

Living Hope, Imperishable Inheritance

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[0:00] Let us pray. Almighty God, we through the resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ, from the dead, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end.

Amen. Please be seated. Before I begin, I just, a few words about our church, both for those who are visiting and those who are not visiting.

And we, if you will remember one of the things we say in the beginning of our pamphlet here, in position, we say the voices of small children are always what?

Welcome. Now, that does mean, though, that we have to help the young parents who are these small children. One of the things that I want to encourage you to do, as we are, our children are welcome to join us in service.

They're being trained to be participants in worship. One of the things I want to invite you to do, as the church, is to come alongside the parents when the child is making some noise.

[1:30] Just let them be. Let the parents deal with it. Don't give attention to the children, because they see that, and then they think they're entertaining you. And so, just pay attention to, during the contest of the sermon.

And by that way, you're both helping me, and you're also, particularly more importantly, you're helping the parents. But, and also at the same time, let the children be.

They are worshiping their Lord as well as we are. So, that's just a short word of invitation to help us as we worship together. Last Sunday, we began to look at this letter of 1 Peter.

We saw St. Peter greet us as elect exiles, chosen of God, and therefore strangers in the world. Strangers in the world, and yet chosen of God.

And he also told us how we came to be so. He said we're chosen by the Father, consecrated by the Spirit, and sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ.

[2:39] Those three theological truths are the ancient pillars of covenant belonging. Like the covenant of God caught with Israel at Sinai, where a people were chosen.

They were set apart, and they were sealed with the blood of sacrifice. Peter takes up this Old Testament imagery, and he fills it with Christ.

The covenant made at Sinai has been remade, Peter is telling us, has been remade by the blood, in the blood of the Lamb. And we have been brought inside of it.

That is who we are, a covenant people. And this morning, St. Peter begins, or continues really his letter, with these words of praise.

This doxology. And he opens up the treasury of what that covenant contains. And tells us what has been done for us within it.

[3:40] He writes in verse 3. By the way, I invite you to open, it's on page 1203 of your pew Bible. 1 Peter 1, starting in verse 3.

And he writes, Peter writes in verse 3. He says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And that's the doxology. This doxology builds clause upon clause over these next ten verses that we will look at.

It builds on mercy, new birth, hope, inheritance, salvation, trial, gold refined in fire, prophets and angels.

This is one long sentence, really, that Peter is giving. Peter does not tell his readers to do anything until verse 13. He doesn't tell them to do anything until verse 13.

Before he asks anything of his readers, he blesses God for everything given to them in Christ. That is, by the way, the grammar of the gospel itself.

[4:48] This is seen throughout the apostles' letters to the churches. It begins with praise to God for all that is ours in Christ. Then it reminds us, the church, who we are and to whom we belong.

Before giving instructions on how to live. Because I think the apostles know this truth. That the power to obey is in first knowing who we are and in whose power we walk.

So this morning, brothers and sisters, before this letter asks us to do anything, it first brings us to worship and adoration. Peter's praise unfolds in three movements concerning the Christian.

It begins with a new birth into a living hope in verse 3-5. And it continues in a genuine faith refined by fire in verses 6-9. And a privilege the prophets longed for.

And the angels stooped to see in verses 10-12. So let's begin in verse 3. Peter opens with the words of the Jewish blessing.

[6:13] This barakah. But he fills the old form of that word and the old form of that blessing with a new Christian content. He cannot speak of God without speaking of Christ first.

And neither can we. It is because of Jesus' work of redemption that we have God as our Father.

And why has this God, whom Peter speaks of, why has this God acted?

He tells us it's according to His great mercy. Not according to our pedigree. Not according to our intellect or our performance.

But according to His mercy. The word Peter chooses is the word the Greek Old Testament uses for God's covenant people. For God's covenant keeping and God's covenant relationship and disposition to His people.

This is the word of steadfast love. The word is, as in Hebrew, has said. It is the word spoken in Exodus 34. When the Lord passed before Moses, if you remember.

[7:18] And proclaimed His name to Moses. The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious. Slow to anger. Abounding in steadfast love.

That is the word, the name God gives to Moses concerning who He is and His character. This is a given at a time when Israel had just shattered the covenant that they made at the foot of Sinai.

By building a golden calf. And God yet responded in mercy instead of wrath. That is the character of God. Of the God which Peter blesses.

The God who saw us in our muck and in our filth. And yet in love sent His Son to rescue us. This is the doctrine our reformers died to recover.

Archbishop Cranmer's homily on salvation confesses this truth. That we are justified freely by God's mercy alone. Not by our pedigree.

