

# Living God's Manifold Grace

Thomas Robinson, *Born to a Living Hope* 6, Pentecost, May 15, 2016

## 1 Peter 4:7-16 Hope and Grace Embodied in Life under Trial

<sup>7</sup> The **goal** toward which all things are moving has come near us. All of you, therefore, must **think clearly** and be sober in your shared **prayers**.

<sup>8</sup> Do this, before all else, by **keeping your love for each other genuinely fervent**, because **love covers a multitude of sins**. <sup>9</sup> Then, by **making friends** without complaint with those among yourselves who are **different from you**. <sup>10</sup> Then, as each of you has received a **gift of grace, use it to serve each other**, as excellent **stewards of God's manifold grace**: <sup>11</sup> If anyone speaks, let it be as **words given by God**. If anyone **serves**, let it be as by **strength that God supplies**. All of this is so that in everything **God may be glorified** through **Jesus Christ**, to whom belong the glory and the power into the ages of ages, amen.

<sup>12</sup> **Beloved** ones, don't be surprised at the **fiery ordeal** when it comes on you as a **trial**, as though **something strange** were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> Rather, because **you are sharing in the sufferings of the Christ, rejoice**, so you may also **rejoice** with **celebration** when **his glory** is revealed.

<sup>14</sup> If you are **insulted because of Christ's name**, you are **blessed!** Because **the Spirit of glory and of God** is resting on you. <sup>15</sup> But no one should be suffering as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or even as a meddler. <sup>16</sup> But if it's as a **Christian**, don't be ashamed, but **glorify God in that name**.

## Acts 2:14, 16-18, 21-23, 32-33 Pentecost: Hope Fulfilled, New Life Begins

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them: "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. ...

<sup>16</sup> This is what was spoken through **the prophet Joel**: <sup>17</sup> *'And in **the last days** it shall be, God declares, | that **I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh**, | and your **sons** and your **daughters** shall prophesy, | and your **young men** shall see visions, | and your **old men** shall dream dreams; |* <sup>18</sup> *even on my **male servants** and **female servants** | in those days I will pour out **my Spirit**, and they shall prophesy.... |* <sup>21</sup> *And it shall come to pass that **everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered.**'* [Joel 2:28-32]

<sup>22</sup> Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs ...<sup>23</sup> **this Jesus ... you crucified** and killed by the hands of lawless men.... <sup>32</sup> **This Jesus God raised up**, and of that we all are **witnesses**. <sup>33</sup> Being therefore **exalted** at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the **promise of the Holy Spirit**, he has **poured out this** that you yourselves are seeing and hearing."

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## Acts 11:26 Barnabas and Paul teach together in Antioch of Syria

<sup>26</sup> For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

## 1 Peter 1:6, 8-9, 13

<sup>6</sup> This is why you celebrate! Even though now for a little while you have been distressed by all kinds of trials, ... <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen Jesus, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and celebrate with joy inexpressible and filled with glory, <sup>9</sup> as you are receiving the goal (telos) of your faith, deliverance of your lives.... <sup>13</sup> Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that is being brought to you in the revealing of Jesus Christ.

## Pentecost – Last Days, New Life Begins

Peter's letter was written not long before his death under persecution, 32+ yrs after Pentecost, 35 yrs after he first met Jesus. He was spokesman on Pentecost, interpreting the strange events to Jews crowding Jerusalem from all over the Roman empire. Possibly a few of his readers were there.

Filled with this new experience of God's Spirit, given by the crucified and resurrected Jesus, he knew that this was the fulfillment of ancient promises from God (Joel, David, etc.), promises that marked it as the start of a new age, the "last days," when the God of Israel would give his life, his Spirit to all people, men and women, old and young, even slaves, all would receive his gifts of grace.

Peter began an adventure of transformed vision, breaking his own prejudices, learning just how broadly God intended this – even non-Jews were included. Now 30+ years later he writes this letter to believers just that diverse – pagans, Jews, slaves, women, men, old and young.

They never knew Jesus, never read a Gospel book, but they know him through the message that people like Peter brought, through the new life, new vision, and new experience of God's presence and Spirit that message brought. They have come to know and love and trust Jesus as their living Lord, one who has conquered even death by his resurrection and united us with God. They have been "*born again to a living hope*" (1:3), a new vision of the reality of the world, of what is true and lasting. They are transformed, even though facing fiery persecution.

## The Sufferings of the Messiah

From present usage you might expect that the term "Christian" would be common in the NT. But it occurs only 3 times. It's based on the Greek title "Christ" (*Christos* = *Messiah*, anointed king), but expanded with the Latin ending *-ianus*, meaning a partisan or follower of Christ, a Messianist. That Latin ending suggests it was a term created by Roman government authorities to mark the group. In Antioch, the population was deeply divided. This was a new group crossing boundaries.

It marked the group as suspicious, followers of royal pretender/traitor, crucified by a Roman governor. But for believers it also marked a reality that deeply shaped their view of the world. Their Lord, the very presence of God in the world had been rejected and shamefully crucified by religious and government and popular powers. That event was not just a momentary mistake but marked the fact that Jesus brought a vision of reality and life that challenged and undermined the structures of power, control, empire, and religion so pervasive in human history. Though the Roman empire was still powerful, they embodied a vision that said its basic assumptions were false and passing. That was the "*Living Hope*" – the vision of reality seen in Jesus. In the face of impossible odds.

Hostility was rising. The crucifixion of Jesus was not the end of opposition. A "*fiery ordeal*" based on simply being a "Christianus" (partisan of the pretended King) was rising into view. Peter would die. But Peter says "*Rejoice*." You are already experiencing "*inexpressible joy*." That Spirit given at Pentecost is resting on you. Don't let the powers define it as "shame." It is God's glory now.

## Thinking Clearly toward Love, Friendship and Service

But what do we do? Think clearly, soberly, in terms of reality – the goal (*telos*). Pray together. Don't let their violence define you. Strengthen the new reality seen in Jesus by concrete action among you.

First, Love! All believers are sinners. Stress can bring out the worst. Do everything to keep your love for each other strong and real. Be gracious and forgiving to each other. Then love flows outward.

Second, hospitality. Jews, Gentiles, slaves, free – you wouldn't naturally associate with each other. Actively work to build real friendship across the divides created by the world. Welcome the world.

Third, God's grace and Spirit give gifts of grace to each person. Everyone has something to give. Use those gifts to serve each other. Learn to see them as God's grace working through you. If you teach or speak, if you serve, always by God's strength. Embody God's grace in all you do.

Then even under suffering, the reality of Jesus' Resurrection life is alive in you. That lasts forever!