

**West Valley Church**  
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**On This Rock:**  
**Part Two:**  
**1 Peter 1:1-2:3**

I was all set to graduate, in the last semester of my senior year of college. I had already been hired by a church to be a full-time youth pastor after graduation. It was finals week of my final semester, when a couple of my friends and I decided to take a study break and blow off some steam. We thought we'd pull a funny prank, but it ended up backfiring and causing damage to one of the buildings. The result was that we each had a fine and damages to pay, resulting in a couple hundred dollars each. Well I was a poor college kid and for sure I didn't have that kind of money. I put myself in a horrible situation because if I didn't pay the money, they wouldn't release my diploma, and without a diploma I wouldn't have a job. I would let down my family, my professors, and the church I hadn't even met yet. And I only had a couple of days to come up with the money. I met with one of my mentors and told him my predicament. I thought he was going to lay into me for doing such a thing, and after a long pause, he reached into his pocket, pulled out his wallet, and counted out \$200 in twenties and said, "Here. I want to make sure you graduate." I couldn't believe it! I thanked him profusely, and ran to the administration office to pay the debt!

Now the question was, would it be registered in time for me to graduate? (This was long before the days of computers.) I was told to be on my best behavior, to go ahead and walk in commencement, and if my diploma was in the folder, I'd know I'd made it (back then, when they handed you the decorative folder, your diploma was inside). I had to wait about a week to graduation, but those were some of the longest days of my life and it felt like it took forever.

Finally, graduation day came. All of us students were seated for the commencement exercise, and I was sweating bullets all through the ceremony. After what felt like forever, my name was called and I walked up, shook the president's hand, and was handed my folder – afraid to look inside. I got halfway across the stage, stopped, and opened my folder....and there it was! I made it! I breathed an audible sigh of relief, and I think I involuntarily wiped my brow. Some people laughed like I was joking, but let me tell you I was dead serious!

That story is sort of a parallel to something Peter said in what we are going to look at today in the second of our series called, "On this Rock" – a study through the letters of Peter. So let's jump right in; get your Bibles and find 1 Peter. In a second, I'm going to ask you to pause this video and read 1 Peter 1:1 - 2:3. It's going to take a couple of minutes but it's power-packed with stuff, so don't rush through it – take your time reading it and let the words and thoughts sink in. Okay? 1 Peter 1:1-2:3. Pause the video now and please read that passage.

*Pause*

Okay, before we dive in, I think it is worth saying something about Peter. It seems like today Peter gets kind of a bad rap; we think of him as this guy who gets angry, is impulsive, and is this uneducated fisherman. But it's wrong to think that Peter was ignorant or uneducated; he had grown up going to synagogue, which was school for Jews in those days. He was no dummy, and you can really tell that in his letters. In fact, verses 3-12 in the original Greek is one long sentence. Your English teacher would've called it a run-on sentence, but in that culture, the ability to carry on an extended thought or argument was a mark of a skilled and intelligent orator. So there's not much question that Peter was an excellent thinker.

Now let's jump in.

This has been called the "thanksgiving section," which it is, for sure. But it's also packed with important teaching and thought. In this passage Peter writes about our salvation, our suffering, and our sanctification. Those are the three things we're going to take a look at together.

Let's start with the first point that Peter is thanking God for, and that is our...

## 1. Salvation

First of all, we have the example of Peter himself. He identifies himself as an Apostle. This is a great example of the transformation that Christ brought in his life. A little over 20 years earlier, he denied ever knowing Jesus – *three* times! That really wasn't much worse than what Judas did. But now Peter's identity in Christ is clear: he knew who he was in Christ. Bryan Stevenson, the attorney and founder of the Equal Justice Initiative and author of the book "Just Mercy," has been responsible for getting dozens of wrongly accused people off of death row, and he once said, "Each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done." That's *especially* true when Christ changes a person. In our salvation, we need to see ourselves as Christ does!

But then Peter turns his attention to his readers, and he uses interesting terms to describe them. His readers were non-Jewish Christians, but he used terms that would've normally been exclusively used to describe Jews. He called them "Elect," the "diaspora" or "scattered," and "chosen." Peter is pointing out that because of what Jesus has done for them by dying on the cross and rising from the dead, and because of their faith in him, they are just as much a part of God the Father's family as the Jews ever were.

But Peter talks about salvation using some interesting terms. A lot of times we talk about being saved as if it were a one-time event in our past. Maybe you've heard people say, "I got saved when I was 25 years old," or "I was saved at a church service in my teenage years," or "I got saved at a Billy Graham crusade." But that kind of thinking was not what Peter wrote about, and honestly, it is not what the New Testament says about it either. Salvation was not a "one-time-when-I-said-a-prayer" thing. Peter wrote, "You are *receiving the end result* of your faith, the salvation of your souls." In other words Peter did not say, "You *were* saved." He said, "You are *being* saved." He and other New Testament writers talked about salvation being a *future* event – something we are working toward.

