

Father God, we so appreciate the time that we are able to spend together in this place with you and with each other. It is a gift from you to us, the fellowship that we have, the love that we share as brothers and sisters in Christ. It is truly a gift. May we never take it for granted. May we never take you for granted, Lord, and the gift of salvation that you have given freely. We worship you today for that. We worship you in song, we worship you in prayer, we worship you in your word, Lord. We pray that you would take your place as the pastor and the teacher of this church and lead us in all things. In Jesus' name we pray this, Amen. Amen. The opening word is Psalm 36. I want you to hear, well, we'll talk about this later and you'll find the connections between this and the messenger, service or leader. Sin whispers to the wicked deep within their hearts. They have no fear of God at all. When their blind can see, they cannot see how wicked they really are. Everything they say is crooked and deceitful. They refuse to act wisely or do good. They lie awake at night hatching sinful plots. Their actions are never good. They make no attempt to turn from evil. Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains. You are justice like the ocean depths. You care for your people and animals alike, O Lord. How precious is your unfailing love, O God. All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings. That's what we're going to be talking about. You feed them from the abundance of your own house, letting them drink from your river of delights. For you are the fountain of life, the light by which we see. Pour out your unfailing love on those who love you. Give justice to those with honest hearts. Don't let the proud trample me or the wicked push me around. Look, those who do evil have fallen. They are thrown down, never to rise again. Well, I wanted to continue the theme that we began over Advent. One of the overtones of Advent was how peace and love and joy exist in such a broken, decimated world, let alone exist in a broken vessel such as this. For love, I actually went into 1 Peter and tried to provide the context of the letter, which is significant in order to understand the letter and to understand the power of the letter. So we'll review that a little bit. I'm going to read the text that I did a couple of weeks ago because when I want to do 1 Peter, maybe some people weren't here, etc. I want to start at the beginning and work through. Plus, in my studies over the past couple of weeks, I've stumbled across a couple of other things that I found very interesting. One of them really changed my paradigm, which is the way you view 1 Peter. We'll get to that one today. So we know that it says, "This letter is from Peter, apostle of Jesus Christ. I'm writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." Peter is in Rome, in the heart of the empire, writing this letter to the Christian church. Now remember, it didn't really look like this. They met in people's homes, they met in groups wherever they could. Especially being a persecuted people now, beginning with Nero, they met wherever they could feel at least a little bit safe. Remember the persecution that began, the Christians were foreigners living in a foreign land, and in a sense, as we will get to spiritually, Christians are always foreigners living in a foreign land. He's writing to encourage them as this persecution has really taken off, and now it's going to last for about 300 years. But their persecution has really taken off. And when I talk about persecution, as we mentioned before, we're not talking about government laws that restrict speech or the freedom of religion. We're talking about propagating the fact that Christians are the enemy, the enemy of the state, the enemy of all people, the enemy of our religion. We should focus on them as our enemy, and they are subhuman, and we can do whatever we want to them, and we will. As I mentioned before, we're talking about going to the extremes of taking Christians alive, putting them on pikes, and then setting them on fire at night to light the city. That's type of persecution. Nobody was safe from the random violence or whatever the state or any agent of the state or really any Roman citizen wanted to do. And it was horrible and horrific. And when I talked about love, I said, putting the backdrop of what Peter is writing in that context, what he says, "But, but," I know all that's going on, what I just described to you, "but you have the love of God." It sounds very inadequate, but then when you think about it, it's true. It's so simple and so powerful that he does not go on and on and on and on about it. But you have God within you. You may have difficulties, right? But you have God within you. So that's the context. That's the backdrop.

