



Two-time Academy Award-winning actor Denzel Washington is best known for his roles in *Glory*, *Remember the Titans*, *Training Day* and recently *Fences*. But these days Denzel sounds more like a pastor. He's publicly stated he reads his Bible every day and strives to consistently "get up and speak of what God has done for him." At a November 2015 church banquet he urged people to live in a constant attitude of gratitude for God's goodness. He said: "Give thanks for blessings every day—every day. Embrace gratitude. Encourage others. It is impossible to be grateful and hateful at the same time. I pray that you put your slippers way under your bed at night, so that when you wake in the morning you have to start on your knees to find them. And while you're down there, say 'thank you.' A bad attitude is like a flat tire. Until you change it, you're not going anywhere."

Hearing that, I have to wonder if Denzel had been talking to the apostle Peter! What Denzel is talking about isn't just gratitude, but what we call praise and worship. Praise and worship, both personal and corporate, are the heartbeat of the Christian life. Worship is all about responding to God and what he's done for us. In worship we become preoccupied with the goodness and greatness of God. Whatever we're going through in life is eclipsed by this greater reality, and that puts everything into perspective.

When you open up Peter's first letter, you can't help but see this posture of worship. When we come to just the third verse of the first chapter the first word of his mouth is "praise." He says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." We get our word "eulogy" from the Greek word Peter uses here. A eulogy is a blessing addressed to God. It's part gratitude, part praise, and part wonder. I like how Eugene Peterson translates this same verse in *The Message*: "What a God we have! And how fortunate we are to have him, this Father of our Master Jesus!"

What's amazing about this is Peter was writing his letter to a group of people he called "exiles." Because of their faith in Jesus they'd been marginalized by the society around them. Because their way of life under King Jesus was so different from the world, they were dislocated, and sometimes persecuted. But their true citizenship was in another place. In this sense all of us as followers of Jesus are exiles because we don't fit into the world around us. We don't hold the same values. We live differently, according to the norms of another country because our citizenship is in heaven. And sometimes we pay a price for that.

No one knew that better than Peter. He wrote this letter from Rome where Nero ruled with an iron fist. Increasingly the heat would be turned up on Christ-followers. Many of them would be martyred, including Peter, who tradition says was crucified upside down in AD 64.

Peter's focus isn't on his circumstances but on his God and all he's done for us. And in verses 3-12 he explodes with a hymn of praise to God. You'll find no commands in this passage. You won't even find a period in the Greek—it's one, long, run-on sentence. But in this sentence, Peter demonstrates for us not so much the **how** of worship, but more so the **why** of worship. Why should praise be so often in our heart and on our lips? Peter gives us five reasons.

Praise Him Because We Have a New Birth into a Living Hope

The first reason is that he's given us something. Look at verse 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,

What has he given us? He's given us new birth into a living hope. Peter got this from Jesus. Remember Jesus told Nicodemus you have to be born again to enter the Kingdom of God. He was talking about a spiritual birth into new life. That doesn't happen by trying harder to be a good Christian or by New Year's resolutions. No one can achieve this new birth on their own. You don't earn it. It is a gift. That's why he says it's only because of his great mercy he's given it to us.

And that new birth gives us a "living hope." God wired us so we can't live without hope, but hope is a rare commodity in this world. For a decade Tiger Woods was the dominant force in pro golf. But after a rash of injuries and poor performances, his game tanked. About a year ago, it was reported Woods was struggling to find his identity after his third back surgery. He told reporters, "There's really nothing I can look forward to... I'm really good at playing video games. That's basically how I pass a lot of my time." That sounds like a man who's lost all hope.

Human beings are created to be hope-ers. The farmer hopes for a crop, the prisoner hopes to be released, the sick hope to get well, the lonely hopes for companionship. Hope is the stuff of life. It keeps us going. You lose hope and your spirit dies. We all know what it's like to have your hopes crushed. Maybe it's a

failed marriage, or a failure in a business venture, or a broken relationship with a child, or the loss of a loved one.

It's not that it's wrong to hope for things in our earthly lives. These aren't always false hopes. Sometimes we do get what we hope for. But they aren't living hopes because ultimately, we all die. That's why many philosophers tell us, in the end, there's really no hope. English philosopher Bertrand Russell said this: "The life of man is a long march through the night, surrounded by invisible foes, tortured by weariness and pain, towards a goal that few can hope to reach and where none tarry long. One by one, as they march, our comrades vanish from our sight, seized by the silent orders of omnipotent death. Brief and powerless is Man's life; on him and all his race the slow, sure doom falls pitiless and dark. Blind to good and evil, reckless of destruction, omnipotent matter rolls on its relentless way; for Man, condemned today to lose his dearest, tomorrow himself to pass through the gate of darkness, it remains only to cherish, ere yet the blow falls, the lofty thoughts that ennoble his little day."

