Born Again to a Living Hope

1 Peter 1:3-5

# Introduction:

[From Illy]... A YEAR IS A LONG TIME  
“A prisoner about to be executed was brought before the sultan. In pleading for his life, he said to the sultan, 'If you will spare me for a year, I will teach your favorite black horse to talk.' Intrigued by the idea, the sultan accepted this proposition, and the prisoner was returned to his cell. When the other prisoners heard of the promise, they ridiculed it: 'How could you make such a promise? You can't do that.' To which the man who had been spared responded: 'Wait. A year is a long time. In a year, I could die a natural death. The sultan could die. The black horse could die. And who knows, I might even teach the black horse to talk.'" [Context, Mar 1994.]

That is what you call hoping against all hope.

[From Illy]... THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE  
At the southern tip of Africa, a cape jutting out into the ocean once caused sailors great anxiety. Many who attempted to sail around it were lost in the swirling seas. Because adverse weather conditions so often prevailed there, the region was named the Cape of Storms. However, in the 15th century, a Portuguese captain was determined to find a way through those treacherous waters so his countrymen could reach Cathay and the riches of the East Indies in safety. He succeeded, and the area was renamed the Cape of Good Hope.

We all face great storms in life. The people to whom Peter wrote his epistle were facing incredible storms and trials. They were facing persecution and abuse, even death. And it was clear that things were continuing to get worse. How are they to deal with that? How are we to deal with the storms in our lives? We need to realize that our perspective has everything to do with the way we respond to our circumstances.

Quote – Robert Deffinbaugh:

“In recent years, our culture has taken a very unhealthy turn, embracing a perspective which predisposes our collapse under life’s adverse circumstances rather than causing us to persevere through them. The essence of this new perspective may be summed up in the word ‘victim.’ No longer are we responsible for our attitudes and actions when we have been wronged or abused—we are now ‘victims.’ Whatever happened is no longer our fault nor are we responsible for the way we choose to respond.”

Does that sound familiar? We live in a ‘victimized’ society. If we can only show that we are victims of other people’s actions, then we are not responsible for our actions. But God has called us to something more than that. Deffinbaugh goes on to say:

“The Scriptures make it very clear that Christians will be the recipients of unjust treatment because of our faith in Jesus Christ and the godly lives we are to live in a sinful world. While the Bible promises that we will experience innocent suffering for the cause of Christ, it nowhere speaks of our being ‘victims’ in the contemporary sense of the word. Rather, the Bible forthrightly speaks of us as ‘victors.’”

Peter was writing to people who could easily have seen themselves as victims. But what he wanted from them was that they would be faithful and persevering and would be victors over their circumstances and that they would not fail.

So, he begins his letter with a focus on their salvation. A clear understanding of our salvation will go a long way toward strengthening and encouraging believers in the face of suffering and opposition.

Last week we looked at verse 2 and what we might call the Source of our Salvation. As we worked through that verse, we saw the ministry of the Triune God in salvation. A brief review:

1. Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. God not only knew in advance, but He planned in advance, your salvation. He fore-ordained, or pre-arranged your calling and faith. I don’t quite understand how that all works or how it fits together with your choice to believe in Jesus Christ, but the Bible is clear that God *“…chose us in him before the foundation of the world.”* Your salvation is the result of his divine calling.
2. Not only chosen by the Father, but sanctified by the Spirit. We are sanctified, made holy, set apart, first in conversion, then also set apart for a life of holiness, a lifelong process of growth, so that our lifestyle matches the standing we have been given in Christ Jesus.
3. *“…for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood.”* Just as under the old covenant, sins were atoned for by the sprinkling of blood, so it is the blood and the application of that blood to our lives that secures our redemption. And the purpose of all of this is that we might live a life of obedience to Jesus Christ.

So, the source of our salvation is the ministry of the triune God. The Father chose us in eternity past for salvation. The Holy Spirit drew us to faith in Christ, regenerating us, illuminating our minds so as to make the gospel clear, convicting us of sin, and baptizing us into the body of Christ. The result of the Spirit’s ministry is obedience to the gospel call, trusting in Jesus Christ for salvation, and thus being cleansed by His shed blood.

Simply put, Peter is telling us that salvation is the work of God. It is a work in which we are involved. It is a work in which we participate. But in the final analysis, salvation is God’s work.

This week I want to examine the next few verses in this letter as Peter moves on to talk about the hope and the security of our salvation. We begin with …

# The Hope of our Salvation

What is it that we look forward to as a result of being saved? What are we saved to, or for? We talked last week about obedience – v. 2. But, beyond that…?

*Read vv. 3-4* – can’t you hear Peter’s excitement as he begins this discourse… “Blessed be …! Our God, the Father of our Lord, Jesus Christ deserves and is worthy of our praise and blessing because of what He has done! Just let me tell you about it…!

