

A Living Hope. A Secure Inheritance. A Genuine Faith. An Inexpressible Joy

1 Peter 1:3-9

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born 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. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Since church is a safe place, I would like to take a quick survey. Who here has ever had a promise made to you only later to have that promise broken? This is pretty much a universal experience. However, I do have a follow up question. For those of us who have experienced the broken promise, has that affected your trust level toward the next promise maker? I would go so far as to say each time we experience a broken promise, our ability to trust is diminished.

The challenge is that if we are not careful we can apply this to God. A dad commits to attend a game or recital and then prioritizes work instead or a wife who agrees to a date night but then double books a lady's night. When we experience situations like these, we can subtly slip into thinking "maybe God has double booked his time", "maybe Jesus has other, higher priorities".

This type of thinking, slowly over time, can have debilitating affects: does God really hear me when I pray? Does he really care? Will Jesus really deliver me faultless before the throne? Will the Spirit really empower me to life and godliness?

I think the whole idea of God faithfully keeping his promises is what Peter is trying to emphasize in the passage we have before us. But this not just an academic exercise. It's a practical reality that hits every aspect of our lives. It was true in Peter's day and it's true in ours was well.

The reality is that Peter was writing to a collection of churches that were facing persecution. I don't know about you, but being put down or harassed for your faith, much less being beaten or ostracized, can easily cause one to ask God. "What's up?" David did it. Elijah did it. John the Baptist did it. I do it.

But Peter doesn't want us to fall into that trap. So what he does instead is cast a vision of four essential entailments to the steadfast faithfulness of God. The first picture he paints in our mind is one of a living hope. Not a hope that is static and unresponsive, but one that is active and vibrant. Next, he puts in front of us the reality that our inheritance is secure. In fact, Peter pushes his imagery to underscore the permanence and security of our inheritance from God. He then makes sure we understand that the faith we've been given is genuine and tested. And Peter ends by reminding us that the promise of Jesus leads us to a joy that exceeds our ability to express.

What I would like to do with our time this morning is take a closer look at these four elements of the promise that God has made to us in Christ. Interestingly, Peter doesn't immediately jump to any

aspect of the promise of God, but rather he explodes in praise. Notice how verse 3 begins: **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!** I don't think this sentence is here by mistake or that it is just a throwaway line to bridge the intro to the meat of the letter. Instead, I think this is Peter's way of setting the tone, not only for this opening section, but also for the entire letter.

You see, Peter wants us in a mode of worship as we consider just a few of the facets of the promise God has made to us in Christ. He wants us to know, not just with our heads, but much more so with our hearts, the sweeping expanse of what we have in Christ. You see, Christ-centered worship is not just about signing, but it's about taking the truth of God's and allowing it to enflame our hearts. On top of this, Peter wants us to unambiguously know that everything he's about to say is really about the promise maker and not so much about the promise receiver.

So, what about this promise? Peter paints the first element in the later portion of verse 3. **"According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead"**. To be fair, this verse deserves its own sermon. With a heart of worship to our great God, listen again: the promise flows from and is empowered by God's great mercy. God has done something decisive in each one of our lives; he is the active agent in our rebirth. The result of our rebirth is a hope that is alive (I will come back to this in a moment). The power and security and permanency of this promise, this hope, this rebirth is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

I realize it is easy to relegate Jesus' resurrection to Easter, to think about it during the week before and perhaps during the week after that great celebration. However, Peter and the other New Testament writers don't see the resurrection that way. Jesus' resurrection is really the lynchpin that holds the entire gospel promise together. That's Paul's thesis in 1 Corinthians 15:17 **"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins."** When we pray, we are tapping into the same power that rose Christ from the dead. When we look forward to the new heavens and new earth, that is just the extension and expansion of Christ's resurrection power. When we trust Jesus, lean fully on him and resist both our internal sin nature and the external assaults of the world and our enemy, that is the Holy Spirit displaying the fruit of Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

But what of this living hope? There are at least two things to make sure we are clear about. The first is hope itself. The problem is with the English word hope. It has become a very wishy-washy word. If I can say it this way, it has become very "Santa Clausy". I hope I can make to your party. I hope I have enough savings to retire. I hope the Packers (or Vikings) (or Bears) win the Super Bowl. Do you hear it? Can you feel it? There's little to no assurance in those statements. Compare that to what I consider the definitive statement of hope in the Bible: Hebrews 11:1 **"Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."** You see, hope in the Bible is assurance. Hope in the Bible is confidence. Hope in the Bible is trust.

The second thing that we should see is that this hope we've been given is alive. Personally, I love this adjective that Peter was inspired to use. We can hope for many things, some good, maybe some not so good. But when we receive them (or even along the way) we find that the thing we were hoping for wasn't really what we were hoping for. Consider retirement: it's something we can hope for, plan for, even mark on our calendars. But then it arrives and we realize Mondays are still Mondays, bills still need to get paid and road construction is still frustrating. So, even though retirement, or anything else, can be an ok thing to hope for in this life, it's static and it's limited.