[8:22] Our performance. And we receive this mercy of God through faith alone. In fact, it is saying that our best works could never deserve what mercy freely gives.

Article 17 locates all of God's salvation in His gracious purpose before the foundation of the world. Peter said it first. Everything that follows in this letter.

Every hope. Every comfort. Every duty. Flows from His mercy. And none of it from us.

All of it flows from His mercy that He has shown to us. And what has that mercy done? Peter tells us it has caused us. He, that is God, has caused us to be born again.

The verb is Peter's own using. It's only found here in verse 3 and verse 23. In the whole New Testament. And it means, it means that Peter is really saying to us, we've been born again.

[9:27] Now Peter didn't invent that idea or that notion of being born again. He didn't invent it. He heard it. Where? He was there when the Lord said to a bewildered teacher of Israel, Nicodemus.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Peter remembers.

Here, the apostle is only repeating his master's words. And think again of what a birth gives you. Think about your birth.

You did not choose it. You didn't contribute to it. You didn't cooperate with it. In fact, you might have been doing the opposite. Yet, from it, from that birth, you've received everything.

You received your name, your family, your citizenship, your inheritance, even your face. On that account, my children are lucky to have received more from their mother than me.

[10:32] Peter says to us, Peter says, God has done that to you a second time. A second time you've been born again. This is what God has done.

He is the one that has caused you to be born again. In the new birth, you've received what? You've received a new father. You've received a new family.

A new citizenship. We looked at that last week. A new inheritance. A new name. A new countenance. A new face.

The gospel is the announcement of new life. To those who come and receive it. It's not just advice for improving your old life.

It is an announcement that you have been born again into a new life. You've been born anew. You are a new creation. And born.

[11:30] Born, as Peter says, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. In fact, what Peter is saying to us is that the empty tomb, as it were, is the delivery room of the Christian life.

When Christ rose, your hope was born. Which is why Peter calls it a living hope. Not a wishful, plausible hope.

Like, you know, there are many wishful, plausible hopes. In fact, right now, as many countries are hoping during this World Cup competition, that their country will win. Those are wishful, plausible hopes.

Some of them are more plausible than others. But that's not the kind of hope that Peter is talking about here. It's not that kind of hope at all. This is a hope that is alive.

Because the object of that hope is alive. The ancient pagan world knew all about dead hopes. In fact, one of their poets wrote these words.

[12:37] The sun may set and rise again. But for man, when our brief light sets, there remains one everlasting night.

There's no hope in that. What a bleak assessment. One everlasting night. But at least, even though it's bleak, it's honest. By the way, it's also the honest voice of our modern secular world.

Every hope that is anchored in this world dies with this world. Retirement accounts dies with this world. Fame, wealth, even the faces of the people we love the most.

None of them can bear the weight of an immortal soul's hoping and longing. But a hope that is fastened to the risen Christ.

That kind of hope cannot die. Because he cannot die. Because Christ is alive forevermore.

Christian hope is also alive forevermore.

[13:49] This is what our prayer book calls the sure and certain hope of the Christian. And note here that Paul continues in verse 4 with these three adjectives to describe this hope.

That is an inheritance. It is our inheritance. And he says that it's to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.

Peter stacks three adjectives to describe this inheritance. One, it's imperishable. It cannot die or decay. Two, it is undefiled. It cannot be stained by sin or seized by injustice.

Three, it is unfading. Time cannot wither it. The inheritance stands. Your inheritance in Christ stands guarded in heaven.

Now. Even now. Continually. Complete and abiding. This is an echo of Jesus' sermon on the mount, which Peter would have heard. A treasure in heaven that no moth, rust, or thief can take away.

[15:09] They can touch. That is what is ours. Now. Why does Peter reach for this language of inheritance? Perhaps because his readers were exiles. And what happens with exiles when it comes to inheritance?

In the first century, wealth is usually tied to a land. Land. And land was your inheritance. So what happens when you're in exile?

When you're displaced? You're disowned. You lose your inheritance. You lose the land that belongs to you. What happens when a pagan family disowned you for confessing Christ?

You watch your future. Your inheritance evaporate. Some of you may know a version of that grief. Many of our brothers and sisters know it in more severe ways than we do.

What happens when the door closes at work because of your Christian convictions? What happens when the family table where you've been made a stranger because of your faith?

[16:14] What happens when the sins that following Jesus has caused you real opportunities in this world? Peter does not deny.

Notice this. Peter does not deny any of these real losses that comes to a Christian. Rather, he answers them directly. He says to you and me and to the church, You have an inheritance that no empire can confiscate, no relative can revoke, no market can devalue, and no sin yours or anyone

else's can defy.

