

Last Sunday was glorious, wasn't it? We celebrated what is arguably the greatest day for Christ's followers, rejoicing in the awesome gift of eternal life because Jesus died on the cross, and was buried in a tomb; but as Christians, we know that he overcame the grave. This blessing is not something that just happens after we die. If you know Jesus Christ as your personal savior, the true joy of living is something you can experience every second of your life. Whatever hardship or trial you face, you can know that you are accompanied by the Paraclete, the fancy name for the Holy Spirit.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, you can confidently face whatever the world can dish out. Today's sermon is about living as overcomers in a fallen world that is filled with reasons we could just decide to head back to bed, curl up and try and shut the world out.

On Friday, a client told me about a difficult situation she was navigating. One of her childhood friends, now a 60-something-year-old man living with just his dog, and no family to speak of. He lived alone in North Dakota and recently she had counseled him to resign from his job before he was fired. My client, Elizabeth, was trying to figure out how she could travel back to help care for his dog while he entered a substance abuse treatment program. She was contemplating driving there with her dog and being close by as this friend entered treatment. She said the friend wasn't particularly religious, but she expressed her fear that he would die before he was able to get into rehab.

And then an employee came into work, feeling sad. On her drive to work, she received the sad news that one of her friends had succumbed to suicide. When I asked her how she was doing she told me that she still hadn't processed her emotions. Clearly, she was sad...distressed for the children and people he had left behind.

In both of those situations, I couldn't "fix" the problem, I could listen and express sympathy. I could also tell them of the loving savior that knew the pain, knew the sorrow.

Yes, in life there are plenty of reasons to be stressed out. But just as the apostle Peter expressed in the first two verses of today's passage, they have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. And through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, they have been called to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood”.

In this introduction, Peter mentions that the readers are strangers in the world. We should know that this world is not really our home; our true citizenship is in heaven. We are called to live differently than those whom we inhabit this planet with.

The introduction to this letter addresses it to God’s elect, those he has chosen to be his. No reason is given here for why God choose us, apart from his foreknowledge; God knew us long ago and has chosen us. Following this introduction, the letter reviews where we stand with God. And the reason we can face challenging times with confidence. We were called and set apart as God's people before we actually made the conscious decision to follow Jesus. Our relationship with the triune God is no accident. We should rejoice and recognize none of our experiences as children of God are just fate. God has a plan for each of his children.

God has foreknowledge of everyone in one sense, but for reasons we do not fully understand, he chooses some for a special relationship. This choosing is done through the Holy Spirit, and the purpose is that we obey Jesus Christ and are cleansed by his sacrifice.

God’s grace has given us a new start in life — a life with confidence in the future because the resurrection of Jesus has given us evidence that we will also be resurrected into glory through him. With our new birth, we are given an inheritance that will never deteriorate - unlike material wealth, the gift from heaven will never perish, spoil or fade."

Life is not guaranteed to always be easy; in fact, we cannot be promised easy lives but we can count on an even better inheritance — preserved in a safe place. “This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 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."

God will protect us. We WILL inherit His glory when our salvation comes. As God's chosen people, we are birthed into lives with the hope that comes from what happened on that first Easter when Jesus arose from the grave. Through the power of the resurrection, we will share in Jesus' resurrection. This is not something that just is for after our death. We can know Jesus now.

Knowing Jesus means that our lives today can be transformed. Rather it is an active part of my life now.

Jesus conquered the grave and that means when we follow him, we have a living hope. This means our earthly lives aren't all that there is -- we will have all eternity to spend with Jesus and with our loved ones.

This eternal inheritance can be part of how we approach life and the challenges that come our way. When we have faith in Jesus Christ, we are birthed into new lives that are transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit. Our old lives and the way we lived as sinners pass away. Having a new birth implies that not only do we die in our old lives but in these new lives we have an inheritance that is awaiting us; awaiting us until we indeed die in this life and enter into heaven. We have a new birth, a spiritual renewal. We have a living hope and a glorious inheritance.

Until we are called home to our eternal home we will still live here in this world. And the people of this world are not generally fans of God's chosen ones. "In all this, you greatly rejoice," Peter says, "though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials" (verse 6). As strangers in the world, we have trials and persecutions, but we can rejoice in knowing that God has something far better already prepared for us. Even if we enjoy many blessings in this life, we should focus our hopes on spiritual realities rather than the approval of society around us.

Yes, there will be trials. Sometimes it is easy to feel sorry for ourselves and to wonder the question, "Why does God allow these trials?"

