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Foreword

I originally wrote this work as a series of blogs. My first goal was to get deeper into the Word than just doing a daily reading and then walking away, not even remembering what I've read. Much of this is written in the first person as I wanted to write what I learned for my life, not necessarily what I think God is saying to others. Pardon me when I lapse into academic style or slip out of the first person.

My secondary goal was to provide some encouragement to others who might read the posts or this book. I picked 1st and 2nd Peter because there is a lot in here about suffering as Christians, whether it is a result of persecution or simply living in a fallen world. Hopefully, this can help keep Christians from panicking when something goes wrong in their lives.

It was not my goal to point fingers or kick anyone in his spiritual behind. However, some passages are there for that very reason. I hope I have handled these appropriately. I pray that in these situations, eyes will be opened, repentance undertaken, and even salvation for people who may read this and discover that they are wandering from the Christian path or may never been on it in the first place.

First Peter – Chapter One

1 Peter 1:1-2

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance. (NIV)

Ok, I'm not sure that I really want to start out with these verses; verses about election! Do I really want to comment on verses that have divided Christians for centuries? Well, if I want to be true to the Word, I can't skip over them and not study them. I certainly don't want to offend someone with what I believe God is teaching me, but I don't want to miss a blessing from God because I'm afraid to state clearly what I believe the Word is saying. I'll try to side with Paul as he stated in Galatians 1:10: *Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ. (NIV)*

With all that out of the way, I'll actually start commenting on the verses. As I look at the (NIV), the first words that stand out are elect, strangers, scattered, and chosen. I double-checked with NASB and an interlinear Bible to make sure the words are really there in the original Greek.

Elect or chosen. The Greek is *eklektos* (ek-lek-tos'); select; by implication, favorite: KJV – chosen, elect. Rather than reiterate what hundreds or thousands have had to say about election, I simple want to understand what God is saying to me and to anyone who knows Jesus. I'm His favorite. I'm not His last pick for choosing sides. I may not have come over the first time He called but out of that line up of humanity, He selected me. What can I say except, "Thank you, Jesus." I certainly can't say that I deserved it or earned His calling. There was nothing I did or will do that caused Him to say He wanted me. The word that goes with this selection is foreknowledge.

The Greek for foreknowledge is *prognosis* (prog'-no-sis). Guess what it means: forethought. Two things come to mind. God thought

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about me before I was even conceived. He knew me and wanted me to be His. This word is what we always hear regarding health issues. What is the prognosis? How is this disease, injury, or condition going to turn out? Being in sin is like a disease and the ultimate prognosis is death and eternal condemnation. But God's prognosis for me is eternal life with Him. It's good to know that the Person making the prognosis is the One who is capable of making it happen. See Psalm 139:1-18 for more about how God knows us.

Jeremiah 1:5 says, *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."* (NIV) Speaking to the prophet Jeremiah, God has a word for me too. He formed me, He sets me apart, and He appoints my function in life. If God is sovereign, then He is sovereign in all things and that includes my destiny. My pea-sized brain can't hope to comprehend how He can have total control and foreknowledge (He knows that some will not accept Him and others will) as well as give everyone the opportunity to know Him (John 3:16, Romans 10:9-13). I can only say along with Paul, "Who knows the mind of the Lord?" (Rom 11:34) His being is too much, too great for me to comprehend. I can only stand or fall down in awe.

Strangers or aliens (NASB). At first glance, you would think that Peter is addressing those who are aliens because they are now living in a country where they had to flee from persecution. However, Peter also speaks in 1 Peter 2:11 about being aliens and strangers regarding behavior. Paul explains in Ephesians 2:12 that we Gentiles were not citizens of Israel and therefore had no part in the promises of God. But through the blood of Jesus, we have been brought near to God. Again in Philippians 3:20 Paul clearly states we are citizens of heaven. The reason we are aliens is that our home country is not of this world. Our behavior and our customs should be different from those around us.

There are many people in the US (and other countries as well) who think that Christians are out to destroy the country. They believe we have a hidden agenda to overthrow it and make it a "Christian" nation. Part of that fear is based on the fact that we do behave differently. Personally, am I different enough to be identified as a stranger or alien? If not, then something is wrong. What do I need to change? I think I've been trying to blend in too much so that I won't be criticized. It gets back to that stuff I mentioned up above about

wanting to please God rather than man. Lord, help me be an alien that pleases You.