The children's catechism in preparation for confirmation confesses this truth. Children are invited to confess that in baptism, I was made a member of Christ.

Christ, the child of God, that's who you are, by baptism, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven. But look, verse 5, is an even more tender stroke.

It gives us even a more comforting reality and truth. It's one thing for the inheritance to be kept for you as an heir. But Peter adds, in verse 5, that even you as an heir of that inheritance, you yourself are being kept for the inheritance.

[17 : 45] You, Peter says, by God's power, are being guarded through faith. The word in the Greek is a military phrase. And it conveys this.

It conveys a garrison. A garrison that is posted around the city. That's the language that Peter uses. He says, you are being guarded. You are a garrison people.

The sentry on your wall is not your willpower, or your consistency, or the strength of your grip on God. It is the power of God Himself.

And faith is the open hand through which that power holds you. The same faith that has made you a new creation and a stranger in the world is the faith by which God keeps you and guards you for your inheritance.

And this is what our article says is this knowledge and this reality and this truth is full of sweet, pleasant, and unspeakable comfort. When we really, truly grasp it.

[18 : 54] And so it is. He will begin a good work, will bring it to completion. The Bible tells us. The God who keeps the treasure for you is the one who is also keeping you for the treasure.

Let's now look in verse 6-9. The second reading. And Peter continues, in this you rejoice. Though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes through it, though it is tested by fire, may be found to resort in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

In this reality, in this you rejoice. in everything that he has said in verse 3-5. You rejoice in that. The living hope, the guarded inheritance.

It is what happens when the truth of what God has done and is doing outweighs the pressure of what you're enduring. And you rejoice in that reality.

But Peter is no Pollyanna. He knows the reality of the Christian life. And that's why he says, though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials.

[20 : 13] Grieved. Real sorrow. Real tears. Notice that in Peter's theology, rejoicing and grieving are not opposites.

They room together. The same heart holds both at once. And Peter will have none of the false piety of the Christian thing today.

He will have none of that. He will have none of the view that Christians must pretend that they do not hurt and there is no pain in the world. And neither will he give in to despair that things that pain, no matter what the pain may be, may cancel out our eternal joy in Christ.

Peter speaks of the Christians as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. As St. Paul also says, that is the true reality of the Christian heart.

The trials, Peter says, are various. Actually, the language there is that there are many colored. they come in different facets. Peter uses this word in chapter 4, verse 10 as well, when he talks about these multifaceted various things.

[21 : 35] But he uses it to talk about God's grace in verse 4, in this same letter, chapter 4, verse 10. He speaks of the many colored grace of God. And so, really, if you think about it, even though you have many colored, many various trials in this world, God's grace is also many colored, multifaceted.

So, there is no color of suffering that you may go through, that there is no corresponding color of grace that is available for you in the midst of that suffering and that trial.

note the two small phrases that fence the suffering in that Paul uses. He says, even for a little while, if necessary, against the backdrop of an unfading inheritance in eternity, Peter wants you to know, against eternity, your troubles now, no matter what they may be, are bounded and brief in light of eternity.

and more than that, your suffering are purposeful. They are useful. If necessary does not mean if unlucky.

It means, though, that when trials come to a Christian, they come by necessity of God's wise and sovereign design. Nothing happens to you by accident of a random universe.

[23:10] Nothing. Nothing that grieves you this morning slipped past the garrison of verse 5 unnoticed. God, in His sovereignty, in His power, has admitted it for a reason.

And what's the reason? Verse 7 tells us, It's so that the tested genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Here is Peter's great image. It's the image of the refiner's fire. He says to us, The test of fire reveals what? The precious value of gold.

Fire does two things to gold. It burns away the dross and it brightens the gold so that it may shine even brighter.

So it is with our faith in the face of trial. trials do not create faith. Trials do not destroy true faith either. Trials prove, as Peter says to us here, proves faith.

[24:19] The word Peter uses is the Greek word, dokimion. It just means this. It means that, it means what he says, the tested genuineness so that after you've gone through those trials, you are stamped.

just like a gold that has gone through the finest fire is stamped. As being true of value of true worth. Don't miss the comparison that Peter is actually making here. He's saying to us, your tested faith, even as you go through suffering the trials, is more precious than gold.

More precious than gold. Why? Because gold, even refined gold, will perish one day. It belongs to the order of things of this world that will pass away.

