

1 Peter 1:3–5 (Part I)

Introduction

Over the last two weeks, we've taken time to reflect on the opening greeting of Peter's letter – and what a wonderful greeting it is! Wouldn't you agree?

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the chosen, who are resident foreigners of the Dispersion of Pontus, of Galatia, of Cappadocia, of Asia, and of Bithynia, [chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, [chosen] in the sanctification of the Spirit, [chosen] for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.”

Already, we could say that Peter is “off and running.” Already, we should be fully prepared for the first words that Peter writes as he moves into the main body of his letter:

I. 1 Peter 1:3a — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Even if we had no idea who Peter was, as soon as he writes these words we know—we just *know*—that he's a Jew. How do we know? When Greek-speaking Jews translated the Hebrew Old Testament into their native Greek language [Septuagint/LXX], they almost always used one particular Greek word [*eulogetos*] to translate a Hebrew word that meant “blessed is” or “blessed be” [*baruk*]. They chose that specific Greek (verbal) adjective because it was the best fit for what they were reading in their Hebrew Scriptures. But here's the important thing: As far as we know, this was an adjective that wasn't to be found anywhere else in the entire Greek speaking world. The noun was common [*eulogia*], the verb was common [*eulogeo*], but the adjective [*eulogetos*] was *specialy invented* just to reproduce that special Hebrew word *baruk*—blessed be—in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.¹ So what does this tell us? *Eulogetos* was a Greek word, but really, *more than that*, it was a Jewish word – a word that had its **roots** sunk deep, deep, *deep* in the Old Testament Scriptures, and really in the life of God's Old Covenant people. In other words, if it wasn't for the Old Testament *Hebrew* Scriptures, then this Greek word wouldn't ever have existed. In the Psalms, we read over and over again:

- Psalm 18:46 (cf. 2 Sam. 22:47) — The LORD lives, and **blessed be [*baruk/eulogetos*]** my rock, and exalted be the God of my salvation.
- Psalm 135:21 (cf. Ps. 113:2; *eulogeo*) — **Blessed be [*baruk/eulogetos*]** the LORD from Zion, he who dwells in Jerusalem! Praise the LORD!
- Psalm 68:35 — Awesome is God from his sanctuary; the God of Israel—he is the one who gives power and strength to his people. **Blessed be [*baruk/eulogetos*]** God!
- Psalm 89:52 — **Blessed be [*baruk/eulogetos*]** the LORD forever! Amen and Amen.

¹ Occasionally, the LXX translators would use the participial form of the verb *eulogeo* (e.g. “May/let the name of the Lord be blessed” [1 Kings 10:9; Ps. 113:2; Job 1:21; Ezek. 3:12; Dan. 2:20]) or even just a straight verbal form (e.g. “Let them bless your glorious name” [Neh. 9:5; 1 Chron. 16:36]). However, by far the most common word choice for translating the Hebrew *baruk* was the Greek verbal adjective *eulogetos*. (e.g. Gen. 9:26; 24:27; 1 Sam. 25:39; 2 Sam. 18:28; 1 Chron. 29:10; Ps. 72:19)

- Nehemiah 9:5 — [In Nehemiah, when the exiles who'd returned from Babylon gathered to confess their sin,] the Levites... said, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. **Blessed be [baruk/eulogeo]** your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.

Can you see how this phrase, "Blessed be the Lord" or "Blessed be the name of the Lord" was more than just thanksgiving and praise?—It was a way of confessing, in just a few words, the *whole* heart and soul of one's faith in and commitment to God.² And so even outside of the Scriptures (LXX; synagogue worship, etc.), we can see that it became a well-known, ancient expression in the life of God's people. (cf. Achtemeier; Clowney) In just a few words it encompassed devotion and obedience, and adoration and worship, and thanksgiving and praise, and faith and trust. One commentator says it like this: "Whoever [**speaks**] the [blessing] **actualizes** [brings to life in verbal expression] the core of his or her faith: In a worshipful and praising manner he or she confesses God as God, namely as the One to whom one owes oneself." (Goppelt) So what do we read in Job chapter one, after Job has just suffered the loss of almost all his possessions and even his own children?

- Job 1:21 — He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; **blessed be [baruk/eulogeo]** the name of the LORD."

Even in the midst of all his suffering and loss, Job is **confessing with his mouth** the greatness and the goodness of His Master and his Lord. Even in the midst of all his suffering and loss, Job is "actualizing"—he's bringing to life in verbal expression the heart and soul of his faith in God as God, as the One to whom he owes himself. "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; **blessed be** the name of the LORD."

