

# Strains of Holy Joy

Acts 2:14a, 22-32 | Psalm 16 | 1 Peter 1:3-9 | John 20:19-31

## 1 PETER 1:3-9

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, <sup>7</sup> so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup> Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

## INTRODUCTION

The first time Angela and I moved to the UK was quite an experience. It was 15 years ago when we moved to Bristol, or as it is locally known, Brizzle. Apart from the oddities of living anywhere new, like trying to decipher the hieroglyphs on the washing machine so that we could successfully clean our laundry, I was surprised at just how challenging communication was. As George Bernard Shaw once wrote: “England and America are two countries separated by a common language.”<sup>1</sup> This became abundantly clear to me the first time I walked up Old Market Street to get the bus to the University. Maybe eight people were waiting at the stop in an indecipherable hodgepodge scatterplot of positions, and yet when the bus came, they knew exactly what order they should be in to enter the bus—as if they all had an internal sense of queueing that comes with being born British. As I got on the bus, I asked the bus driver, a tall and rather rough looking man, for a day pass. “That’ll be 4 quid, my lover,” he responded. I looked at him, confused, paid, and took a seat. Even though I had been married four years at that point, but was unaccustomed to being addressed as “lover.” Later that day, checking out at the Sainsbury’s grocery store, it happened again. The very nice lady at the cash register addressed me as such. I later learned, of course, this is a feature of Bristolian, one of the less popularly-featured British dialects, apart from pirates, as it is often thought to be vaguely embarrassing, even by the locals.<sup>2</sup> Don’t even get me started about what it was like to live in Aberystwyth, Wales, ten years later.

I mention all of this because I was thinking about what it is like to live in a foreign land, the mix of emotions that comes with it—a mix of emotions that most people in this room have felt. There might be melancholy from homesickness, combined with anxiety from the challenges of figuring out life in a new setting, to hope and anticipation because, at that moment, the world is full of promise. And these emotions are often experienced at the same time, or alternating,

---

<sup>1</sup> For more on this quotations, see David March, “Lickety Splits: Two Nations Divided by a Common Language,” in *The Guardian*, November 26, 2010. See [theguardian.com/media/mind-your-language/2010/nov/26/americanisms-english-mind-your-language](https://theguardian.com/media/mind-your-language/2010/nov/26/americanisms-english-mind-your-language). It may have been inspired by Oscar Wilde in 1887: “We have really everything in common with America nowadays except, of course, language.”

<sup>2</sup> John Morrish, “All Right, My Lover? No It Certainly Is Not, My Cocker,” in *The Independent*, August 17, 2003. See [independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/john-morrish-all-right-my-lover-no-it-certainly-is-not-my-cocker-100618.html](https://independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/john-morrish-all-right-my-lover-no-it-certainly-is-not-my-cocker-100618.html).

or in almost contradictory ways. It can be hard to know what to do, what to think, how to sort out the German you learned in class compared with the *Wienerisch* you hear on the streets, how navigate the dumpster fire that is the MA35, how to figure out what exactly is *sturm* and whether it is safe to drink it.

Well, this is exactly to whom Peter was writing when he composed his first letter. In the two verses just before our Epistle reading, we learn that Peter is addressing the elect “*exiles of the Dispersion,*” Christians who find themselves far away from the geographic centre of the faith.<sup>3</sup> But if we look deeper into the letter, I think we find that he’s addressing Christians—all Christians, I think—because if we are honest about our faith, we do not quite feel at home in this world. There are the opportunities and challenges that come from the constant collisions of our faith, our understanding of life as people who follow Christ Jesus, with the moral and ideological convictions of our post-Christian society. And what we then have, in our Epistle reading, is the first thing that Peter wants us to know as the elect exiles, the Christians who live in this world, but are not at home. And it is this: Our salvation should compel us to uncompromising joy, even while we wait. The reality of our salvation, that we have been and are being saved, should compel us to loud, boisterous, uncompromising rejoicing, while we wait for that salvation to be complete. And in the text, Peter shows us how this salvation is incredible, how the experience of it may be intractable, and how it is often invisible, and yet it should bring us to incomparable joy, even in this life. So, let’s take a brief look.

### 1. INCREDIBLE (vv.3-5)

Incredible. Peter begins, perhaps counterintuitively, with the future benefits and hope of our salvation. He uses a few different phrases—“*new birth,*” “*living hope,*” and an “*inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.*”<sup>4</sup> The picture he paints is that of heaven, of paradise, of the abundant and eternal life provided in the Easter resurrection of Christ, concluding, in verse 5, by calling it the “*salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.*”<sup>5</sup> He’s saying that just as Christ Jesus rose from the dead, so we too will rise one day to eternal life, to an eternity in the presence of God, free from pain and anxiety and suffering, that will far surpass anything in this world. No wonder, then, as he transitions in verse 6, that he’s able to say: “*in this you rejoice.*”<sup>6</sup> Nothing should make us, as Christians, more joyful than the prospect of what is to come in the next life, that imperishable inheritance given to all of God’s children. We need not despair, we have something incredible to which we look forward.