*“According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again…”* Let me just stop there for a minute… His mercy – it is only by his mercy that we are saved. It is only by his mercy that we have anything. You do not deserve to have your sins forgiven. I do not deserve it. It is only because God has shown us mercy, and reached out and lifted us up, that we can even talk about hope.

Often people accuse God of not being fair. Yet the truth is that if He was fair and gave us exactly what we deserve we would all be hopelessly lost for all eternity.

So, *“… In his great mercy he has given us new birth…”* (NIV) He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The word “hope” – not just something we wish for, but an expectation – “I sure hope it rains tonight.” The biblical idea of hope is to expect something, wait for something with the expectation that it will happen.

So, Peter says we have been born again to a living hope. It is alive, it gives life, it gives us assurance of life, because we know what God has done for his own son, Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus is what gives us this living hope.

Paul spoke extensively of this hope throughout his letters, especially in his pastoral letters to Timothy and Titus – *turn to Titus and read…* Titus 1:1-2; 2:11-13; 3:5-7.

The hope of eternal life – we can look forward to life, eternal life, because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

But there is something more. Not only have we been born again to a living hope, but also *“…to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.”* We have an inheritance waiting for us.

Discuss inheritance – a promise of something that is ours, but we don’t yet possess it – waiting, will the promise ever be fulfilled. Included in our salvation is the promise of an inheritance. But this inheritance is an absolutely sure thing.

Peter describes this inheritance as one that can never perish, spoil or fade. Imperishable - not subject to corruption or decay; undefiled – unsoiled, free from that by which the nature of a thing is deformed and debased; unfading – perennial, permanent.

We cannot help but be reminded that everything we have here in this life, on earth will one day disappear – it will decay or rust, rot away or be used up. But God has given us a new birth, we have been born again to receive an inheritance that is permanent, eternal. God is keeping this inheritance for us in heaven.

And Paul, in Ephesians also reminds us of the promise of that inheritance – see Eph. 1:11-14 – the Holy Spirit has been given to us as the guarantee, the deposit or down payment on what we are to receive later on.

That is the hope of our salvation – God has caused us to be born again to a living hope … to an inheritance … kept in heaven for you.” You have eternal life and an inheritance prepared by God. No matter what we may face here on earth—suffering, pain, persecution—that should bring us joy as we look beyond the pain to what is waiting for us ahead.

# The Security of our Salvation

There is a future aspect to our salvation. Peter speaks of it in v. 5 – read it. Someday the totality of our salvation will become a reality. We will receive all that God has planned for us. We all wait for that day when that salvation which is yet to come will be revealed. When that day comes we will be able to enjoy all of the blessings without the pain, without the suffering, and will be in the very presence of our Saviour forever.

But in the meantime, what if we fail? What if somehow we do something wrong and we lose out?

Peter points out a very important truth in this verse. He wants us to understand the security of our salvation. Note what he says: “You, who through faith [believing in God and his Son Jesus Christ] are shielded by God’s power…”

The security of our eternal inheritance depends not on our strength or ability, but on His.

🡺 Illust. – When our children were little and we would walk across an icy street. They would hold my hand for security. Yet, in fact, it was not their ability to hold on that kept them safe. It was me holding on to them. If I slipped, they would fall too. That is the way it is in our relationship to God. The only difference is that we know that He will never slip. God will never let you go.

John 10:27-29 – “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

We are protected by the power of God. We are also protected through faith. Robert Deffinbaugh puts it like this:

“The power of God is provided for our protection, but God provides and requires faith as the means through which God’s power is appropriated. While Peter was going to fail, as Jesus warned, the Saviour had prayed for him that his faith would not fail. Peter could fail and fall, but he could not fall completely. Like us, he was protected by the power of God for a salvation yet to be revealed.”

# Conclusion

Peter’s opening words in this letter give us a great deal of assurance. They are the kind of words that can keep us strong in the face of trials and suffering. We can perhaps summarize with three statements.

1. Our salvation is secure because, from beginning to end, it is the work of God. The Father chose us to be the recipients of His mercy; the Spirit drew us to Himself and brought us to faith, and we are sprinkled with the cleansing blood of Jesus Christ the Son.
2. Our salvation has secured for us an inheritance that is not subject to deterioration or fading. It is secured for us by the guarantee of Christ’s own resurrection. We have a living hope because we have a living Saviour.
3. Our salvation is secure because we are shielded by God’s power. Not only is our inheritance certain, “reserved in heaven for us”, but we are being kept securely for it. We are “protected [shielded] by the power of God through faith”.

What we need to see in all of this is that our salvation is the lens through which we must view all of the trials of life. We do not have to be “victims” of our circumstances. Peter turns our eyes toward God, and calls us to be “victors” over our circumstances. He knew the reality of suffering, yet he also knew the reality of God’s presence and the glory of eternity.

The apostle Paul expressed the same mindset when he wrote to the young preacher, Timothy:

2 Timothy 1:8-12 – “Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.”

I trust that we can have that same mindset, as we face opposition and suffering in the light of the glory of our eternal salvation.