How is it that we confess **in actual words** our own faith commitment to the Lord? How is it that we are faithful to confess **with our mouths**—whether it's in prayer to God or in conversation with one another or in conversation with ourselves—the heart trust and heart commitment and

² It's in light of this general reality that we might at times understand something of the significance of hearing these words on the lips of Gentiles. I say this in a qualified manner because, of course, just saying these words is by no means a guarantee that they express a true saving faith and commitment to God. (See especially the last example below and Zech. 11:5)

Exodus 18:10 — Jethro said, "**Blessed be [baruk/eulogetos]** the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians."

1 Kings 5:7 (cf. 2 Chron. 2:12) — As soon as Hiram heard the words of Solomon, he rejoiced greatly and said, "**Blessed be [baruk/eulogetos]** the LORD this day, who has given to David a wise son to be over this great people."

1 Kings 10:9 — [The queen of Sheba said to Solomon,] "**Blessed be [baruk/eulogeo]** the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness."

Genesis 14:20 — [Melchizedek said,] "**Blessed be [baruk/eulogetos]** God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!" And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.

Daniel 3:28 — Nebuchadnezzar answered and said, "**Blessed be [baruk/eulogetos]** the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent his angel and delivered his servants, who trusted in him, and set aside the king's command, and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God.

heart surrender that's at the core of who we are? If we believe in our hearts, then shouldn't we be diligent to confess with our mouths? (cf. Rom. 10:9-10) On the one hand, what is a faith in the heart that never expresses itself in words? Is it really any faith at all? There are some who will say that they are a Christian when asked and who will tell themselves that they are a Christian, but beyond that their so-called(?) faith is never expressed or "brought to life" in words. Can this really be a true, saving faith? On the other hand, there is nothing to strengthen the faith already in our hearts quite like confessing that faith with our mouths. I find that when I purposefully choose to confess my faith with words, my faith is always strengthened, and I find always a greater assurance and joy. Paraphrasing the commentator I quoted before: "Whoever speaks the blessing **brings to life** in verbal expression the core of his or her faith."

- Romans 10:9–10 — If you confess **with your mouth** that Jesus is Lord and believe **in your heart** that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For **with the heart** one believes and is justified, and **with the mouth** one confesses and is saved.

In both our personal, private lives, and also in our families and when we're gathered together here as the Church, how is it that we are bringing to life in **verbal expression** the heart and soul of our faith in God?

The Hebrews confessed their faith and commitment and surrender and praise and worship and adoration all wrapped up together in these words that they could write with their pens and speak out loud with their mouths: "Blessed be [*baruk*] the Lord." And so, Peter, standing right in the middle of this long tradition of God's covenant people, begins his letter with the Greek word that never would have existed if it weren't for the Old Testament Hebrew Scriptures: "**Blessed be [*eulogetos*]** the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

Now, Peter may be standing here in an ancient tradition, but are you seeing that there's also something *new* here – something radically new? Who was this God that the Old Covenant people confessed with their mouths and worshiped from the heart? They identified Him by His name, Yahweh ("Blessed be the LORD/Yahweh") **and** by who He was the God **of**. Who is God in the Old Testament? He's the God **of** the "fathers" (45 x's); He's the God **of** Abraham, the God **of** Isaac, and the God **of** Jacob (27 x's with variations); but more often than anything else—over two hundred times—He's simply known as **the God of Israel** (204 x's). Who is God in the Old Testament? He's not the God **of** all and everyone, he's the God **of** Israel – He's the God who committed Himself to Israel in a relationship of covenant. That's not just *which* God we're talking about. No, *that's who* God is. (cf. Ps. 33:12) So if you were an Old Covenant Jewish believer, what could be more natural in all the world than for you to confess your faith **with words** like these:

- Psalm 72:18 — **Blessed be [*baruk/eulogetos*]** the LORD, **the God of Israel**, who alone does wondrous things.
- Psalm 106:48 (cf. 41:13) — **Blessed be [*baruk/eulogetos*]** the LORD, **the God of Israel**, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, "Amen!" Praise the LORD!
- 1 Chronicles 16:35–36 (cf. 1 Sam. 25:32 [*eulogetos*]; 1 Kings 1:48 [*eulogetos*]; 8:15 [*eulogetos*]; cf. 2 Chron. 6:4; Ezra 7:27 [*eulogetos*]) — Save us, O God of our salvation, and gather and deliver us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name

and glory in your praise. **Blessed be [baruk/eulogeo]** the LORD, **the God of Israel**, from everlasting to everlasting!

What a beautiful word is that word “*of*”! “Blessed be the Lord, the God who has given Himself to us in covenant.” “Blessed be the Lord, the God *of* Israel.”

