

Text: 1 Pt 1.3a

Proposition: The key to joy is to keep our hearts fixed on God.

1 Pt 1.3-12 is one long sentence in Greek. It forms a part of the letter called “the *exordium*.” One commentator says, “the purpose of [the exordium] is to create a good atmosphere, preparing the audience to receive the instruction that will follow and introducing the main elements of the letter.”¹

As the sentence works its way out, the clauses seem to build on one another. It is something like a flower, just as the bud begins to break open, then more and more of the whole flower opens for display, until the whole glorious bloom perches before your eyes, a visual feast of God’s glory.

Well, here it is a verbal feast, not a visual feast, but the idea is that one idea leads to the next and soon the whole sentence displays a message of praise to God for all he has done for his people.

Today we will just consider the opening bit, the first crack as the bud opens, if you will.

Read 1 Pt 1.3-5, text 3a

The big subject of the passage is *salvation*. You will see it mentioned in vv. 5, 9, 10, with “born again” in v. 3.

The opening phrase is a “blessing.” It follows a Jewish pattern called “the blessing of the Divine Name.” They offered such praise, “whenever they were moved by the mention of God’s greatness or great works.”²

With that in mind, let’s remember that Peter is writing to believers experiencing or anticipating persecution and pressure from the authorities because of what they believe.

Peter doesn’t point his readers to strategies to oppose or overcome the pressure, rather he points them to the proper attitude that enables godly living amid the pressure.

¹ Joel B. Green, *1 Peter*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 22.

² Robert E. Picirilli, *Commentary on the Books of 1 and 2 Peter*, ed. Robert E. Picirilli, The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville, TN: Randall House, 1992), 111.

Today, our text is just the opening, where our hearts are called to focus on the God who saved us.

Proposition: The key to joy is to keep our hearts fixed on God.

I. Who we bless

A. The subject is God the Father

1. The doctrine of the Trinity

- a. God is one
- b. Three persons are the one God

Much can be said of this, and there are limits to our understanding.

“Unlike modalism, orthodoxy insists that God is three persons at every moment of time.”³

2. The way our passage describes God

“the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”

a. The wording of the phrase strikes some uncertainty in some hearts

- 1) A verse used by Arius in promoting his views that Jesus was less than God the Father (as Jehovah’s Witnesses also do)
- 2) This uncertainty misses the point: the elevation of God the Father

b. The solution to the uncertainty:

- 1) The New Testament clearly describes the Father and the Son as equals in every respect
 - a) Phil 2.6: “equality not something to hold onto”

Phil 2.6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, [held onto]

³ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1998), 363.

b) Heb 1.3: “exact representation of his nature”

Heb 1.3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

c) John 1.1: “Word was God”

Jn 1.1 ¶ In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

2) Nevertheless, the Son is subordinate to the Father – by his own will: the Son submits to the Father

Jn 5.30 ¶ “I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

Jn 5.36 “But the testimony which I have is greater than *the testimony of John*; for the works which the Father has given Me to accomplish-- the very works that I do-- testify about Me, that the Father has sent Me.

3. The object of our blessing (in this passage) is this God: the Father of our Lord

4. Sidebar: our Lord Jesus Christ

- a. Note, not the focus of the blessing
- b. But of course, the connection between the “blessers” and the “blessee”
- c. Phrase like the growing concept of imperial deity: “Lord Augustus,” “Lord Caligula,” even “Lord Claudius”

“Naming Jesus Christ as Lord undercut the lordly claims of the emperor and the imperial cult, tore followers of Christ away from the idol worship that pervaded everyday life in the world of Rome, and thus

distinguished believers as aliens in their own communities.”⁴

d. Through Jesus, God the Father is also our Father

II. Why we might bless him

A. Reminder: Jewish pattern of the “the blessing of the divine Name”

B. OT Examples:

1. For delivering from enemies (Gen 14.20)

Gn 14.20 And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” He gave him a tenth of all.

2. For faithful guidance [Abraham’s servant] (Gen 24.27)

Gn 24.27 He said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not forsaken His lovingkindness and His truth toward my master; as for me, the LORD has guided me in the way to the house of my master’s brothers.”

3. For hearing my prayers (Ps 28.6)

Ps 28.6 Blessed be the LORD, Because He has heard the voice of my supplication.

4. For working wonders (Ps 72.18)

Ps 72.18 Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who alone works wonders.

C. NT Examples

1. For fulfilling his prophecies (Lk 1.68)

Lk 1.68 “Blessed *be* the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people,

2. For providing comfort to our souls (2 Cor 1.3)

2 Cor 1.3 ¶ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort,

⁴ Green, *1 Peter*, 23–24.

3. For granting us “every spiritual blessing in heavenly places” (Eph 1.3)

Ep 1.3 ¶ Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,

III. Why, in this case, we do bless him

A. God the Father caused our new birth

1. The word used here occurs only here in the NT
 - a. Etymology: “again generate”
 - b. BDAG: “*beget again, cause to be born again*”
2. The word corresponds exactly with Jesus’ words in Jn 3

Jn 3.3 Jesus answered and said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Jn 3.5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

Jn 3.7 “Do not be amazed that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’

3. The Actor in this new birth (the subject of the action): the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ

For this we bless God: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who made us born again

B. God the Father worked our salvation by his *mercy*

1. Mercy is one of the pair of twins that describe God’s motivation in salvation: grace and mercy
 - a. We define grace: unmerited favor, God giving what we don’t deserve
 - b. Mercy is kind restraint, God not giving what we do deserve

2. Illustrations:

Spurgeon: “A good brother said to me, the other day, concerning a certain boy, that he was afraid we should never do much with him because he was of very corrupt origin. I said, ‘So were you.’

He replied, ‘I do not quite mean it that way.’

‘No,’ I said, ‘but I do mean it that way.’”⁵

The Good Samaritan: The good Samaritan picked up the injured Jew, bound his wounds, and paid for his care:

- He ignored the man’s filthy and broken condition
- He disregarded any risk to himself from the robbers who left the man in this state
- He didn’t hold the pervasive Jewish prejudice towards Samaritans against him

Spurgeon, again: “Mercy is needed for the miserable, and yet more for the sinful.”⁶

3. In the OT, God speaks of his mercy towards Jerusalem (Ezek 16)

- a. Jerus. pictured as an abandoned new-born child, covered in filth
- b. No one pitied, baby thrown out in the field to die
- c. God passed by, and said, “Live!”
- d. God cleaned Israel up and covered her nakedness, caused her to multiply

The chapter goes on to say that Israel spurned the God who showed such mercy.

Our passage responds in a different way, “Blessed be God”

⁵ “mercy and compassion” in Charles H Spurgeon, *300 Sermon Illustrations from Charles Spurgeon*, ed. Elliot Ritzema and Lynnea Smoyer (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017).

⁶ Spurgeon, *1 Peter*, 1 Pt 1.3.

Conclusion:

Proposition: The key to joy is to keep our hearts fixed on God.

Our circumstances may weigh us down, but remember:

- The Great God sent his Son, our Lord Jesus
- The Great God caused our new birth through Jesus
- The Great God worked these things for us out of his *great* mercy

Blessed be God.