Humanity, according to Russell, has no hope. And left to ourselves, he's right. But God's word tells us because of this new birth we have a **living** hope. And that's not wishful thinking or blind optimism. Hope is a guaranteed and joyful expectation based on a Person, Jesus the Messiah. That's why Peter adds those words "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Jesus conquered death in the resurrection, so we have a living hope that transcends anything here on earth. And that hope is joy-giving and life-enhancing and it fuels a life of grateful praise.

Praise Him Because We Have a Glorious and Secure Inheritance

But that's not all: Peter wants us to know more about what we're hoping for. Look what he says in verse 4.

**...and into an inheritance that can never perish,
spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven
for you,**

This is the second reason to praise him—we have a glorious and secure inheritance. There's a lot of talk these days about inheritance. I love the *Seinfeld* episode where George Costanza believes he'll inherit hundreds of thousands of dollars from his parents. But his hopes are crushed when he sees them walk into a fancy restaurant and they tell him they're "blowing it all." That's a concern for you Generation X and Y folks because according to a recent study, Baby Boomers have a total of about \$30 trillion to pass on. But even if the money is passed on, studies show one-third of people who received an inheritance blow through it within two years of getting it.

That word "inheritance" would have poked at a soft spot in the folks Peter wrote to. In that day, wealth and inheritance was usually vested in land. Many of these believers in Asia Minor had been displaced from Rome because of their faith and even if they

did inherit it they'd lost the ability to ever settle on that land. Many of the people Peter was writing to had likely forfeited their earthly inheritance because of their faith in Christ. It's not unlike modern-day Muslim, Hindu and Jewish families who disinherit a family member because of their faith in Jesus.

But Peter reminds them of a different kind of inheritance. He says it can never perish, spoil or fade. In other words, it's untouched by death, unstained by evil, and unimpaired by time. Peter says it's "kept" in heaven for you. It's secure. It's far beyond the reach of earthly events. In our study of Joshua we saw how the Israelites were given an inheritance of land. But that earthly land wasn't "kept" for them. It was taken from them in exile, and later by Roman occupation. Even while they had the land, its rewards decayed with time.

The most complete portrait of our inheritance is found in Revelation. John describes not some esoteric, ghost-like existence, but something real. He talks about a new heaven, a new earth, a holy city inhabited by people with new bodies. This world is just a prelude and foretaste; all the sunrises and sunsets, symphonies and rock concerts, feasts and friendships are but whispers. They're a prologue to a grander story and a better place. Only there, it won't end. J. I. Packer said: "Hearts on earth say in the course of a joyful experience, 'I don't want this ever to end.' But it invariably does. The hearts in heaven say, 'I want this to go on forever.' And it will. There can be no better news than this."

All that is "kept in heaven" for you. I heard a story about a guy who, ever since he was a little boy, his parents promised to give him a beautiful car to drive when he turned 16. He looked forward to parking it in the family's barn where it could stay warm and dry. But first his dad would have to get rid of that old car sitting in the barn. He couldn't wait for his dad to haul it off to the dump to make way for his dream car. But when would that day come? When would that new car arrive? When would his dad get rid of that old junky car under the tarp?

Then one evening he heard the sounds of an engine coming from the barn. Peering into the darkness he noticed a light was on in the barn. He walked over and poked his head inside. When he saw the tarp, rolled up and left against the door, he thought, "Dad is finally getting rid of that junky old car!" But then he looked and saw a Corvette, but not just any Corvette, but a 1963 red Corvette 327 V8 with a split window, aluminum knock-off wheels. So that was the car underneath the tarp all those years! He was stunned. It was always there, just waiting for him to turn 16. His father looked up, and with a broad smile, he said, "Come on, son. Let's take her for a ride."

In the same way, this coveted, beautiful and powerful inheritance I just described is "kept in heaven for you." It's there now. Someday the Lord himself will roll back the tarp and let you see

it in all its glory. You can praise him and thank him and worship him **now** for that!

Praise Him Because We are Being Shielded by God's Power

But our inheritance isn't the only thing that's guarded. Look what Peter says next as he moves from the future to the present.

...who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (v. 5).

Here it's not our inheritance that's guarded, it's **us**! We need constant protection because we're constantly assaulted. But through faith we're now being guarded by the power of God.

The word for "guard" is a different one than the one for "kept" in verse 4. Here it's a military term used to describe guarding done by soldiers. God guards us with his great power. But what for? For the salvation to be revealed in the last time. That's talking about our future salvation at the return of Christ. Our faith in Christ has so united us to him that his power now guards us for the day of salvation. The apostle Paul put it this way, "*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus*" (Phil. 1:6). God is committed to finishing what he started. When you believed, God started a work in you called salvation. And God isn't a quitter. He'll guard you to the end. He'll finish the work. And that means you'll become like Jesus.