I have been chosen and it is through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. If anyone has seen the Stargate TV series, then you know about the Goa'uld. These are alien, snake-like creatures that use humans as hosts and take over. These are totally evil beings. On the other hand, there are also some of the same alien species that are good but are called the Tok'ra. I wonder how many people view Christians as Goa'uld (evil) because we have the Holy Spirit living in us. In one of the first TV episodes people are “chosen” to be hosts. If I knew nothing of our God and Jesus and had seen these TV shows, what would I think of people who say they have the Holy Spirit living in them? I would probably say they are possessed. Well, quite frankly, I am possessed! I have surrendered my body to someone who is outside of our physical domain. I have become a slave of God and the benefit is holiness and eternal life (Romans 6:22). This is really scary to people who want to do their own thing.

Then the Word in 1 Peter 1:2 also says that the purpose of my being chosen is obedience to Jesus and sprinkling by His blood. Whoa! What does that mean? Many verses in the Bible talk about sprinkling blood. The blood from animal sacrifices was used to cover sin and cleanse objects and people to make them acceptable to God. But in the New Testament, it is clear that Jesus willingly shed His blood once (instead of the many animal sacrifices) so that God would forgive our sins and accept us. Not only does His blood buy our redemption but it also clears our consciences. Hebrews 9:13-14: *The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!* (NIV)

It is understandable that this may freak people out who do not know Jesus. If I am truly following Jesus, then I act differently and talk about being sprinkled by His blood. I have a clear conscience and say I'm holy because of that. I'm called arrogant because I speak confidently of this, even though I'm not perfect.

Blessed be God – 1 Peter 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
(NASB)

My first thought is that I could camp out on the first phrase for a long time, even the first word. I've never looked up the word blessed. It sounds good in this verse but what do I mean when I say God is blessed? In Hebrews 7:7 the writer says that the lesser is blessed by the greater. How can I bless God? The good old dictionary and the Greek cleared up the confusion for me. The dictionary¹ has several definitions and the one that fits in verse 3 is "worthy of adoration, reverence, or worship: the Blessed Trinity." Checking out the Greek, the word is *eulogetos* (yoo-log-ay-tos'); adorable.

Our God is adorable. If I adore my wife, and I do, is this the same adoration that I have for God? My wife is attractive, delightful and charming – a definition of adorable. Would I describe God that way? Yes and no. He is much more than that. Adorable is also being worthy to be adored. Knowing sign language helps because the same sign is used for adore and worship. From now on, when I see verses that say "Blessed be God" I will think of how worthy He is of worship. Worship is the reverent honor and homage paid to God. What is homage? A dictionary² definition is the formal public acknowledgment by which a feudal tenant or vassal declared himself to be the man or vassal of his lord, owing him fidelity and service. OK, now we're getting somewhere. I can only worship God when I belong to Him.

A vassal was essentially a slave. As a vassal of God, I am owned by Him and in worship I acknowledge that He has complete authority over me. A vassal was granted land in return for paying homage to the lord, a portion of the crops, and even military service. Isn't that the picture of a Christian? God gives me life, everything I have on this earth, and an inheritance in heaven. In return, I give back to Him myself, tithes and offerings, my service to spread His Word. Living the Christian life is often symbolized as warfare.

¹ American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language

² Encarta® World English Dictionary [North American Edition] © & (P)2009 Microsoft Corporation.

I'm glad that I picked the NASB for this verse since the NIV says "Praise be to God..." I don't think I would have discovered the richness of the first four words otherwise. In many verses in the O.T. the NIV uses "praise" where the NASB uses "bless." The NIV is much more readable than the NASB, but that may be only because my vocabulary is limited. The NIV is written to be more understandable at a lower reading level than the NASB.

The phrase, "God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" appears only four times in the Bible. (Romans 15:6, 2 Corinthians 1:3, Ephesians 1:3, and 1 Peter 1:3) I sometimes become messed up trying to think of God and Jesus. So what do I do? I go back to what I know for sure, that Jesus and God the Father are one. John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.* (NASB) This has to be the clearest declaration of the deity of Jesus and the unity of God and Jesus. The next thing I do is think about what it means to say Jesus is our Lord. It goes back that vassal thing above. He owns me and I am His.