But now it’s against the backdrop of this very deeply ingrained and beloved confession that the **radical “newness”** of Peter’s confession can be fully seen: “**Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**” Who is God in the New Testament? He’s the *same* God that we have in the Old Testament, only now we’ve come to know Him differently – only now we’ve come to know Him more deeply and more fully and more wonderfully as the God **and father of our Lord Jesus Christ.** (cf. Rom. 15:6; 2 Cor. 11:31; Eph. 1:17; Col. 1:3)

Think of how Peter actually lived to see the transition from the old to the new. As a faithful, believing Jew living under the Old Covenant how do you think Peter would have been accustomed to worshipfully, joyfully confess with his mouth that God is God, and the one to whom he owed himself?—“**Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel.**” (cf. Lk. 1:68 [*eulogetos*]) But under the New Covenant, Peter has come to know the God of the Old Covenant so much more deeply, and more fully, and more wonderfully than he ever could have before. And so now he worshipfully, joyfully confesses God as God, the one to whom he owes himself, with these radically new and wonderful **words: “Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

But what does this all of this mean? What are the full implications of these **ancient**, and yet at the same time **radically new** words? For the Old Covenant believers, it was most common to follow their confession of faith with a remembrance of God’s saving power and His saving love.

- Ruth 4:14 — The women said to Naomi, “**Blessed be [baruk/eulogetos]** the LORD, **who** has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel!
- 1 Kings 8:56 — [At the dedication of the temple, Solomon prayed,] “**Blessed be [baruk/eulogetos]** the LORD **who** has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised.
- Psalm 66:20 — **Blessed be [baruk/eulogetos]** God, **because** he has not rejected my prayer or removed his steadfast love from me!
- Psalm 31:21 — **Blessed be [baruk/eulogetos]** the LORD, **for** he has wondrously shown his steadfast love to me when I was in a besieged city.
- Psalm 68:19 (cf. 124:6 [eulogetos]; 144:1 [eulogetos]) — **Blessed be [baruk/eulogetos]** the Lord, **who** daily bears us up; God is our salvation.
- Psalm 28:6 — **Blessed be [baruk/eulogetos]** the LORD! **For** he has heard the voice of my pleas for mercy.

All of these things are expressions of God’s “*steadfast love*” – His loyal love, His faithful love, His covenant love – in the Hebrew, His *hesed*. In other words, for the Hebrew believer under the Old Covenant, his confession of faith was always his response to the multitudinous expressions of God’s covenant love – His *hesed*. Now here’s another particularly important Hebrew word

that needed to be translated into the Greek Old Testament. And for this word, the Jewish translators almost always chose the word *eleos*, or *mercy*. The key passage here is Exodus 34:6.

- Exodus 34:6 — The LORD passed before [Moses] and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and **abounding [rab] in steadfast love [hesed]** and faithfulness.

And now let’s look at the Greek translation:

- Exodus 34:6 [LXX] — The Lord passed before [Moses], and proclaimed, “The Lord God full of pity, and merciful, longsuffering and [**abounding in mercy; polu-eleos**] and [truth]...

The two Hebrew words “abounding” in “steadfast love” are combined into a single Greek word: “*polueleos*” (abounding in mercy). If God is **abounding** in mercy, then we’re certainly meant to think of all His **acts** and **deeds** of kindness and love and faithfulness. That’s really the meaning of *hesed* (God’s steadfast love) – the point wasn’t just God’s attitude of love toward us, but God’s covenant love **constantly in action**. You see, God doesn’t just love us in thought and in word, He loves us unceasingly in all His works and deeds. So, in light of the Hebrew *soil* of this Greek word *eleos*, and in light of the constant connection with the word abounding, it might actually be most accurate to translate with the *plural* “abounding in **mercies**.” In other passages in the Greek Old Testament, we read of God’s “**mighty**” mercies (Ps. 117:2),³ His “**great**” mercies (1 Kings 3:6),⁴ and even the “**crowd**” or the “**multitude**” of His mercies (Isa. 63:7).⁵ To truly know God is to know the one who is **abounding in mercies** – in unceasing acts and deeds of kindness, and faithfulness, and love.

In the Old Testament, God’s chosen, covenant people loved to remind themselves, and remind others, and even remind the Lord Himself of the words that He spoke to them in Exodus 34. The Psalmist prays:

- Psalm 86:5 (cf. 86:15) — For you, O Lord, are good and forgiving, **abounding [rab] in steadfast love [hesed]** [Greek: **abounding in mercies (polueleos)**] to all who call upon you.

³ Psalm 117:2 — For **great [gabar] is his steadfast love [hesed]** toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.

Psalm 117:2 [LXX; Ps. 116:2] — For **his mercy [eleos] has been [mighty; krateo]** toward us: and the truth of the Lord endures for ever.

⁴ 1 Kings 3:6 — And Solomon said, “You have shown **great [gadol] steadfast love [hesed]** to your servant David my father, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you. And you have kept for him this **great [gadol] steadfast love [hesed]** and have given him a son to sit on his throne this day.