But the hope we have in Jesus is fundamentally different. It's alive. That implies that its growing, moving, adapting to the needs and fears and failures of our lives. Prayer needs we couldn't have imagined even a year ago, much less a decade or two ago go, are already encompassed in our hope because it's living. The ability to resist a temptation that has plagued us for a decade. A new found desire serve people who are fundamentally different than you so that the gospel can be spread. And, because our hope is living, it responds to and relies upon the living and active word of God.

Not only that, we need to tie the living essence of our hope to the living relativity of our savior. As we already considered, this hope is anchored in the the power of the resurrection of Jesus. But, on top of that he too is alive and active and dynamically interacting with us, responding to our prayers, giving comfort in our grief, providing strength in the midst of our struggles. This is all wrapped up in our hope. Our daily, eternal confidence that God is keeping and will continue to keep his promise to us in Christ.

As Peter recorded his thoughts, he merged smoothly from one aspect of the undergirding of confidence in God's promise to the next. Verses 4-5 speak to both the quality and the firmness of the inheritance we've been promised. Peter affirms that not only will our inheritance be ready for us, we will be ready for it. **"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."**

Since Peter's second picture is one of a secure inheritance, let's look at how he paints that picture. First he describes our promised inheritance with three adjectives that are contrary to everything we see in normal everyday life. Imperishable: name a food that doesn't spoil at some point. Milk and bread go quick. Boxed food lasts longer. Canned food even longer. But even canned or bottled or frozen food has shelf life. Who hasn't opened something old, even its from the freezer, only to say: "it's no good; it's too old" Not our inheritance! It will never rot or spoil. It will always be fresh (after all, its alive, right?) So whether we view God's promise as something new or something made to us when our eyes were opened to the reality of salvation or something God committed to before the ages began, nothing has spoiled. It is and will continue to be as pure and as fresh and as wonderfully enjoyable as it ever has been.

But, not only is it imperishable, it is also undefiled. This adjective is important because our experience as we work out our own salvation, is one of reoccurring defilement. An angry word, a racist thought, a lustful act, a greedy choice and a thousand more daily things defile us. And while recounting these sins and confessing them is good and right (see 1 Jn 1:9), Peter is assuring us that these things are not defiling our inheritance. Not only is it protected and preserved from internal decay, it is also protected from external forces that would reduce or even ruin it.

Both of these descriptions of the essence of our inheritance are awesome, but there is one other to consider. Our inheritance is also unfading. The fading element in life is a little different than the internal spoiling (think old milk) and the external defiling (think sin). Fading is more like the slow erosion of the bluffs or the slow drying of flowers even though they're watered. Its much like our bodies. We can do our best to care for these great gifts Jesus has blessed us with, but they are all fading. For the younger folks here, trust me, your bodies will fade as well. The reality of life is everything fades, just like everything spoils and everything is easliy defiled.

Well, not everything. Our inheritance does not fade, it will not spoil and it cannot be defiled. It is 100% complete. Its as perfect as it was on the moment God decided to create it. And it will remain

just as full and all encompassing throughout eternity.

And this imagery has one more component: our imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance is being kept in heaven for us. Peter is reassuring his original audience and us as well that the inheritance God has promised is going to be there when God calls us home. There is no question in Peter's mind. Our inheritance is secure, it will be pristine and it's waiting for us to arrive.

But our inheritance is not the only thing Jesus is guarding. We are also being guarded. Given that Peter was writing to Christian Jews who had been exiled for their faith in Christ, I'm confident there's an element of us being guarded from external things, persecution, temptation, suffering. This idea sets up a nice contrast with verse 6.

However, I think there is also an element of being guarded from ourselves. If our inheritance is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, how can we step into it if we ourselves are rotting, sin-stained, worn out people? The beautiful, praiseworthy truth of the gospel is that we're not rotting or sin-stained or worn out. We are new creations, as Paul says in 2 Cor 5:17, "the old is gone; the new has come" and we are being guarded, preserved, as it were, in our faith. Romans 8:38-39 sums it up well. **"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

So far Peter has painted for us a picture of a living hope and a secure inheritance. Now, he quickly moves to the image of our genuine faith. 1 Peter 1:6-7 **In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.** This section is intriguing because Peter weaves in the theme of suffering, but he doesn't try to minimize it or pretend that it is something that it isn't. Instead, he speaks of our trials as being grievous. They are hard. They hurt. And Peter knows that. But we should be reassured because he says that we are being guarded and that these trials are necessary.

Necessary? Most of us probably balk at that. Unfortunate? Sure. Unwanted? Definitely. But necessary? No way. Except Peter wants us to know that the trials we face, the suffering we endure have a God ordained purpose in our lives,

And what is that purpose? James 1 and Romans 5 lay out some of the purposes God has for the suffering he allows into our lives, but here the Holy Spirit directs Peter to focus on something other than these men did. Peter declares that the trials we walk through demonstrate the genuineness of our faith. In a sense, our faith is tested, but it's not a pass/fail test. Instead, it's a test to show the quality, value and authenticity of our faith.