Do I worship Jesus in the same way that I worship God the Father? Yes! Absolutely! How do I know that it is OK to worship Jesus? Well, I'll start with what Jesus said. Matthew 4:10 *Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"* (NASB) Clearly, Jesus says by quoting the O.T. that we should only worship and serve God. John 9:38 *Then the man said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.* (NIV) Of course you then need to read and see how Jesus responded to worship. Did Jesus rebuke the man for worshipping Him? Not at all, in fact He used the situation to point out to the Pharisees that they were spiritually blind. When Thomas first saw Jesus after His resurrection, he declared that Jesus was his Lord and God. John 20:28-29 *Thomas answered and said to Him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed."* (NASB) Did Jesus rebuke Thomas? Well, yes, but not for calling Jesus Lord and God, but because he had to see Jesus physically first. For us who have not seen Jesus in the flesh, we are blessed when we believe. This Greek word for blessed is not at all the same one that was used before. This is *makarios* (mak-ar'-ee-os) which means happy. In just a few more verses I'll see why I should be happy.

One of the reasons that God is worthy of my worship is because of His great mercy. I just can't keep away from looking up the Greek

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since some versions use the word abundant instead of great. While abundant is much more descriptive of God's mercy, the Greek is *polus* (pol-oos') which means much or many or large, so great is probably more accurate. Now I'm off on a rabbit trail because *polus* sounds a lot like Palouse which is a huge, abundant wheat producing area in eastern Washington that extends into Idaho and Oregon. If you've ever driven through the area in the spring, it is a beautiful green and turns to gold when the wheat ripens later in the year. The origin of the word Palouse is debated but thought to come from French and has nothing to do with abundance or greatness but it should. God's abundant and great mercy is certainly shown by the provision we receive from this part of our nation.

The love of God, His mercy and grace can be seen in the O.T. as well as the N.T. However, to understand His mercy and grace I also have to understand that without it, I would be suffering His wrath. The following verses express His mercy, my guilt, and the consequences if I did not receive His mercy. Exodus 34:6-7 *Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations."* (NASB). My sin and rebellion against God will certainly have far-reaching consequences, not only on my eternal destiny but also upon my children and those of others. The people I vote for, the causes I embrace, my attitude toward nature, if not guided by God are sin and affect many generations.

The greatness of His mercy can be seen in Ephesians 2:4-5 *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions — it is by grace you have been saved.* (NIV) God has taken me out of the realm of the dead and given me life. Of course, before this happened, I thought I was alive, not realizing that my spirit was dead because of my sins. That's the biggest problem in presenting the Gospel to anyone, convincing a person that he or she is a sinner. My friend, Larry Kent, has written some tracts that help do this. They have been translated into many languages. Go to [http:// www.on-tract.com](http://www.on-tract.com) to see them.

Now, back to the Bible. One last thing about God's mercy and love; it isn't like my concept of love. I generally love others because they are nice people and we get along with each other. These are people who are relatively decent toward others. However, can I say that I love my enemy or those who have insulted, maligned, or ignored me? Before becoming a Christian I was an enemy of God whether I knew it or not. Most of us would probably say we were not enemies of God. Unfortunately, the Bible says that when I love the stuff in the world which isn't aligned with God's plan and direction, I'm His enemy. James 4:4 *You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.* (NIV) So how great is God's mercy? This is how great it is: Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* (NASB) How about that? Jesus died for me when I was His enemy.

Yes, God is worthy of worship – blessed – because of His great mercy.

