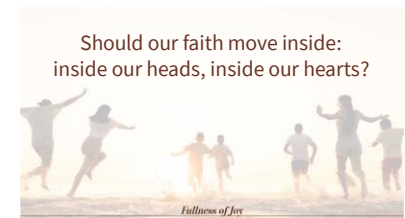
As we enter into the season of Eastertide, we do so in a series called “A Living Hope.” In this series we will focus on how to live with joy. Today we focus on this idea. As we delve into the fullness of joy that comes from our faith in Jesus Christ, we begin to explore what it means to be a disciple that seeks the transformation of the world – in a world that really does not really seem to want transformation. In this series we will practice living out our hope within the body of Christ so that we can then proclaim this hope to the greater community all around us. As we prepare to begin this series and this time together, let us pray...



Turn with me to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1 as we begin this time together. As we lean into these words, a little context. This book was written when the church was under constant threat. At the end of worship, the blessing was spoken with an understanding that when they gathered again, someone would likely be missing, caught up in the cleansing, deportations, and imprisonments. Most Christians were afraid of their neighbors. They feared that their neighbors might notice that they practiced this new religion and would, in turn, report them to the increasingly vigilant and hostile authorities.

In spite of this, these early Christians often stood out even though it made them less safe. For example, when an illness would sweep through a town or region, it was these early Christians who were the only ones who would tend to the sick. Fear would lead families to place sick members out in the street to die. Christians would take these people in, offering care to the sick and dying. And if too late to the scene or unable to help the sick recover, they would care for the dead, treating the body as if it were something precious and worthy of a decent burial.

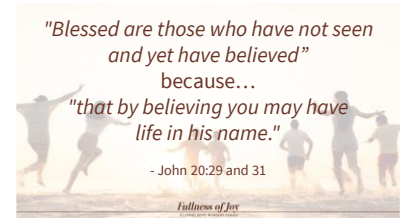
They believed that life was bigger than what could be seen with the human eye. These acts of compassion would draw attention from the world. So the early communities of faith began to question their behaviors and the way that they were living out their faith. Should we go underground? Should we hide? Should we blend in more? Wouldn't it be safer to pretend that we didn't believe that we were saved by grace through faith? Should we act as though we weren't asked to pray for those who persecute us, and that Jesus didn't call us to care for the sick and the least and the lost? And perhaps the biggest question: Should our faith move inside: inside our heads, inside our hearts? A purely personal faith would keep us safe from trials and persecution and pain. Maybe this is a question that you too have wrestled with now and then. I know that I have. This was the central question that Peter sought to answer in this letter that we call 1<sup>st</sup> Peter.



If the question was “should we hide?” or “should we move our faith inside?” then who better to answer than Peter? Author Sarah Wright describes Peter this way: “Passionate and zealous one minute, fearful and cowering the next, Peter’s highs and lows are on full display during his time as a disciple of Christ” (page 7.) It was Peter who declared Jesus the Messiah with great conviction then proceeded to deny even knowing Jesus not once or twice but three times. It was Peter who said over and over, ‘I do not know the man!’ He understands the pull to save one’s own skin. He has also been there. He has felt the guilt and shame of denying Christ. He has been present when another has doubted the resurrection. Turn with me briefly to John 20 as we remember how Thomas doubted the other disciples.



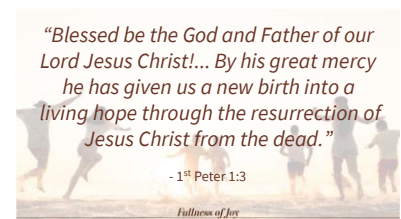
Starting in verse 19 we hear how Jesus visited the disciples and breathed on them the Holy Spirit, giving them “*power from on high*.” In verse 24 we learn that Thomas was not there that day. When the others shared their joy at seeing the risen Christ, Thomas has doubts. He declared that unless he sees the mark of the nails, unless he can sink his hand into the wound in Jesus’ side, well then, he will not believe. In a way so typical of Jesus, he once again appears, inviting Thomas to simply come and see, to touch, saying, “*Do not doubt but believe*.” Thomas’ doubt crumbles in the presence of the risen Lord. Speaking to Thomas and to all who would doubt from then on, Jesus says, “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” because “*that by believing you may have life in his name*.” What a powerful blessing for all who will come to a saving faith in Jesus based not upon seeing him but upon the witness in the word and from those who we meet along our journeys of faith.