This scripture in verse 7 provides the answer: "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." Even the best gold eventually perishes, because it will have no value to us after we die. But the value of faith continues forever, and it brings better rewards, so it is worth much more than gold.

It is really easy to get caught up in the here and now, focusing on the temporary and volatile things that surround me and make up my life now. But I have something waiting for me that is so much better. I have no reason at all to be concerned about the little I have now. No reason to hold onto it so tightly. No reason to fear losing what I have here. None of it will last. None of it is worth taking with me. Something much better is waiting. So let go of the cheap trinkets of this life and embrace the glorious inheritance that awaits you.

Life can be hard. We face all of the difficulties that come from living in this world. In addition, we face the challenges presented by people who take offense over those with a living hope, who look forward to a glorious inheritance.

But we are assured here that God's power serves as a shield to protect us while we are here. Many would like to apply this shield to every aspect of our lives, but I do not believe that is appropriate. God's people face hurricanes along with everyone else who lives along tropical coastlines. All of us are equally at risk from disease and drunk drivers. I believe Paul explains this shielding in 2 Timothy 1:12, "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day." Paul had entrusted his eternity into God's hands and was convinced that God's power would be a shield around him until he ultimately stood before God.

Do you ever find you're surprised, and a bit discouraged, when you find yourself amid challenging times? Somehow many Christians have developed the feeling that God should shield them from all of the ouches that life throws our way. And so, when something unpleasant comes along, they are left to wonder why.

But it is unrealistic to expect that your life as a believer will be a bed of roses, nor is that really even a desirable goal. We are told here that we may well have to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. Some of these trials come simply because we live in this world, while others come about because of the opposition of the world to Christ. But however they come, we can rejoice because of the hope we have and the inheritance we look forward to. As Paul says in Romans 8:18, "I consider that

our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.” Rather than moaning about what is happening now; look ahead to what is to come. The present cannot begin to compare with our future.

Peter then compares our trials to a refiner’s fire. Our faith is being refined here. Whatever the world may dish out, we are called to persevere and hold on to our faith. Persevering is a demonstration of the genuineness of your faith and is the desired outcome of the testing times. Those challenges should lead us to trust ever more in our creator, and even less in the temporary things of this world. Instead of dreading the refiner’s fire, we should welcome it because when our faith is proved genuine, it results in praise, glory, and honor in the end. Hang in there during life’s challenges, and rejoice in what they are accomplishing in your life; getting rid of the unimportant, and preparing you for a wondrous “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

The return of Jesus is still in our future. Those of us living and following him now have never seen him, either in the past or the present. But not seeing him with my eyes does not prevent me from believing in him and loving him. The world will scoff at faith because it seems foolish to them. Yet the foolishness of faith brings me into God’s presence.

What is the goal of faith? It lets me know God. But the end result of faith is the salvation of my soul, the “me” that inhabits the shell I walk around in now. I find it interesting that we are even now receiving the salvation of our souls. It is not just something to look forward to at death, or at Jesus’ return. But even now that goal is being accomplished. The more I come to know God, experiencing his presence in my life; the more I experience the refining of my faith through the trials of this life; and the more my soul is delivered from the bondage of this flesh and into the glory of his presence. And that should fill me with glorious and inexpressible joy.

Trials can demonstrate that our faith is genuine — that we put more stock in the future life than we do in the present. This kind of faith will bring us praise, glory, and honor when Christ returns. Though we may be despised now because of our faith in Him, we will have eternal honor because of that same faith.

We have not seen Jesus personally, but we love him and believe in him. This faith fills us “with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for [we] are receiving the end result of [our] faith, the salvation of [our] souls” (verses 8-9). Our difficulties are not worth comparing with the indescribable joy that Christ is giving us.

So, the bottom line is clear: Jesus died for each person, and he loves you immensely. If you do not know Him as your Lord and Savior, it is actually as simple as the ABCs,

A" stands for Admit. We must first admit to God that we are a sinner. We must express our sorrow for our sins and make a decision to turn from our sins.

"B" stands for Believe. We must believe that Jesus is God's Son and that God sent Jesus to pay the penalty for sin. Jesus paid the price on Calvary's cross on Good Friday. He died once and for all humanity.

"C" stands for Confess. We must confess our faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Remember: through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be transformed.

I invite you each to join me in prayer:

Dear God, thank You for choosing to love me! I know I am a sinner. I believe You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to die for my sins. I believe He rose again and lives today. Today, I repent and turn away from my sin. Thank You for Your wonderful love and for changing my life forever. In Jesus' name, I pray, Amen.