New Birth – 1 Peter 1:3

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (NASB)

“Are you one of those born again Christians?” I was asked. I answered yes. Why did I say that I was born again? Verse 3 says that God has caused us to be born again. The NIV says He has given us new birth and the Greek says He begot us again. The meaning is clear that we are born again. Also, the more famous verse is John 3:3, *In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."* (NIV) There is also James 1:18 *He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.* (NIV) 1 Peter 1:23 *for you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God.* (NASB)

I am struck by the fact that three different authors of books in the Bible have mentioned this phenomenon that is the beginning of

Christian life. It wasn't just John, but also Peter and James. Like Nicodemus, the person who asked me didn't understand. It was babbling to him. He claimed to be a Christian but his life didn't demonstrate it. There is no getting around the fact that something changes in people when they become Christians. If nothing changes, then there has not been a new birth. If I had continued in my ways after being born again I wouldn't be able to claim to be born again. By the way, I know I changed because the person who asked me the question wanted me to go back to my former habits, which had become disgusting to me.

In these last two verses, being born again is linked to the Word of God. It seems clear that without His Word, we can't become born again. 1 Peter 2:2 says that as newborn babies we should crave the pure milk of the Word. One of the things which happened after being born again is that I had a desire to read the Bible. Even more amazing was that I could understand it! A man at a men's breakfast group asked the others how we could understand the Bible. I don't remember the exact passage because it was many years ago, but it was evident that this person either was not born again or so infrequently in the Word that he had stagnated or never grown.

Hebrews 5:12-14 *You have been believers so long now that you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things about God's word. You are like babies who need milk and cannot eat solid food. For someone who lives on milk is still an infant and doesn't know how to do what is right. Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong.* (NLT)

One reason for this book is that I don't want to be in the position of only knowing the basics and not being able to use the Word to tell the difference between good and evil. When I face situations, I want to be able, first of all, to recognize that something might be wrong with the picture. If my only view of life is what I get from the world (TV, magazines, movies, newspapers, Dr. Phil, teachers, professors, conservative or liberal talk show hosts, etc.) then I may easily stroll through life sinning blatantly and not have a clue that I'm dishonoring God. However, I want my worldview to be shaped by God's Word so that I can see that something is wrong. The next thing is to formulate and carry out actions which are also shaped by God's Word. I can't do that if all I'm doing is reading the Bible briefly or sporadically. I need

to dig into His Word so I don't just walk away after my time in the Word and not be moved closer to what God wants.

I may be born again, but I also need to keep on growing. I pray that is everyone's desire.

Living Hope – 1 Peter 1:3

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. (NIV)

God the Father has given me a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I need to ponder that for a moment. How many people think God is out to get us, to keep us under His thumb and make our lives miserable? But this verse says He gives me a living hope. A living hope as opposed to what, a dying hope? Yes, my hope is not just that I will eventually wind up in heaven where everything will be better, even though there is nothing wrong with that. Heaven is certainly something I should keep at the forefront of my mind.

I better digress and define hope. "A wish or desire accompanied by confident expectation of its fulfillment." This is not the "I hope it won't rain today" type of wishful thinking. This is confidence that I will get something that I have not yet received based on the authority and power of God who has promised it.

Romans 5:1-8 tells me what that hope is all about. I have peace with God. His goal isn't to make me miserable. When I face bad things, instead of blaming God, I know that the troubles are there to produce perseverance, character, and hope. I am confident of this because my confidence is in God who has promised it. How can I be so confident? Verse 5 says that hope doesn't disappoint me because God has poured out His love into my heart through the Holy Spirit, whom He has given me. It isn't me and my ability, but it is the Holy Spirit who gives me that confidence.

Romans 5:1-8 ties back to 1 Peter 1:3 as it explains that at just the right time, when I couldn't do anything to help myself, Jesus died for me – the ungodly person that I was. God demonstrates His love for me that while I was still his enemy and totally opposed to everything He is, while I was doing everything in my power to insult and hurt Him (even though I thought I was being a very nice guy), Jesus died for me.

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Now with a God like that, how could I not have hope that helps me live each day?

Romans 8:23-25 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. (NIV)

Ok, some of that hope is also knowing that this isn't all there is. This life will someday be over and when it is, I will be with Jesus. Again, there is confident expectation that it will occur. My body will be redeemed and I will no longer have to put up with the physical or spiritual weaknesses I now have. I have to wait patiently for that day to come. One thing about growing older is that I know that day is closer than it was yesterday.

1 John 3:2-3 Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. (RSV)

So, because of this hope that I have, I don't sit around and do whatever I want. Instead, because I will someday be like Jesus, I need to purify myself now. If I'm not trying to become pure then I'm simply proving that Jesus isn't my Lord and that I really don't care what He wants.