And when even when I began to study that context, I was like, that's what opened my eyes that I wanted to preach it regarding love. Because that is a powerful statement. So simple, so pure, so true, so powerful to overcome every circumstance. Now, Peter is going to elaborate on this a little bit. We'll see this in the opening verses here. Verse two. "God the Father knew you and chose you long ago, and the Spirit has made you holy. As a result, you have obeyed Him and have been cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ. May God give you more and more grace and peace." These simple words. In the Book of Life, those who are written in the Book of Life, the fact that God will know who is written in the Book of Life does not mean that everything and every aspect of your life is predestined to happen. The fact that He is in history at all time and understands it and sees it at all time does not negate the fact that we need to share the word of God with those who do not believe, do not know the word of God. So we have to understand that. You can't just say, "Well, you know, if God chose you, you're good to go." Even then, if you talk to a Reformed theologian, they would elaborate much more on that. But when I think of this, I think of God's not only omnipotence, but omniscience. Being in all history, at every point in history at the same time, understanding all things. Because he understands that does not mean that you don't have the choice now. We must, as a church, as we are, declare to do, order to do, preach the word of God faithfully every Sunday, build each other up, know the word of God, be solid in our roots in the word, and then go and live it and share it with this world. And that's what he's saying to them. You need to know, we talked about this, who you are in Christ. Because it's important. It's important then, and it is important to the church and every individual disciple now. Knowing who you are in Christ. We have such, and I'm not going to go down this rabbit hole big time, look around at these various movements that we have. There's a huge identity crisis among human beings today. Especially in secular states like America, which it is now, post-Christian, anti-Christian. And in any secular state, you'll see this identity crisis. Who am I? I don't know who I am. Am I defined by my education? I don't know. Am I defined by who I find to marry or how many people I sleep with? I don't know. Am I a man? Am I a woman? Can I be either? I don't know. There's such fractures in the human soul that have been exploited by the great accuser and so many people who were lost. And can you even say lost in the more traditional sense these days? Now they're fractured. There's pieces of them everywhere. And the enemy, the accuser, will take one of those pieces or a couple of them and just beat that drum until a person doesn't know who they are. And then they come across a community of people that have some sort of idea and some sort of dress code and some sort of language and some sort of ideology. And they're like, "Oh, I need that." But we all need that because we're built that way. And Peter, get back to your identity as a son or a daughter of the Most High God. Now you're on solid ground. Those are the words of scripture. You're on solid ground, not shifting sand. And you're a son. That's the reason why I'm a son. Thank you very much. And this is what very simply, very plainly, without all the words that this guy just used, Peter says that to a persecuted church. "Know who you are in Christ." And it is important to understand their identity as this letter unfolds, because everything that he's going to teach them, everything that he's going to ask of them, is predicated, hinges on that statement. If you don't believe that, then all bets are off. If the persecution has taken away your identity as a disciple of Christ, then all bets are off. If the persecution has helped define you as a disciple of Christ and actually strengthened who you are in the midst of these trials, "Hear me out," he says. "Hear me out." That's something to tell you. And it will be tremendous encouragement. All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is by His great mercy that we have been born again because God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Now we live with great expectation and we have a priceless inheritance, an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled beyond the reach of change and decay. And through your faith, God is protecting you by His power until you receive this salvation, which is ready to be revealed on the last day for all to see. It is by His great mercy, remember when we defined our terms, I know I did that on turning on the lights, right? Mercy is relief from something that you deserve. You deserve that punishment. And sometimes the New Testament wrath of God, as we've taught, is simply God allowing people to be themselves, which is wicked and evil and a downward spiral. And we read that from Romans 1 on. But it is