I want to linger here for a moment, because there is a reality in this verse I think we need to grasp. Who is this test actually for? Since God is omniscient and Jesus is the author and perfecter of our faith, the test can't be for him. He already knows whether or not our faith is genuine. So who is the test for? It's for you and for me. It's to show us that while we may feel weak in our walk or anemic in our faith, God knows differently. And he wants us to know it's not the size of our faith, but the object of our faith that makes all the difference.

There is one last element to this part of the picture Peter is painting. He wants us to know that our faith, what Spurgeon called "*the gossamer thread by which we cling to Christ*", doesn't terminate

with us. Our faith has an external purpose as well. Our faith brings glory to Christ. This reality underscores the value, the quality and durability of the faith that we have received. Our faith is this beautiful treasure that resides in a jar of clay to highlight both the gift and the giver. To quote Spurgeon again: "*No faith brings greater glory to God than the faith of the audaciously guilty when they dare to believe that God can forgive them*"

As Peter rounds out the imagery he is using to open our eyes to the majesty, the permanence, the vitality of what God has promised he moves from a living hope, to a secure inheritance, to a genuine faith, to an inexpressible joy. If you think about it, with all that we've seen so far, and all that we've whizzed right by for the sake of time, what other reaction could there be?

Consider the description of faith in verse 8 **"Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him"**. These two elements by themselves should stagger us. Why should I love, serve, trust or obey someone I've never met and can't connect with in any tangible way? That's the essence of faith. And its faith that's focused on an unbreakable promise. And it guarantees that our inheritance will be preserved for us and we will be preserved for it. The result? A joy that is inexpressible.

One might ask, what is this joy? Is it 24x7 happiness? Is it giddiness or bubbling euphoria? While these emotions may exist in the midst of our joy, it seems to me that the joy the Bible speaks of runs through the whole gamut of human emotions. That's why Paul can speak of rejoicing in suffering and weakness. We can even rejoice in our sorrow and loss. Why? Because our joy is not anchored in our experiences. Rather, our joy is anchored in Christ and the steadfast, sure, loving, grace-soaked, mercy-driven promise of God. Here's how John Piper defines it: "*Christian joy is a good feeling in the soul, produced by the Holy Spirit, as he causes us to see the beauty of Christ in the world and in the world.*"

As I pull these threads together I want to highlight two things for us to take away. First I want to ask the question some of you may be asking: what is the promise that Peter wants us to have 100% confidence in? What is the promise that drives our living hope, that secures our inheritance, that requires a genuine faith and results in inexpressible joy? Peter mentions it twice, once in verse 5 and again in verse 9. The promise of God to us through Jesus by way of the Spirit is the salvation of our souls.

If you think about it, everything hangs on our salvation. There are no new heavens or new earth without salvation. There is no eternal life without salvation. There is no reuniting with our Father without salvation. There is no victory over sin, death or the grave without salvation. And wasn't that Jesus' mission from the very beginning? Matthew 1:21 **She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.**", Ephesians 2:13 **But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ,** 1 Corinthians 15:1-4 **Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.**

This salvation, this incredibly great gift and promise is available to all. But, there is a step we each must take. As the Holy Spirit brings the reality of Jesus, his death, his resurrection, his grace, mercy and love, into our hearts and minds, we must respond in repentance and faith. If you have

never trusted in this secure, pure, powerful, all-encompassing promise of God, would you do so today? Everything Peter speaks about, freedom, security, hope, joy are available to you in Christ. Would you repent and believe that Jesus died for you, that because of Jesus you are forgiven and that he's alive and interceding for you right now?

And for all who have believed, whether for a minute or for decades, how should we live our lives in the light of what Peter has painted for us? First there is joy. Inexpressible joy. Joy when everything goes our way. Joy when nothing goes our way. Next there is confidence. Not a self confidence, since eventually our self will fail us. Instead we can have a confidence in God. He will keep his promise. Jesus will deliver us faultless before the throne with exceedingly great joy. And there is hope. Whether we are on the mountaintop or the bottom on the Grand Canyon, God is for us, and Jesus has us in the palm of his hands.

So, consider how trusting you are. Have people let you down? Has that affected your trust in others? More importantly, has that affected your trust in God himself? Let the images that Peter painted for us sink into your heart so that they can renew and revive your trust and confidence in Jesus. Embrace the living hope, the secure inheritance, the genuine faith and the inexpressible joy that only Jesus brings. Allow of this to well up inside of you of so that you can say **Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!** And proclaim with the psalmist:

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous;
our God is merciful.
The Lord preserves the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.
Return, O my soul, to your rest;
for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.
I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord,
I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the Lord.
Praise the Lord!