Jesus had to die to give me this hope. His resurrection proves that His death wasn't meaningless but that He can give me the power by His Holy Spirit to live a godly life and purify myself.

Our Inheritance – 1 Peter 1:4

... and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you ... (NIV)

Not only am I given new birth into a living hope but I'm also given an inheritance. The NAS version says to obtain this inheritance. Unfortunately the word obtain is italicized which means it isn't in the original Greek. Obtain clarifies the meaning since it doesn't seem like I can be born into an inheritance. That is something I get or obtain when another person dies. I don't usually think about the future

benefits of heaven as an inheritance but it fits because Jesus is the one who died so I can go there when I die. That is another strange thought – I have to die (unless Jesus comes back first) before I can receive the inheritance.

In Hebrews 9:15-17 it says that Christ is the mediator of a new covenant (from which comes the term New Testament) so that I may receive the promised eternal inheritance because Jesus has died. The Greek word for covenant and will (used in verse 16) is the same – *diatheke* (dee-ath-ay'-kay). The verses go on to explain that for a will to be in force, the death of the one who made it must be proven. Now I want to go off with a big explanation of the proof of Jesus' death and resurrection but then I'd never finish this thought. Besides, I did that a long time ago. I've included in the appendix if you are interested. The current benefit of the inheritance is found in Hebrews 10:16 "*This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds.*" (NIV)

I need that law in my heart and mind, otherwise I'm without hope. In the past, before I was born again, my only hope for heaven was to be 100% obedient to all of God's laws. The problem with that is that I can't be 100% obedient. I don't know anyone who can. Neither does God know of anyone who can. So the law was put there to show that I need someone to be a mediator for me. 1 John 2:1-2 *My dear children, I am writing this to you so that you will not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate who pleads our case before the Father. He is Jesus Christ, the one who is truly righteous. He himself is the sacrifice that atones for our sins—and not only our sins but the sins of all the world.* (NLT) Now, of course, that doesn't give me the right to blatantly sin but Jesus does defend me and has paid the penalty for me. With His law in my heart and mind, I now have a desire to obey. Before it was all external obedience but not from my heart.

Now I want to get back to the inheritance that is kept in heaven for me. The key thing in 1 Peter 1:4 is that it can never – and I need to emphasize the word never – be diminished in any way. It is kept for me by the power of the almighty God. He has promised it in these verses. Is there anything I can do that will remove that inheritance? No. Is there anything that anyone else can do to remove it? No. It is based on the one who has promised it.

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Ephesians 1:13-14 *And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession — to the praise of his glory.* (NIV) The Holy Spirit who gives me hope is my guarantee that I will receive that inheritance. He will keep me until I die or Jesus returns.

That inheritance is like a divine 401(k). My inheritance is a mansion (John 14:2) and the right to reign with Christ (Revelation 3:21, 5:20, 20:6). That is the employer's input to my 401(k). My input is found in Matthew 6:19-21 (store up treasures in heaven). The great thing is that this is kept safe for me. No depressions, recession, moth, rust, thieves, or anything else will be able to diminish it.

Guaranteed Long Life – 1 Peter 1:5

Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (NASB)

OK, so I'm done with the inheritance but this next verse is really cool. I am protected by the power of God. I know that many people believe that they can lose their salvation if they turn away from God. I think this is one of the verses which support the fact that I will be kept safe until that salvation is completed. There seems to be a caveat in the verse as it states that the power of God is available by faith. Does that mean I have the ability to lose my faith and then I will no longer be protected and could lose my salvation? Well, if my faith was dependent on my own ability to remain faithful then I could certainly lose my salvation. However, my faith is not in myself, but it is in God and His ability to protect me.

A very familiar verse is Philippians 1:6 *being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.* (NIV) I don't think God is someone who will not finish what He started. Unbelievers may argue that, but I believe the book of Revelation is God's plan for the end of this world and the beginning of a new world to come. I know the end of the story because I've read it. In the same way, I believe that He isn't going to dump me if I don't progress at a perfect rate or if I fall on the way. He will keep on working in me and won't give up.