But sometimes we wonder. Our progress seems so slow. One of my favorite movies is *Tender Mercies*. Robert Duvall plays a washed-up country music singer named Mac Sledge, who's stringing dead-end jobs together and battling alcoholism. A young widow named Rosa Lee and her little boy Sonny befriend Mac. Late in the movie, Mac and the boy both get baptized at a local church and are driving home in a pickup truck when a conversation ensues:

Sonny says, "Well, we've done it, Mac. We're baptized."

Mac is a man of few words and answers, "Yeah, we are."

Sonny says, "Everybody said I was going to feel like a changed person. I guess I do feel a little different. But I don't feel a whole lot different. Do you?"

Mac says, "Not yet."

Sonny says, "You don't look any different."

Sonny sits up to look at himself in the rearview mirror and asks, "Do you think I look any different?"

Mac says, "Not yet."

You can praise him **now** because of his promise to shield you by his power for the day of salvation when you **will** look very different. Paul says he will "*sanctify you through and through*"

and "*your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1 Thess. 5:23-24).

Praise Him Because Our Trials Prove the Genuineness of Our Faith

But it's not an easy road, and one of the things that causes us to doubt this is just the struggle. Look what Paul says next.

In all 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 the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls (verses 6-9).

Peter talks about trials. We all go through trials. Trials take place in our lives for a number of reasons. Some trials come just because we live in a sinful, broken world where bad things happen. Other trials happen because we ourselves make dumb choices. But here, because of what his readers are going through, he's likely thinking of the kind of trials and suffering that come because of our faith in Christ. For Peter's readers—and for many people in our world today—that can mean your kids don't get into college, or you don't get a promotion, or you're not invited to a wedding, or even imprisonment or death. We trivialize their suffering when we lump that together with our everyday stresses like preparing for an exam or getting a flat tire on our vacation.

I heard about a young athlete in high school. As a senior he had a track record of partying and hookups but then he became a Christian. His lifestyle changed and as a result he found himself on an island. He was no longer invited to parties, nor was he a hit with the girls. He wasn't even given opportunities to shoot in his basketball games. That's an example of how someone today might suffer trials as a result of their faith.

Peter says several things about these trials. He says they take place "for a little while." I think he means it's "a little while" compared to the vastness of eternity. It never seems like a little while to us, but it is compared to the billions of years we'll enjoy our inheritance. He also acknowledges these things are difficult. He says, "you may have to suffer grief." That word "grief" was used to describe the agony Jesus went through in Gethsemane. To deny our trials are painful is to even make them worse. Finally, he says these trials come in all shapes and sizes ("all kinds of trials"). It might be social exclusion, or it could be physical harm or illness.

How can you possibly rejoice and praise God in the midst of trials? How can you be filled with joy when you're suffering grief? Two reasons: First, you can rejoice because of what these trials

produce. They prove the genuineness of your faith. Do you ever wonder if your faith is genuine? The only way to really know is if it holds up under pressure. Peter likens it to gold refined by fire. A goldsmith puts the ore into a smelting furnace long enough to burn off the impurities. I've heard a goldsmith would keep the gold in the furnace until he could see his face reflected in it. So our Lord keeps us in the furnace until we reflect the beauty of Jesus. Someone has said a faith that can't be tested can't be trusted. Peter even goes so far as to say a tested faith is of greater worth even than refined gold because it will last forever. Gold won't make it through the final judgment, but you will!

The second reason we can rejoice in the midst of trials is because even though we don't see him we love him and we believe in him. Of course, Peter had seen Jesus, but no longer. And we don't see him either, but we still love him and trust him and that gets us through the trials.

I have a friend up in Spokane who's battling cancer. His wife wrote a note that said, "Met with the oncologist this week... The doc gave him 3-6 months life expectancy. I'm preparing myself for shorter just in case." Then she adds at the end of the note, "Says he's making great connections with Jesus...is at peace." That's what Peter is talking about — even in trials we don't see him but we love him, we make great connections with him, and we look forward to the day when we'll see him face to face!

Praise Him Because We Know what Prophets and Angels Longed For

The last reason for our praise and worship is found in verses 10–12.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted

the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

There's much we could say about this, but what I want you to see is we have the great privilege to see and experience things the prophets and angels longed for. Prophets searched to understand more about Christ and his suffering and his resurrection. Angels looked down to get a peek, like wedding attendees trying to steal a glance at the bride before her appearance. What they all longed to see has been preached to us by men and women filled with the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

In response today I want to give you some homework. I want you to take each of these five reasons for joyful praise and spend just five minutes on one per day. Spend some time with one per day, and make it the center of your worship:

Monday: Praise him for a new birth into a living hope.

Tuesday: Praise him for your glorious and secure inheritance.

Wednesday: Praise him that you're being shielded by God's power.

Thursday: Praise him for how trials prove the genuineness of your faith.

Friday: Praise him because you have what prophets and angels longed for.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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