

<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us 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>You are being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup>You rejoice in this,<sup>[b]</sup> even though now for a short time, if necessary, you suffer grief in various trials <sup>7</sup>so that the proven character of your faith—more valuable than gold which, though perishable, is refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. <sup>8</sup>Though you have not seen him, you love him; though not seeing him now, you believe in him, and you rejoice with inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup>because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

### Best Wishes? No, Blessed

After a wedding it's customary to congratulate the husband by saying, "Congratulations." Whereas according to tradition the wife is never to be congratulated but is rather consoled with, "Best wishes." The reason for such a custom was once upon a time marriages were arranged and women were once wedded against their will and sometimes simply had to settle with "We hope this works out for you, best wishes." And the husband, "Congratulations on acquiring a wife because anything and everything you could have acquired was out of your league."

Many have said that this letter reads less like a letter and more like a sermon, a sermon that was likely delivered after a baptism. As a Christian steps out of the water, Peter more fully expounds what has just happened. It's more than "Best wishes, we hope this works out for you... you really got in over your head this time." This is a "Congratulations... you couldn't do any better." Peter goes on in detail expressing the blessings of this new relationship, that is often described as a marriage, and yet it's a relationship that is often taken for granted, abused, neglected, and sometimes even left wondering if he's even wanted.

We don't fully realize what God has done for us. Like Thomas we may not believe that God has done it all, especially in suffering and at those times when it seems as if God is nowhere to be found. God's still there in a very personal way and congratulates you with his presence.

But Peter, you sound like you've got your head in the clouds. You don't know what suffering is. You've never been married to someone that wasn't worth congratulating. But, that's not true. Peter is well aware of suffering. He deals with many issues in this letter from slaves that are abused to wives that are mistreated, friends who have been lost and who are now being slandered, to Christians who are now facing threats and martyrdom. Peter knows a thing or two about suffering. He also knows a thing or two about marriage. He's the apostle who is known as having a wife. Later on tradition says that he and his wife were taken captive she was led away to be crucified first before Peter's eyes and his last words to her, "Remember the Lord."

Peter knew a thing or two about suffering and in spite of this he can call for one and all to bless the Lord, "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" Peter recognized that the greatest gift God had given him wasn't his wife, possessions, best life ever but a gift that could never be taken away from him. This God did for him, one who had so vehemently denied that he even knew the man. And that's why it's called "*Great mercy.*" "*Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope.*" Peter didn't deserve to be called a Christian. He didn't deserve a living hope, *an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you.*" God did this. God caused it. Peter points back to John 3:16 and Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus, "*God has caused us to be born again.*" Just as we were born physically so also we must be born spiritually. And just as we had nothing to do with our first parents, we also didn't help with the second birth. It must come from God.

This is the new life to which we are born, called, caused by God. If salvation comes from our effort, will, performance then it rests on shaky ground. But if it comes from God and his power to bring us from death to life

then it is a sure and certain thing. Luther points out that the human nature loves the thought that, through our own strength, good works, free will, merit, or by keeping God's law, can atone for our sins and acquire eternal salvation. But this is what we must let go of if we want God's Mercy. If we deserve salvation, it does not come through God's mercy. We only deserve his wrath because of our great sin, but he has shown us great mercy. However difficult and uncertain life is, we can give thanks to God and rejoice in the gift we have.

But sometimes it feels like the world around you is offering their condolences, "Best wishes. We wish you could do better but here you are." Sometimes it looks like God doesn't really care. And sometimes it feels that way too. We sometimes get the feeling that everything in this world should go well for us... that once we become Christians the heavens will open and God's blessings will start pouring out all around us: health, wealth, happiness... never a struggle nothing but talk of a land flowing with milk and honey.