As we return to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1, we can hear right away the faith and conviction and the fullness of joy that now drives Peter’s ministry. Peter has been through the ringer and back. Imagine the guilt at denying the one he said he would be willing to die for. Imagine the shame of being called the “rock” yet melting like a snowball on a 100-degree day. But he was not left there. He was restored by Jesus and commissioned to “*go and feed my sheep*.” This was a task that Peter dove into 110% from then on.

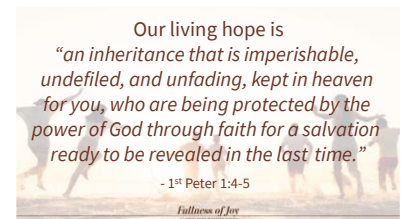


In verse 3 we read these words: “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!*” Peter is reminding them of their true identity – as people known and loved by God.

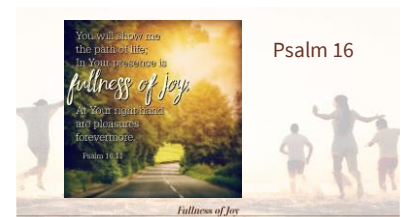


Continuing in verse 3 we read, *“By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”* A new birth into a living hope – that is the gift. It is a new life not based on our own merits or on what we can do to rack up good points. The gift is ours through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Nothing can diminish it; nothing can take it from us. This gift of new life is ours through Jesus Christ. Here Peter is also reminding the elect exiles that Jesus chose to be exiled. He chose to be separated from God in order to save us.

In verses 4 and 5, Peter explains why the gift is sure and why it is secure. Here we read that our living hope is *“an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”* Through this inheritance we become heirs with God and co-heirs with Christ. Wright adds that because of this “we inherit the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross – Christ gives us his righteousness as our own” (page 23.) Through Christ we receive something that is imperishable. It is undefiled and unfading. It is kept in heaven and protected by the power of God, a salvation that will always be ours. Imagine how these words would sound to those enduring constant threat, ever pondering the question: Should our faith move inside: inside our heads, inside our hearts?



These words from Peter echo the trust in God expressed by David in this week’s Psalm 16. We began with a few verses at the start of worship. Now we again turn to Psalm 16, verses 8-11, as we read words that surely sustained and encouraged not only Peter but also these “elect exiles” that he wrote to.



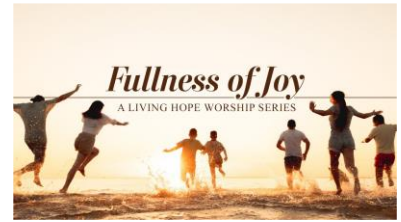
They were dispersed, displaced, and scattered throughout Asia Minor. Earlier persecutions had driven the church out from Jerusalem. The word “elect” was a very intentional choice. To the exiles this word meant “favored” and “chosen by God.” This word would bring to mind the promises made to their ancestors. It would bring hope.

In verses 8-11 we read, *“I keep the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. For you do not give me up to Sheol or let your faithful one see the Pit. You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”* To seek God’s counsel, to keep God ever before us, to know that God is at our right hand – this would help us to not be moved. For David, the fullness of joy was found in obedience – finding one’s place in God’s kingdom, following God’s counsel, keeping God ever before us, living into God’s instructions and ways. There is fullness of joy.

Here, living in close relationship with God, here we find gladness in our heart. Here our soul rejoices and we rest secure. David knew these truths and promises in the depth of his heart. And as we come to know this intimate relationship with God in the depths of our hearts, we too can be glad and we too can rejoice just as David did. What hope is found when we seek the Lord with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength!

