

“JOY IN OUR FUTURE REWARD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: I Peter 1:3-5

Introduction.

Try to imagine for a moment what it would be like to be a Christian in the time when Peter wrote this letter. Imagine living in a culture where the political system was increasingly antagonistic toward Christianity. Imagine living in a culture surrounded by temptations to sin, in an openly sexually immoral society, temple prostitution, corruption, greed, bribery. Imagine living in a world where other religions were opposed to you and your presence and persecuted you.

Imagine feeling increasingly like an outsider, marginalized to the edges of society. Imagine living in a culture hostile to everything you stand for and live for.

Imagine living in that kind of world and then on top of all that having to deal with all the normal issues of our sinful, fallen life. Disease, sickness, death, broken relationships, troubles and trial at work and at home, with parents or kids or neighbors.

Can you imagine a world like that?

Now if you were going to write a letter to someone living in a world like that, what would you say? Where would you start? What kind of hope and help and encouragement would you give?

I Peter is that letter and it's God's Word to us, elect exiles scattered in Lynden, Bellingham, Everson, Nooksack, Sumas and Ferndale.

If you are down or discouraged or defeated for any reason, listen to what Peter writes and take it to heart. His purpose in writing is to lift our hearts and our eyes above this present world, and to prepare and equip us for living in this world with hope. How he starts is very important.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, vs. 3.

We must start with God and with the benefits that are ours through faith in God and love for God. When we know this everything else falls into place, we gain perspective.

When we see Christ and His blessings and benefits in the right light, anything else without Christ is rubbish. All of a sudden it isn't so hard to let go of this world and its things when we see the priceless treasure we have in Christ.

There is no greater blessing or joy or privilege on this earth than to be the object of God's mercy and love.

Peter highlights *two* of these blessings, our present hope and our future inheritance.

For our Hope and our Inheritance, vs. 4.

Present Hope.

Our first great cause for praise is that we who were once dead in our sin and without hope in this world, living under a curse and God's just wrath, have been made alive and saved and forgiven and reconciled with God.

If our being born in the flesh was enough to have hope of eternal life then being born again would be unnecessary. But being born of the flesh means we are destined to die, we are born children of wrath and death because of sin. So it is necessary for those who want to escape death to be born again, not of the flesh, but of the Spirit to a living hope, or the hope of life.

This hope, this new birth, is by the great *mercy* of God. ***“He has caused us to be born again”*** is a very strong and clear statement of what Scripture elsewhere teaches when it says “salvation belongs to our God” (Revelation 7:10).

Did you have anything to do with your physical birth? Did you decide to be born, did you decide when and where and to whom to be born? Of course not, we didn't decide it or ask for it.

Yet many Christians think they are the cause of their spiritual birth, they thought about it and then decided it was a good option and went with it. No, God decided and God did it.

Remember that conversation Jesus had with Nicodemus about the need to be born again and Nicodemus being confused by those words and asking how can someone enter his mother's womb again. Jesus answers that the second birth is a spiritual birth, it is by the Spirit, it is in our hearts as the Spirit breathes new life into our sin diseased souls.

God is the God of our salvation, it comes to us not by anything in us, but by His great mercy and comes to us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Peter is building a strong foundation for the suffering believers in the churches scattered throughout Asia Minor.

First, he said that their salvation is the result of the electing foreknowledge of God and the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit which produces obedience to Jesus Christ.

Now He drives the point home even further, that this is the work of God and not of man, lest anyone should boast or be discouraged by their own weakness.

Being born again by God's great mercy is cause for hope, a confidence assurance.

Future Inheritance.

The second great cause for praise is our future inheritance. What is an inheritance? How is it defined? It is a gift based on a relationship. It is not earned or deserved.

The NT talks a lot about the inheritance that awaits believers in heaven. We are in the will, we are going to share in the abundance of riches that are Christ's. And no inheritance on earth can even come close to comparing what is in store. If you inherited a hundred million dollars it wouldn't even be pocket change in heaven.

Peter piles up ***three adjectives*** to describe this second aspect of our great blessings from God, an imperishable, undefiled and unfading inheritance. In other words, it's nothing like any inheritance on earth.

Earthly inheritances have a way of dwindling and diminishing over time and even disappearing altogether. Peter wants to impress on our minds the excellency of our heavenly inheritance.

Imperishable is a word that is never used of anything on earth. Every single thing you own is in bondage to decay. It will not survive the fire at the end.

Undefiled means that our inheritance in heaven is not stained by sin or effected by sin. Anything that is defiled is not worthy of God's blessing.

Unfading means it is different than earthly wealth, it's perfect, permanent, never ending.

Finally it's ***kept*** in heaven for you. It's reserved for you, it has your name on it. Reserved is great, like reserved seats, reserved tables, a reserved parking space.