Jude 24-25 *Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen.* (RSV) This is one of my favorite memory verses because it affirms that when the end comes I will stand before my God without any blemishes. I know that I will stand there with great joy because He isn't going to bring up all my sins and ugly things I've done in my life. It will be to His glory and not mine because everyone who sees me standing there will know I don't deserve it. It is only because of Jesus and His sacrifice that I can stand there.

So I've looked at what others have said in Scripture about what they think God will do. Another set of my favorite verses is in John 10:27-30 *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one.*" (RSV) These are Jesus' own words. First Jesus says He has given me eternal life and that life is so firm and solid in His mind that He can say I will never perish. Wow! His promise is something I can hold on to and it is apparent that He is holding me in His hand. So the question is whether or not someone can pull me out of His hand.

I must diverge. I remember seeing the Kung Fu TV series where Grasshopper finally is able to snatch a pebble from his master's hand and then it was time to leave. My Master isn't some aging martial arts expert. My Master is eternal, all-powerful, and all knowing. If someone were to try to snatch me out of God's hand, He would know it way before hand. He would be able to prevent it even if He didn't know it. He is eternal so He doesn't get weak or senile so He can't hold on to me.

Some have argued with me and said they could chose to reject God and therefore lose their salvation. My answer is that since I'm saved and in His hand I don't want to leave. If I did want to leave then I wasn't really in His hand to start with – I didn't really believe and have faith. Even if it crossed my mind to do something like that (and that happens), He protects me. Otherwise, I would be able to say that I'm greater than God and am able to snatch myself out of His hand.

Ray Ruppert

I also like these verses in John because Jesus reiterates that He is God by claiming to be one with God. “Ah!” you say, “He didn’t claim to be God but only one in purpose with God.” When I look at John 10:31-33, I see that the Jews who were listening to Him clearly understood that Jesus claimed to be God and said they would stone Him for making the claim. In the verses following (John 10:34-39) Jesus didn’t deny the charge.

So Jesus is the one in whom I have faith and He gives me eternal life and guarantees that it will always be that way.

Sanctification – 1 Peter 1:5

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I normally think of salvation as something that happened to me when I turned to Jesus and was born again as stated above. The ending of this verse refers to a salvation that is different. My understanding is that there are three stages of salvation. John 5:24 *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. (KJV)* This is the initial start of my salvation. There was a point in my life some 35 years ago when I heard Jesus’ words, understood them for the first time, and believed. At that point I crossed over (NIV) from death into life – eternal life. At that point, I knew I was no longer condemned.

The second part of salvation is my daily growth in Christ. Some people call this a process of sanctification. This process is described in part in Philippians 3:7-14 where Paul says that he considers everything that he had gained in the world (prestige, power, and whatever) nothing in comparison to knowing Jesus. In fact, he had to give it all up when he became a Christian. I didn’t have to give up as much as some people do in other parts of the world. Would I give it up, if I had to? I certainly hope I wouldn’t even have to think about it. He describes the process of sanctification as not having his own righteousness but the righteousness that comes from faith (initial start of salvation). He goes on to say he wants to know the power of Jesus’ resurrection, share in Jesus’ sufferings, and become more like Jesus.

In Ephesians 1:19-23 Paul describes the power of Jesus' resurrection. He says that power is for me because I believe. That is the power to live a holy life. Learning to rely on His power is what brings me closer to being like Jesus. Back in Philippians, Paul also goes on to admit he hasn't become the perfect Christian but he puts the past behind him to push on to that goal. I need to remember that when I sin (I'm getting tired of people saying they made wrong choices, messed up, or made a mistake – I just about typed one of those instead of saying sin), I need to repent, put it behind me and get back on the path to becoming more like Jesus. With Paul, I admit that I'm nowhere near that goal, but I have experienced His power to overcome sin.

1 John 3:1-3 says that God has lavished His love on me so that I'm a child of His. I will be like Jesus and I don't know exactly what that will be like. Because I will and I have that hope, I purify myself because Jesus is pure. It doesn't mean I sit around and wait for Jesus to wave a magic wand and I become pure. It means I have to work with Him, to yield to Him so that it will happen.