by His great mercy that you are relieved. Mercy is a gift that you are given that you do not... is relief from something that you do deserve. He will be merciful and relieve you of that punishment because we have been born again, born again not to die. I'm saying that in joy to the world. You see how these hymns are so awesome? You're born again not to die. Now we live with great expectation and a priceless inheritance, an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay, and through your faith, God is protecting you. We relate this continually to those who will remain faithful will be saved. The more I dig into scripture, the more I go in depth, it is actually the simpler the message becomes. We want to go here and go there and look at this word and that word and maybe this and this. The message actually becomes simpler. The more you dig in and the more scholarly you get, the more resources you look at, the more things you look up, it comes down to have faith. Do not be afraid. Have faith. Why do you have such little faith? Your inheritance is secure for you. Stay faithful. The messages become simpler, not some convoluted seminary class that you walk out of. What did that guy just say? I think it took so many seminary classes where the Bible was not even in the rooms. So much stuff about the Bible or about the authors or about the context, and the Bible is not anywhere to be found. One time we had a seminary class and one of the students said, "Professor," it's been a couple of weeks into the class, "do you mind if we pray before we begin class?" And he said, "Why?" He said, "Why?" And the more that you do this stuff on your own or in a group under good teachers, you realize that it's not more complicated, it's less complicated. And you keep picking yourself in the head going, "It's that simple! Why can't I do it?" Well, we do have a whole book that tells us why and helps us out with all of that stuff, but we know that. Through your faith God is protecting you by His power. Verse 6, "So be truly glad there is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while." I want to stop there because this is the hinge that I found in my studies. That word "trials" is so difficult to interpret. This is what I found when I read something and then I started looking for the "how can you explode this word?" We think of the trials now as the physical persecution. But really what Peter is trying to say is something along the lines of "even though you must endure many challenges to your faith at this time." Now, you can say, "Well, certainly if the government is coming down on me and persecuting me or whatever is happening, it's going to challenge my faith." But the word is very specific. "You will endure many tests of faith." He's not talking about the other stuff. He says, "Whatever it may be, and these tests of faith is what will reveal your faith." I thought of football when I thought of this. Because we talk about how difficulties reveal character. Back in the day, back in Josh's day, during summer camp, we would go so hard and be so mentally and physically challenging. Because we wanted the young men to reveal who they were. And it didn't matter about talent, it didn't matter about anything. We wanted to know who they were as young men. Who was going to be there, whether they were second string, third string, first string, superstar, water carrier. Who are they? Will they be a part of the team? Will they be revealed? And then throughout the course of the week, we would always try to schedule one practice at least that would be five times harder than any game they would ever play. And again, through that, we are learning who they are as young men, what their character is, who we can count on, regardless of talent and those sorts of things. Give us 12, give us 22 I guess, of those young men and we'll be okay. We'll be okay. When we talk about the persecution that they're going through, the many tests of their faith that they're going through, the many physical trials to be sure. But the challenges to their faith when you say, "Hey, just give up your faith and go about your merry way. Renounce your faith and go about your merry way." That would be tempting if my husband or my wife was just taken away and murdered. Very tempting. Or, and this is what Peter is saying, "So we're truly glad there's wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many spiritual trials for a while." "These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold, though your faith is far more precious than mere gold." This is the other thing that I learned, which is probably far less serious. But when I was investigating all this, I learned that even gold decomposes. Especially if it's exposed to different chemicals and so forth, it will decompose and just fall apart. And you don't think about that, right? Gold, gold standard, gold has been considered a measure of wealth for all of

history, all of these things, precious metals. We make our rings out of them, all of those things. But I was reading that, and one of the stories was a pool cleaner. The guy was a pool cleaner in a pool cleaning business, and so one time he dipped his hands out of the water in his wedding ring to sell the pieces. And he went to the jeweler and he said, "What's going on?" And the jeweler said, "The chlorine leaches out various things in the gold, and it's gone." So Peter uses this example quite literally, knowing something that I didn't know until I looked it up this week. Nothing gold can stay. There's my homage to my English literature class. Did anybody get that? But everything, everything, everything that is physical on this planet, decays, falls apart. Nothing is eternal except that which is spiritual. And that hit me when I was reading about that and why then Peter would say something like that. Even gold that is being refined by fire, the purest of gold, that doesn't have all those elements that you could smelt out of it or whatever so it would fall apart. The purest of gold, gone. And I guess we know that because our rings and so forth, they didn't flare down and everything. But again, this is just me expressing my learning process. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. Praise and glory and honor for who? That's a very good question and I don't have the exact answer. It could be something that is very local, shall we say, to you and your circle of believers. If it happened right now, would we be experiencing the praise and glory and honor? Could you experience that sort of feeling? This kind of threw me for a loop, but it's not necessarily hyperbole, it's describing those who will persevere to the end. You will be glorified. There is honor in that. You have run the race. You have poured your life as a drink offering. You have done all of those things and here you are. So when those words are stated, it's not like I'm going to be standing on some pedestal with non-believers who are condemned around me going, "haha, praise and glory and honor be to me." You're messed up. Not like that. But there will be an overwhelming sense in the church praising God and I do believe that He will feel some way toward those who have remained faithful to the end. Glory and honor. And this is the revelation. This is the bride of Christ and how she is upon His return. And then that feeling, if you will, that the church will have. I thought those words, we can read through them very quickly and I'm like, "Praise and glory and honor from who?" Is God going to praise and glory and honor me and give me glory? Will other people, will the church? It's really something to think about. But I do believe that what Peter is describing by the power of God's Holy Spirit is a condition, a sense of being that we will experience as we have endured to the end, as our faith has remained strong. It says, and it will come to us when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world. And this is faith. You love Him even though you have never seen Him, though you do not see Him now, you trust Him and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy. The reward for trusting Him will be the salvation of your souls. This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you. They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when He told them in advance about Christ's suffering and His great glory afterward. Well, if you think that maybe we should detach the Old Testament from the New Testament and just be New Testament Christians living in a resurrection power, then you have to take 1 Peter out of your Bible, please, because Peter did not believe that. Peter refers to the prophets and what we call the Christology, the prophecies of this suffering servant. And you're familiar with that one. And it's in all the prophets. But you're the prophecies of the suffering servant that they didn't understand at the time. I can just imagine those words and they're relating it like we said to people of the time, but not knowing what it means for the future. We do. And Peter refers to this, this salvation, this plan of salvation through Jesus Christ and the spread of the good news through the creation of the church, of which He is both the foundation and the head. This was the plan. He says even the prophets wondered what was going to happen, basically. Why am I prophesying about this? The salvation and the inexpressible joy and the strengthening of their faith are all spiritual things. There is nowhere in this book or anywhere, because we know, even when Jesus came as the Messiah, we know that the Jews were expecting a savior along the lines of a human savior. I will rise up, I will be a Caesar, a great army, and we will defeat, as in the days of old, right? Joshua and Jacob and those,

boom. But that was not the plan to actually save people. The plan is to save them for eternal life spiritually. And so all of these things, this oppression that's coming down on these individuals, he's not saying raise an army or wait for God to send a judge of old and destroy the people. He's saying you are saved now. This is all spiritual. All of it is spiritual. You are saved now. Do you believe that? But they're doing this, they're doing that. I want to fight back. I want to get... Do you believe that you are saved and sealed by Jesus Christ and that salvation? Regardless of your circumstances on earth now, do you realize how much God loves you, he has saved you, and prepared for you? This is what Peter is trying to get across. And if you can't tell me that that doesn't have any relevance to today, then we need to have a conversation. Because that's exactly where the world is going today, and it's exactly what the world is saying to the Christian world, Christendom, Christians today. Christians are responding in a variety of different ways, getting into the culture, compromising scripture, doing whatever they need to do, synchronizing with the world, all of that stuff. Anything to do what we're going to talk about next week and live and lead a holy life. That part, we find it difficult enough to do here in America, where we have enough of everything and aren't being persecuted. He's going to ask them to do that in the midst of trial and persecution and pressure. And that's going to be a powerful thing when we get into that next week. So he's talking about the prophets. They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this good news has been announced to you by those who preach in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is also wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen. And again, we get an