This is great news. Our inheritance is kept in heaven beyond the reach of stock market fluctuations, greedy relatives, estate taxes, lawyers, thieves, scammers. It is kept in heaven beyond the reach of all the destructive powers of Satan

II Corinthians 4:16-18 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

As we are kept by God for final salvation, vs. 5.

(Kept in Heaven for us by God, vs. 5.)

I should have made the third point in the bulletin outline read, “you who are kept by God through faith.” The third cause for praise is about us being kept, not our inheritance being kept.

What good is a secure inheritance if there is a chance we will be shipwrecked here in the storms of life? What hope do we have of reaching our destination if we have to run a gauntlet of sin and temptation and great trials and Satan’s powers on our own?

While God is actively preserving and protecting our inheritance up in heaven, He is just as actively keeping preserving and protecting us down here on earth.

We experience this is a small way on earth when we plan a big surprise party for someone. We plan this elaborate perfect party and then we also make a plan to make sure the person arrives for their surprise party (illustration idea from Doriani, *I Peter*, p. 17).

That’s what God is doing, planning the perfect party, and planning to make sure we are there for it.

Philippians 1:6 I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

This is what we should call true Homeland Security. Our inheritance and we are secure in our true homeland, in heaven.

Where does our faith fit into this equation? Are we kept as long as we have faith? Is our being kept dependent on our faith?

Philippians 2:12-13 ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

Through our faith and our acts of faithfulness God is at work, preserving and protecting and acting and strengthening and upholding. Think of it this way:

“God is continually using his power to guard his people by means of their faith. God’s power energizes and continually sustains individual, personal faith” (Grudem, *I Peter*, p. 63).

Faith and hope are gifts from God and He enables us to exercise them and persist in them. When we stand, we stand in the power of God. However weak we are, our salvation is strong, however uncertain we are, our salvation is not uncertain.

This doesn’t mean we don’t sin. It means when we sin we hate it and repent of it and seek in God’s power to overcome and defeat it.

Charles Spurgeon once used the illustration of a man on the deck of a ship who may be knocked down by waves crashing onto the deck, but he is never washed overboard.

There is danger, there are spiritual battles to be fought and won, there are sins to be overcome, there is great striving and praying. But we are never alone in this, God is with us and His power is for us.

We see this clearly from the life and experience of Peter. Peter knows firsthand what he is writing about and how God keeps us and protects us.

On the night all the disciples betrayed Jesus, He said to Peter:

Luke 22:31-32 “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, 32 but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.”

What did Peter do? He fell into deep sin. What did Jesus do? He prayed to the Father to not let Peter completely fail and completely lose all faith. Peter was protected, guarded, kept by the power of God.

I Peter is Peter restored, and now he is strengthening us and our faith.

Where is your salvation? In your heart? No, it's in heaven. It's in the hand of God. It's kept in heaven secure for you and you for it. And Jesus is in heaven ever living to make intercession for us.

Implications and Applications.

Let me conclude with a couple of questions. Do you know if you are born again? How do you know? You know the same way you know if you are physically born. You know you are born because you are alive. You are breathing and walking and moving, you are alive.

The same is true of being born again. You are born again if you are alive to God, if you have a living faith and a living hope. You are spiritually alive if you have a spiritual appetite, if you have an interest in spiritual things, if you long for eternity, if you love Jesus. Only spiritually alive people have a living hope.

We use hope in different ways and we have various levels of hope.

I have no hope of ever winning the Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes. I have little hope of seeing the Cubs win the World Series. I have some hope of visiting Hawaii someday. It's kind of expensive but it's a possibility. But I have no doubts when I say I hope my wife will always love me. I have put it to the test countless times and she still loves me. That hope is secure and confident.

How is your hope? Do you have confident assurance in God's love and favor and salvation and promised inheritance? Do you understand that your hope doesn't rest on you but on God, on Jesus' blood and on Jesus' resurrection?

Life is hard and it can stir up a lot of fears and doubts and anxieties and serious questions. Our faith can be tested by all kinds of fiery trials and refining fires. Do you know you are protected by the power of God, the same power that raised Jesus from the dead?

If you have put your faith in Jesus Christ as your savior then your future is certain and therefore your hope should be unwavering.

There are a lot of people in this church family carrying some heavy burdens. Encourage each other with our reasons to hope, our reasons to not grow weary in well doing, our reasons for endeavoring to persevere and even with joy, our reasons for praising God who is the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and is our Father and who has made us heirs with Christ of all the blessing of heaven and is keeping us for that day. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has caused all these blessing.

Prayer:

Holy Father, you are the only one who can satisfy the longings and desires of every soul that is thirsty and hungry for what is true and real and substantive. We long for your very power in us to enable us to know you and love you the way you have created us to know you and love you.

Thank you that you are a God who is faithful to all that you promise and that you are a God who follows through, what you begin you bring to completion. You are the potter and we are the clay. Thank you for seating us with Christ in the heavenly places and for securing our citizenship in heaven.