There is also an implication in the Psalm that David’s life had its challenges. In verse 4 David speaks of those who *“choose another god”* and who *“give drink offerings of blood.”* David lives in the real world too, just like those to whom Peter was writing, just like you and me. We know those who have chased after the things of this world and we too have probably battled our fair share of false gods.

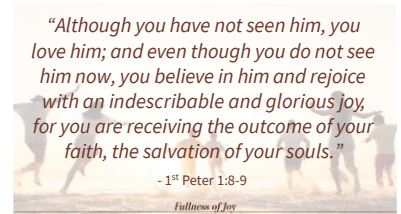
Most of us have offered much at times to attain different gods – wealth, popularity, success. And we have felt the conviction of the Holy Spirit as we stepped outside of the path of life that God intends for us to walk so that we can experience the fullness of joy.



Peter does not shy away from this reality. Nero, the current Roman emperor, was publicly targeting and persecuting Christians. Returning to our Epistle reading, in verse 6 Peter tells us to rejoice *“even if now for a little while you have to suffer various trials.”* In your mind, as it did in my mind, well, this probably doesn’t compute. Rejoice even while suffering? Rejoice in the trials and in the persecution? Yes, Peter says, yes! Peter understands that part of our inheritance is also inheriting participation in Christ’s suffering. This suffering helps us to more closely identify with Christ.

In the next verse we are reminded that our suffering refines us, tests us, strengthens us. Sarah Wright calls these trials “God’s crucibles.” Peter reminds us that *“the genuineness of your faith,”* when tested by suffering and trial and persecution, will *“result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”* Peter is connecting to the larger picture of faith here. In those moments of testing and refining, then our faith is most alive. We are most alive in those times when we rely deeply on our faith.

Pointing on to the deeper truth of life and of our faith, Peter offers these words in verses 8 and 9: *“Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”*





All this stuff happening now, all of this testing and all of this really hard stuff – in the big picture it does not mean anything. It cannot diminish you. It cannot steal away your salvation. Because you love and believe in Jesus, you can “*rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.*” Why? Because you are even now receiving “*the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*” Even now, in the trials and sufferings of this life, your faith is being worked out, it is being refined, it is growing and deepening.

God knows that life here-and-now is not what it is supposed to be. The fall changed all of that. So even now, even in this life, we can experience the fullness of joy that is found in Christ Jesus. This alone is reason enough to rejoice and celebrate! Yet there is more. Because we trust Christ with our lives, we can rejoice because we will receive what Wright calls “the complete and total salvation of your full personhood: mind, body, and spirit restored” (page 38.)  
Talk about a future fullness of joy!



The love that we feel for Jesus, the love that first drew us to him and to the offer of salvation – this love does not begin with us. This love starts with Jesus. It is a truth that Peter experienced firsthand. Even though Peter had turned his back on Jesus, Jesus never turned his back on Peter. As Peter was restored, it was a deep and profound love that rocked Peter to his core. Jesus’ no-matter-what love shook Peter to the depths of his soul, and it restored him to a full and right relationship with Jesus. Peter found a new and living hope in Jesus. He knew that his salvation was secure, imperishable, unfading. He knew that he was saved by Jesus’ love. And he knew that he was saved not just for eternity or just for his own good. Peter knew that he was saved to love others as he was loved by Jesus.



As we seek to know this living hope, may we too “*rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.*” Why? So that all will come to experience the salvation of their souls. May it be so for you and for me. Amen and amen.

**GPS – Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. In what trials and sufferings have you experienced new growth or a strengthening of your faith? How could you share this to encourage others?
- 2) *Pray*. As you consider your life, where might you be tempted to hide or “go underground” with your faith? Pray for Holy Spirit power to stand firm.
- 3) *Study*. Read 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:13-16. How do you prepare and discipline yourself so that you are ready to live a holy life always?