Finally, the last stage of salvation is when I'm safely in heaven. That is the reference in 1 Peter 1:5. It is in the last time. When Jesus comes back, sets all things straight on the earth, rules for 1,000 years to give mankind a last chance at salvation, then starts over with a new heaven and a new earth (Revelation 20 and 21). I wasn't made for life on this earth; I was made for eternal life. Through sin, that life was forfeit. Through Jesus, that life is redeemed. Everyone was made for eternal life, but unfortunately, not everyone will make it and that, too, is described in Revelation 20 and 21.

So I'm eagerly waiting for the culmination of my salvation when Jesus is revealed to all.

Rejoicing in Trials – 1 Peter 1:6-7

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (NIV)

Just before I sat down to write about these verses and what they mean to me, I read an e-mail from Pakistan that included a news

article. Apparently the Taliban around the city of Sargodha sent a letter to several Christian pastors and Christian schools in the city. The letter said that Christians should convert to Islam, pay an Islamic tax imposed on religious minorities, known as 'Jizya tax', or leave the country. If Christians refuse to accept these choices, Christians "will be killed, their property and homes will be burnt to ashes and their women treated as sex slaves," said the letter. The Christians "themselves would be responsible for this," the letter added.

If I were in Sargodha, would I be rejoicing that my faith was being tested? What would I do? Would I remain and take my chances that the government would protect my family and me? Would I take everything I could carry and flee? It is hard for me to understand what I would do; however, I have made up my mind that I would rejoice.

I've been through some personal trials in my past; family, health and other things, but nothing that threatened my life. I have felt God's presence in those trials. I know He will sustain me in trials. I have resolved that I will listen for God's direction if this were to happen to me. He may lead me to flee as many of the early Christian did when persecution broke out against the Church in Jerusalem (Acts 8). Most fled to other parts of Israel and even beyond. The amazing thing is that when this occurred, the Word of God spread faster than it would have in a time of peace. Perhaps I would flee and thereby take the Gospel to some area where the people needed to hear it.

If I had to stay in place and was threatened to renounce Christ or die, my verse would be: Mark 8:36-37 *"For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul?"* (NASB) At this time in my life, I have made up my mind that I would not renounce Jesus for any reason. If it cost me my life then I would be in a better place. Why do I say this so confidently? It's because I know that if I don't make the choice now, when not threatened, I will have a harder time when faced with it later. This same principle applies to most critical decisions. If I am faced with an easy way to cheat and get away with it (on my job, taxes, wife, you name it), then what makes me think I will not cheat if I haven't already made up my mind to be honest even when no one is watching?

Matthew 5:9-12 *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil*

against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (RSV)

Jesus’ words are hard to swallow sometimes. In the U.S. there are many churches that teach a Christian should be healthy and wealthy or they are living in a state of unfaithfulness. I can’t help to wonder why they ignore the clear teaching of Jesus that some will be persecuted. There are many other verses which also state this is the norm for Christians. Peter opened his letter to those who had already been scattered to other countries because of persecution. I certainly don’t think that I should be exempt just because I live in the 21st century.

Jesus’ words bring out the truth that I’m not living for this world. My reward will be in heaven. If I fix my eyes on this world and its rewards, then my decisions and goals will be oriented toward the temporary things of this world. When I eventually die, then all those temporary things will be gone and the eternal things that I should have worked for will not have been achieved (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

For my brothers and sisters in Pakistan, I pray daily for you. I pray that you would remain strong in your faith and not surrender. I pray that you would have wisdom to flee or stay. I pray that plans to aid you in some way will occur. I pray that you will not show fear for that is Satan’s tool to keep others from becoming Christians. I pray that you will be able to rejoice in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:16). And I pray for peace for you.

Seeing is Believing – Not! 1 Peter 1:8-9

Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls. (RSV)

I think one of the hardest parts of believing in Jesus is the fact He isn’t a visible person. As I studied English literature in college, I took a class on fairy tales as literature. The class described how fairy tales change over time. I’ve seen the same things in those urban legends that are passed around on the internet. Someone gets an e-mail and tweaks it a little bit to make it sound a little more realistic for his friends or his neighborhood. A name or a place is changed; most certainly the date