Remember that story I told about my graduation? What Peter is describing is sort of like

that: everything is in place for our salvation and our debt has been paid; we're just waiting for the time when we can walk across the stage at the end of our lives and get our diploma. Salvation is what we are moving toward. Listen carefully, now. I'm not saying that we save ourselves; it is God alone who, in his boundless grace and mercy, sent Christ to pay our penalty, to die on the cross and rise from the dead. But now that we've accepted that, we are working out our salvation. It is Christ then who gives us the Holy Spirit who, according to Ephesians 1:14 is the "guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory." (Ephesians 1:14) In fact – and this is important to remember – it is through the Holy Spirit that is given to us that we are empowered to live out our salvation and to be holy. We need to see our salvation as a *process* that started the day we accepted Christ's death on the cross, that we are growing in here on earth by the Holy Spirit within us, and will be completed when we are finally and fully in God's presence in heaven someday. That's why the great theologian John Wesley said, "I am *being* saved."

The other thing that Peter points out about our salvation is that we were chosen for a purpose. By the way, words like "chosen" and "elect" are never used to describe an individual person, but to describe a *people*. God doesn't choose some to be saved and not others; God chooses for *everyone* who responds to the Good News would be saved. And when you become one of the chosen, you are chosen for a purpose. It always involves a responsibility; it involves a mission. That's why the Great Commission in Matthew 28 is so important; if you are not living out your mission and purpose on earth, you might not be saved, or perhaps drifting away from your salvation. You need to spend some time in prayer and the Word and start obeying Jesus by the power of the Spirit and get on with your mission.

And that mission becomes especially evident when we go through...

## 2. Suffering

Peter's letter was written to the Christians who were scattered and concerned, because they were being persecuted under Nero, the emperor – who was also the one that in just a few years would murder Peter and also Paul, by the way. So Peter wants the Christians to see that their suffering is *necessary*.

Now, you and I aren't facing persecution, but we *are* facing difficult circumstances right now, aren't we? We've been sheltering in place for weeks, many of us without income and some have lost their jobs altogether. Some are dealing with sickness or loneliness. So instead of seeing this as some bad thing that we must endure, Peter wants us to see it as *necessary* for our salvation, for our identity in Christ, and for our mission. Peter pointed out that we are not saved *from* trials; we are saved *through* them. Just like gold is refined by fire, so is our faith. This time you are going through right now is not planned by God, but neither is it a surprise to him. He intends to use this as a necessary part of his plan for you; to refine and strengthen your faith. That's why Peter calls them *trials*. A "trial" is not a test, like a pass-fail or graded thing, but it is a purifying thing. Peter points out that Jesus went through suffering to achieve our salvation, so if we are going to identify with Christ, we must expect that our suffering is achieving Christ-likeness in us, too. If we want to be like Jesus, which every Christian should, do we expect we can get there *without* suffering? To

be like Jesus means we *will* suffer. So we should be joyful and grateful for these times! Suffering is not inevitable for believers, but we must always be ready to face them. So Peter's letter is not concerned with *if* we face suffering, but *how* we will face it, and Christ is our example. In fact, later in this letter Peter will make the case that it is through suffering that we will be the *best* example to others, and that others will come to faith in Christ by watching how we handle it. So we who are saved need to see suffering as part of our mission, and that is...

### 3. Sanctification

...which is a big and fancy word for holiness, or Christ-likeness. First, we are *commanded* to be holy (1:13-16). Peter talks about "girding your minds." Let me give you a word picture: the real translation of that phrase is "gird the loins of your mind." Here's what it meant: in those days, men wore tunics, right? Like one-piece kilts, sort of. So, to "gird your loins" meant to take the part of your tunic that was between your legs, and tuck it up into your belt, sort of like a diaper. Now, try to get *that* picture out of your head: some dude's dusty and hairy legs sticking out of a giant diaper! But *that* isn't the point – *this* is: men would do that so that they could be ready in a moment's notice to move quickly or run fast or do whatever was necessary. It's where we get the phrase, "tighten your belt." To be like Christ means that we are ready for whatever happens, to live for him and him alone, to always choose what Christ would do and wants us to do, 100% of the time, *especially* when suffering in any way.

Then, in 1:17-21, we're given the motivation for being holy: because we were bought with something far more precious than gold; we were bought by the very blood of Jesus Christ himself. God will judge us by whether or not we live up to that price, so make it your aim to be holy in all things at all times.

What's the demonstration of this holiness? Peter says it is exactly the way we treat people (1:22-25). I remind you that Peter wrote this:

"Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart. For you have been born again..." (1 Peter 1:22-23a, niv)

Purity – holiness – is obedience and love. Period. That's what's different from your life before Christ to now that you are saved; before, it was selfishness; *now* it is love for others. Holiness is love. Holiness is *not* how well you follow the rules compared to those who don't – that's legalism. Holiness is love. Holiness is love. Holiness is love.

So Peter wraps this up by reminding them to get rid of everything that is not love, because holiness is love. *This* is your salvation, *this* is the purpose of suffering, which is your sanctification. You are being saved, through suffering you are being sanctified, so that you love God and people. Patrick Morley once said (and I agree), "The height of our love for God will never exceed the depth of our love for one another."<sup>1</sup>

*Pray*

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<sup>1</sup> Patrick Morley. *Leadership*, Vol. 16, no. 4

Let me close our time with these words of Peter from later in this letter:

“(May) the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, ... himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.” (1 Peter 5:10)