1 Kings 3:6 [LXX] — And Solomon said, Thou hast dealt **very [mega] mercifully [eleos]** with thy servant David my father according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee, and thou hast kept for him this **great [mega] mercy [eleos]**, to set his son upon his throne, as it is this day.

⁵ Isaiah 63:7 — I will recount the steadfast love of the LORD, the praises of the LORD, according to all that the LORD has granted us, and the great goodness to the house of Israel that he has granted them according to his compassion, according to **the abundance [rob] of his steadfast love [hesed]**.

Isaiah 63:7 [LXX] — I remembered the mercy of the Lord, the praises of the Lord in all things wherein he recompenses us. The Lord is a good judge to the house of Israel; he deals with us according to his mercy, and according to **the abundance [plathos; crowd/multitude] of his righteousness**.

- Psalm 103:8 — The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and **abounding [rab] in steadfast love [hesed]**. [Greek: **abounding in mercies (polueleos)**]
- Psalm 145:8–9 — The LORD is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and **abounding [gadol] in steadfast love [hesed]**. [Greek: **abounding in mercies (polueleos)**] The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.
- Joel 2:13 (cf. Numbers 14:17-18; Jonah 4:2) — Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and **abounding [rab] in steadfast love [hesed]** [Greek: **abounding in mercies (polueleos)**]; and he relents over disaster.

God’s steadfast love is His covenant love constantly in action – constantly at work in the lives of His people; and God is **abounding** in steadfast love, abounding in mercies. This is **why we** confess with our mouths at all times and in all circumstances: **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...”**

In Peter’s day, every faithful Jew would have been intimately familiar with that beautiful Greek word, *polueleos*, “abounding in mercies” – just like their counterparts from long ago would have been intimately familiar with the Hebrew equivalent, *rab hesed*, “abounding in steadfast love.” So after writing “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” can you guess what words Peter continues with?

II. 1 Peter 1:3b — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, [SLIDE] **WHO** according to His **abounding mercies [polu eleos]**...

Can you see how Peter is still standing very much rooted in the ancient world of the Old Covenant people and the Old Covenant Scriptures? And yet, just as we saw the radical newness of “Blessed be **the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,**” so also we’re about to see the radical **newness** of this same God’s “**abounding mercies**” – mercies that we know have come to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who** according to his abounding mercies _____...
 Would we be able to fill in the blank? Would we be able to rehearse out loud the abounding mercies of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? We’ll come back in the next several weeks to see how Peter fills in that blank, but let’s read just a small part of it right now:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who
 according to his abounding mercies, [SLIDE]
has caused us to be conceived again
 to a living **HOPE**
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
 to an **INHERITANCE** that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for
 you,
 who by God’s power are being guarded
 through faith
for a **SALVATION** ready to be revealed in the last time.

Conclusion

One commentator writes about the blessing in verse three: “[This] blessing is not a prosaic introduction but begins the section with joy, a gladness that fills the rest of the passage.” (Schreiner) You might remember from our time in Ephesians that Ephesians 1:3-14 is a single, long sentence made up of 202 words. But do you remember how that sentence begins?

- Ephesians 1:3 — **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, *who*** has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places...

And guess what? As Peter introduces this letter with these identical words, he’s actually embarking on just the *second* longest sentence in the Bible – a sentence made up of 178 words and not coming to an end until verse 12. It’s this sentence that the opening blessing has begun with joy, with a gladness that will indeed fill the rest of the passage.

In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians we see again the same words:

- 2 Corinthians 1:3 (cf. 11:31) — **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort.**

Do you see how these words—both ancient *and* radically new—became part of the **language** of the church? The church is a community of “**confessors**.” That’s what the martyrs were and are today – “confessors” – and that’s what all true Christians are. (cf. Mat. 10:32-33) On the one hand, just saying the “right” words doesn’t mean anything.

- Zechariah 11:4-5 — Thus said the LORD my God: “Become shepherd of the flock doomed to slaughter. Those who buy them slaughter them and go unpunished, and those who sell them say, ‘Blessed be the LORD, I have become rich.’”

Yes, on the one hand, words are cheap. But on the other hand, a faith that isn’t being confessed with words is likely also just as cheap. How is it that you confess **in actual words** your own faith commitment to the Lord? How are we doing this in our personal, private lives, and also in our families and when we’re gathered together here as the Church? How is it that we are bringing to life in **verbal expression**—whether it’s in prayer to God or in conversation with one another or in conversation with ourselves—the heart and soul of our faith in God? Truly, there is nothing to strengthen our faith quite like worshipfully, joyfully confessing that faith out loud with words.

So in light of all this, I’ll ask: Why do we pray, testify, sing, etc.? Isn’t this the reason?—We’re a community of “confessors,” a people who love to bring to life in **words** the heart and soul of our faith in God – confessing God as God, as the one to whom we **owe** ourselves.