For your faith, proved through trial, will last and endure even the last fire. And it will come out the other side into praise, into glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[25:25] On that day, the world's gold will burn to ash but your battered, tested, persevering faith and trust in Christ will shine all the more bright.

Though you have not seen him, Peter continues, 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.

Now there's something wonderfully personal in verse 8, as St. Peter writes to us. Peter has seen him. Peter had watched him, still a storm.

He had seen his transfigured face. He had met his eyes across the courtyard fire. He had eaten bread and fish on the far side of death with the Lord.

But his readers had not seen none of it. Peter marvels at us. He says, Though you have not seen him, you love him.

[26:37] Behind those words, we can hear the Lord's own words to St. Thomas. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. That blessing lands on us this morning.

None of us have seen his face, yet we love him. That love that you have to your Lord and Savior and Redeemer, that love that is unmanufactured by you, but is a gift of grace to you, that love that is impossible apart from the work of the Holy Spirit in you, that love itself is evidence of the new birth, that you are a new creation.

And the joy of verse 8, as he speaks, this inexpressible joy, filled with glory. Why is it in his presence filled with glory? Verse 9, because you are obtaining it.

Present tense. It is now, you are obtaining it. In the middle of the trial, there is joy, present joy, because the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls, is being shown.

the first fruits of this salvation are in our hands, brothers and sisters. This morning, the love that wells up in our hearts to our love, for our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, that very love is the fruit of believing faith.

[28:07] And Peter ends this passage, this thanks given to God, by marveling in verse 10 to 12, concerning this salvation that is ours. Now, Peter lifts our eyes to show where we stand in the soup of redemptive history.

And the view is staggering. He says to us, he says to the church he's writing to, he says, these bruised, marginalized, house churches in present-day Turkey, in Asia Minor, these Christians were mocked in the marketplace.

disinherited at home. These Christians have a more privileged vantage point in the story of God's work in history, even more than the prophets, even more than angels.

First, the prophets. He says, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Zechariah, they searched and inquired carefully concerning their salvation. They poured over their own prophecies like men studying a treasure map.

to a country they would never visit, asking what person, what time, what circumstances. Daniel begged the angel, how long until the end of these great things that have been shown to me?

[29 : 29] And the angel told him, go your way, Daniel, for the worlds are shut up and sealed under the time of the end. Abacuc was told, the vision awaits its appointed time.

Wait for it. they saw the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories to follow. But the when and the how, they didn't know. The who, they didn't know.

And notice, who was speaking through them, as Peter tells, the spirit of Christ was the one speaking through them. They longed to know these things. They predicted it, but they didn't fully see it.

then comes the sentence that should take our breath away. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves, but you.

Do you see what that means? Isaiah wrote for you. Jeremiah wept in part for you. Daniel sealed the book so that you could open it, hold it open.

[30 : 34] The prophets were servants in a great house, laying a table for a feast they would not live to eat. And you, brothers and sisters in Christ, you are seated at that table.

The youngest believer in this parish, on this side of the empty tomb, knows plainly what the greatest prophets strained to glimpse. Their name is Jesus, born of the blessed virgin Mary.

The time was Pontius Pilate's Judea. The sufferings were a cross. The glory began at dawn on the third day, after his death and burial.

These are the mysteries every Christian, young and old, confesses in our oldest creed. These are the things the prophets longed to know. And then, as if that weren't enough, even the angels are stooping down, peering in, marveling at this grace.

they are peeking in, straining to see the gospel being brought to sinners, who are now saved and transformed, and they marvel at it as they see it.

[31 : 48] The resurrection power of Christ being brought alive and being lived out in the church. Brothers and sisters, this is the pattern, this is the glory, reason why Peter praises God.

And I invite you to ask this question, who are you this morning? Who are we? Who are you? You are one on whom the covenant mercy of God has been lavished.

That's who you are. You've been born a second time if you're in Christ. You've been born into a hope that lives and can never die because Jesus lives. You hold a title to an inheritance that cannot perish.

Even death cannot take it away. This inheritance cannot be stained. It cannot and will not fade.

Your griefs in this world are real and though they are real, they are brief and bounded and purposeful in light of eternity.

You love a Christ you've never seen with your physical eyes, with a joy inexpressible. you stand where prophets long to stand. Angels lean over the battlements of heaven to watch the grace that is at work in you.

[33 : 12] And if all of that is true, and it is true, then Peter's one long sentence of praise to God must become ours as well. Whatever this week holds for you, God has done for us, let us respond in praise.

Let us respond in praise. Let us begin where St. Peter begins. Knowing who we are, knowing what God has done for us, let us respond in praise.

and doxology. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope.

Amen.