Nowhere has the bible made such promises and if it does then check the context because God did make specific promises for specific people. And God has made specific promises to you as well. These promises are often overlooked, taken for granted, doubted, and left behind as we strive for what the world has to offer. Sometimes these promises are twisted and used as a club against God, "If you care for me then do this or..." When suffering comes our way God turns into the proverbial punching bag, "Why did you allow this?" I'm not saying we shouldn't grieve loss but we shouldn't take it out on God. God in his mercy has committed himself to us.

But why should God bless us? Why should he give us every good and perfect gift? When we compare our life to his Word what do we find? A spouse who cheats on his or her husband is hardly considered faithful, a prize to be treasured let alone congratulated. For us to congratulate ourselves on having acquired a God takes his glory.

For all of this People should congratulate us and give God the condolences. But that's not how Peter puts it. There is no "Best wishes," only "Blessed." How easily we forget. How easily we stumble and forget the God who has committed himself to us.

Just as in a marriage a husband and wife commit themselves to one another so also God has to us. He brings us into the family. He puts us into the will. He makes it sure and certain, locked up in the vault of heaven, guarded against every intruder that might steal it from us. We are assured that God's great power is guarding us. He commits to us. He makes us who we are to be a blessing to him and not a bane.

This gift: God's Son, his suffering and death and most importantly his resurrection that assures us, "Death is dead. Your sins are forgiven. You have nothing to worry or fear." This is your God who caused this and committed himself to you. Here is our God who comes to doubters like Thomas and gives them what they need to believe and then he pronounces blesses us who have not seen but have believed. And it is through this faith that he has given us, that he guards and protects that we achieve the purpose: the salvation of our souls.

What is that? Peter tells us what it is not, "perishable, defiled, and fading." Maybe we can describe the gift best by knowing what we've been saved from. If someone jumped and pushed you out of the way you might be upset, bruised, bleeding, and filing a complaint for assault with the local authorities. But if you realized that the reason you've been pushed was because you were standing in front of a bus, you might be more than thankful. The bus wasn't a onetime death that you were saved from but eternal death and separation from God. A life lived outside of any love or care. We were in the position of needing to be saved. We were threatened by death.

But some will simply say that we've been delivered from lack of fulfillment. Your marriage isn't working out and your child isn't turning out to be the next savant, you've been laid off. Life just isn't delivering. Some say, Jesus will take care of all of that. He will fix your marriage, your children will be brighter, breathe new life into your business will take off. The only danger you need salvation from is shattering your dreams. Jesus will take care of it he'll

rescue you from an unfulfilled life. Certainly God provides all that we need for this body and life. He gives abundantly. He blesses the harvest and allows us to store up for the future, pass on to future generations.

Peter on the other hand concedes the fact that you will suffer “*grief in various trials*” It’s not going to be a pleasant experience but you can rejoice in it. You can bless the God and Father of our Lord. Why? Because here is evidence that he is faithful to his promise that in spite of the sufferings all around you that gift is still yours – the salvation of your souls. Suffering results in proven character. A faith that continues to hold fast onto the hope we have in spite of the adversities is to be seen as a blessing from God. *It results in praise, glory, and honor.* That faith confesses Christ in the midst of threats, warnings, and beatings.

This is the God we confess as the Christ. The God who promises us that what we have is secure, no one can take it away from you, and even if you doubt or question there is forgiveness. He comes to us in a personal way: his flesh and blood for the forgiveness of sins. He comes to us in Baptism which Peter will tell us more about later. We are then called to oppose that which is contrary to God’s Word. Unlike the advice of Gamaliel we oppose and speak against the false teachings and false christ’s that lead people from death to death.

The Holy Spirit works through your Words. You have been given the keys to the kingdom of heaven. God has given you his Holy Spirit and the ability to forgive sin. You can remind those around you the good news of what God has done and apply his word to them.

Best wishes? No. Congratulations? Maybe. God got the short end of the stick and that’s also what I tell my wife. I married up. God came down. He humbled himself to serve, suffer, and die. He did this according to his great mercy. He gives us every reason to be at peace. So, Best wishes? – No, but blessed. God has blessed us and we bless him. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because of his great mercy. Amen.*