indication that this plan of salvation not only kept from the prophets of old, but kept from all created beings. This plan of salvation kept from all created beings, including the satan, right? Satan, the accuser, the enemy. Kept from all created beings, including the angels. And now they are witnessing as the world has witnessed, salvation of humankind unfold. OK, great. Salvation of humankind has unfolded in this little tiny speck on the map of Earth, of the planet Earth. What now? Now the church. Now comes the church. This is the real plan. The church. And we know Peter, right? The rock sang that today. It's going to be a big thing. The rock, the church, all of those things. He went from being a teenage idiot to being a prophetic preacher with the power of God. And that's what we're experiencing with this. Now the church. And now what about the church? Well, the church gets persecuted in Jerusalem. So it spreads out a little bit. Then it gets kind of you read all the letters of Paul. It's messed up. And it's this and it's that. So it gets a little bit more purified than other little branches. Along comes Nero and the Roman Empire. And he wants to unify the empire. And so there now there's mass persecution of the church, which God uses to spread the church out through four corners of the world and to strengthen and purify the faith of those who follow Jesus Christ. Praise be to God. We look back on this and I know again, you can look in your Christian journey, as we say, your Christian walk, however you put it in your own life. I know we could spend the rest of the day and tomorrow talking about the stories in your life. You had no clue what was happening at the time. You were upset at the time, upset with God at the time. It's never now you're looking back on praise be to God. Look what he did. Those doors he closed. If I walked through them, I would have died. If I walked through them, I would have been. Thank you, Lord. Nearly everybody is shaking their hands. But isn't that an incredible feeling when you look back? I mean, before I shared this story before, before I was literally called to be a preacher, to be a pastor, things were happening in our life, our marriage, our life. It was being purified through fire, believe me, and all of these things. And we were growing and we were getting a better relationship and a better relationship with the Lord, a better relationship with each other. And we one day turned and said, "Why is he doing this for us?" Well, he was prepared. We had no clue. No clue. But he was preparing us for what was coming next in our lives. And he knew that I could not preach from a place where I was at that point in time in my life. Nor could we be partners in such a ministry at that point in time of our marriage and our life together. Those who persevere to the end, salvation through Christ, is your salvation enough? We look at the needs of the church and talk about directly relating it. And there are people that we know and we love now who are physically ill and hurting and significantly so. There are people that we know and we love now who have torn relationships,

who are still grieving broken marriages. We have people that we know and we love now who have experienced, this is a vast library. This is what I always tell the young couples. This is a vast library of human experience. Why? Why has he brought us all together, if not to strengthen one another? And everything that we've gone through yet, you've remained faithful. Everything that we've gone through yet, you've remained faithful. That says something. I want to talk to that person please. Because right now I'm about to walk away. I need to talk to that person who went through filling the blank and remained faithful. That's the person I want to talk to. That's what the church is all about. You saw that on display this week. It was a week. It was a week. And then in the middle of it, and I've got to be honest, we did this New Testament reading, and at first I was like, "Why? To what point?" I'm very utilitarian. "To what point?" And then it began and it went on and so many personal testimonies of individuals who read, sometimes completely alone by themselves, like four o'clock in the morning or whatever, or the middle of the afternoon, and then you could feel it. Like the spiritual momentum as that reading went along. I know as a participant, and perhaps you as a watcher or a participant, you could feel it. The strengthening of the spiritual foundation. I always underestimate and neglect the full measure of the spiritual foundation. And I guess that's just part of brokenness. Like, "Show me proof." Right? "What's this accomplishing?" It's all spiritual. People tell me that all the time that I'm still just like man-focused. Point A, point B. Get the job done. Nothing is spiritual. It's about me. I got a break from that. You see that. And you see so many people that are going through such suffering and remain faithful. They rejoice in their salvation. But you have this diagnosis. They rejoice in their salvation. But you've gone through so much in your life. They rejoice in their salvation. You're like, "Whoa, those are the people I want to talk to." And that's what Peter is saying. He's saying, "Be that person. Be that person." God will use you. God will use you, whether a Roman officer comes and plucks you from your home tonight, or whether you live a long life as a wonderful example of the disciple of Christ. God will use you no matter what. Rejoice in your foundation. I say it again. Rejoice.