### 2. INTRACTABLE (VV.6-7)

And yet, the hope of the life that is to come, is tempered with the reality of life in this world. The future salvation is incredible, but it also produces an intractable character of life in this fallen world. Life is difficult because we are not yet home. We are here now, suffering what Peter calls “*various trials.*”<sup>7</sup> Now, we could talk about trials being any difficult circumstance that we face by simply being out of our homeland, out of our depth, out of our comfort zone. But if we keep reading in this letter, we will find that Peter has a particular set of trials in

---

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet 1:1-2.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Pet 1:3-4.

<sup>5</sup> 1 Pet 1:5.

<sup>6</sup> 1 Pet 1:6.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Pet 1:6.

mind—the trials of being opposed or treated unjustly or even persecuted because of one’s faith.<sup>8</sup> In fact, he’ll use this language again in chapter 4, saying: “*Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name.*”<sup>9</sup> In other words, being a Christian, someone who believes in and shares in the resurrection of Christ, not only brings an incredible salvation, and so hope worthy of rejoicing, but it also brings a cost. Just like being a foreigner in a land that isn’t always welcoming to the outsider, as resurrection-believing Christians, there is a price. Your work colleagues may think you’re a bit old fashioned. Your family may not understand why you give yourself to these religious rituals. The world may think you’re backwards, or a bigot, or just bonkers. And it may cost you, financially or socially or professionally, to be honest, to be generous or merciful, to be Christlike, to be faithful. Yet, a genuine faith will withstand this. You need not worry about bearing the cost, or as we heard repeatedly during Lent, you need not worry about *‘denying yourself and picking up your cross and following Jesus.’*<sup>10</sup> Why? Genuine faith, Peter says, is more precious than gold tested by fire—a profound statement. Gold is one of the most stable elements in the world and very little can tarnish it, let alone destroy it. Take something impossible to destroy and then recognize that genuine faith is even harder to extinguish than that. And so, what? Well, Peter is clear. When your faith allows you to withstand the various trials of this world, that faith will result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

### 3. INVISIBLE (VV.8-9)

This brings us to the final section. What does hope in an incredible salvation, in this intractable world, look like? It looks like faith. Although we did not see Jesus as he was resurrected, and just as we do not see him tangibly in the present, although this salvation is, in some ways, invisible, faith allows us to be completely certain. Through faith, we know that we will come to see him. We can trust that, even though we were not there, he died for us and saved us from our sins. And in doing so, we are receiving, as Peter says in that last verse of our passage, *‘the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls.’*<sup>11</sup> Where at the beginning of the passage, salvation is something incredible that we anticipate, here it is also something we presently experience, in cultivating faith even now, while we are in the time of trial. That is, the incredible benefits of salvation are not only in the future, because we believe in that which is unseen, we are receiving them now as well. And once again, just like in each of the other sections, Peter is clear about what this salvation should result in from us: *‘rejoicing with an indescribable and glorious joy.’*<sup>12</sup>

### CONCLUSION

In the end, Peter’s point, his opening words to the elect exiles, is important. And I will try to state it as clearly as possible. Christ Jesus died and rose again, defeating sin and death, that we might be forgiven for our sins. And because he did that, we can have a hope in an incredible salvation, a faith that this salvation is being brought to completion, even while we live as foreigners in a world that is increasingly sceptical or even hostile to our faith. Nevertheless,

---

<sup>8</sup> See 1 Pet 2:4, 12, 18-25, and 4:14-16.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Pet 4:16.

<sup>10</sup> Mark 8:34.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Pet 1:9.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Pet 1:8.

the fact of our salvation should compel us to uncompromising joy, even while we wait. It should compel us to continue in the faith, continue believing in that salvation, continue repenting of our sins, continue holding fast in what we have been taught. It should compel us to rejoicing together, as a church gathered, building up one another in the faith, serving one another and participating in the life of the community. It should compel us to continue withstanding the various trials, bearing the cost of being a follower of Christ Jesus, together, even when people look down upon us. But mostly, it should compel us to indescribable and glorious joy. As we shall sing in just a few minutes:

Ye choirs of new Jerusalem,  
your sweetest notes employ,  
the Paschal victory to hymn  
in strains of holy joy.<sup>13</sup>

Let me pray: *Heavenly Father, fill our hearts with the indescribable and glorious joy of the salvation which you have provided, which we experience, and for which we hope. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

---

<sup>13</sup> Robert Campbell, Fulbert of Chartres, "Ye Choirs of New Jerusalem," 11th century.