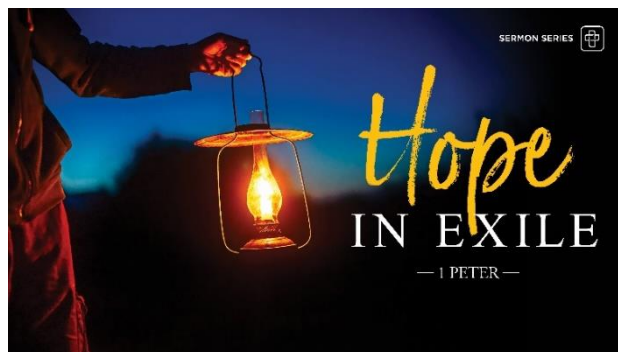


## **Born Again Into a Living Hope**

**1 Peter 1:3-5**

**David Sunday     April 26, 2020**



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Hello New Covenant family. May grace and peace be multiplied to you. That's where we left off last week in 1 Peter 1. As you turn there, let me just say how much I appreciate the prayer meeting we had this past Friday noon over Zoom. Pastor Patrick led us in a great time of prayer together. One of the ways God's grace and peace is multiplied to us is through praying together as a church family. We're going to continue to do that on Fridays over the next several weeks, so I'd invite you to join us in that.

Also, let me say a word of thanks. So many of you have commented on how much you've appreciated our ability to connect with one another through these on-line services. I'm sure you know there's a lot of work behind the scenes that goes into putting these together. Someone who has worked a great deal is the one whose fireplace or piano you see behind him and his wife as they lead us in the praises of God in song. That fireplace was made through Dan's workmanship and he's also put a lot of work into these service. Dan and Holly, I want us to express how much we appreciate and thank God for your ministry in our midst and for the way you're serving these days.

Last week we saw who we are in this world—we are chosen exiles, elect exiles—and how this all came about through the foreknowledge of God the Father, the cleansing of the blood of Jesus and the sanctification of the Spirit which enables us now to live new lives of obedience to Him. As you ponder these wonderful truths of who we are, and as you rejoice in how it all came to be, you'll understand why the Apostle Peter is overflowing with praise to God in the verses we're going to read today.

Let's picture Peter. He's not a professor giving some dispassionate kind of lecture here. This is a rugged fisherman who has turned into a street preacher. I can see the veins popping out on his neck, his eyes just piercing with light and life and adoration, and his voice being lifted up in great praise to God as he speaks of this wonderful salvation.

I hope our feeling and attitude will be the same as we hear God's Word together from 1 Peter 1:3-5:

*<sup>3</sup>Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead <sup>4</sup>and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. <sup>5</sup>You are being guarded by God's power through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*

Let's pray together.

Father, I pray that what we hear today from Your Word would cause an eruption of praise and thanks to You, as Your Spirit empowers my preaching and our hearing to make us more and more aware of all the mercy You've shown us in Your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray this in His name. Amen.

I love reading Peter, because I feel he writes with such tender empathy for sinners like you and me. He's speaking to us of a hope that God, Who is full of great mercy for great sinners, has assured those who place their confidence and trust in Him—a hope that nothing in this world can destroy. Because Jesus has been raised from the dead, you can have the hope of a new beginning, a new inheritance and a new confidence that will sustain you in every kind of sorrow with unceasing joy.

In verse three, Peter praises God for the gift of new birth. Then in verse four, he praises God for the guarantee of an eternal inheritance. And finally, in verse five, he praises God for guarding believers for this inheritance until we receive possession of it.

Another way of looking at this passage is that the resurrection of Jesus answers three of the most troubling questions we have as we go through this life.

- Question number one, "Can I begin again?"
- Question number two, "Is there anything left for me to look forward to?"
- Question number three, "Will I ever get there?"

Let's ask these questions together as we look at this passage.

## **1. Can I begin again?**

You may find yourself this morning hearing about Jesus and His life and teachings, His wonderful works and His death and resurrection, and you might be feeling in your heart a great sense of need and desperation. You might be wondering, "How could God ever receive someone like me, someone who has failed so miserably. Am I good enough to be a Christian?"

I want to answer that question very straight on: no. No, you are not good enough. None of us is good enough to earn or deserve the great salvation that's spoken of in this passage. In fact, if

you take an honest look at yourself in light of God's law, you will have plenty of grounds for fear and abundant reasons for despair, but zero reasons for hope.

Here's Peter. He's a sinner like us, yet he's full of praise toward the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter's hope is grounded, not in himself, but in Who God is. He is, according to verse three, a God Who is full of great mercy. That's a wonderful word: mercy— God's grace through His goodness toward sinners who don't deserve it. He gives us what we don't deserve. His mercy is His kindness in sparing us from what we do deserve. God's mercy is His compassion that moves toward us in our misery. It's what motivates Him to be gracious toward us. So Peter is praising God because of His great mercy, which assumes a great need on our part and abundant provision on God's part.

A Christian is not someone who is good enough. A Christian is someone who's not ashamed to admit, "I am endlessly in debt for a gift I could never repay." In fact, James Stewart puts it like this: "None who is too proud to be infinitely in debt can ever be a Christian."

Now, let's put this truth of God's mercy together with the truth of God's election we pondered last week. Sometimes we struggle with this doctrine of election. We think, "God has revealed Himself in His Word to be a God Who desires that no one would perish, a God Who delights in salvation." So we wonder, "Why does God not reach down to rescue and save everyone?"

I don't ultimately know how to answer that question, but I do agree with what Tim Keller says: "When we get before the throne of God and ask Him that question"—if in fact we still want to ask that question when we're standing before the throne of God and I doubt we will—"we will discover that God's mercy is greater than anything we could have ever imagined."

You see, when you and I struggle with the doctrine of election, it's because we think we can imagine a God more merciful than He is. But when you actually experience God's mercy, you know there is no more merciful plan of salvation than what God the Father has achieved through Christ His Son and has made known to us by His Spirit in the gospel. He is great in mercy.

So what has God the Father given us in His great mercy? Peter tells us in 1 Peter 1:3, "*He has given us new birth...*" New birth—a miracle, something we could never have achieved. A Christian is someone who has been born again. Please don't think of "born-again Christian" as a certain type of Christian. It's not a brand. It's not a label. It's not a denomination. It is actually redundant, like a sour lemon or sweet honey or bright sun or a tiny ant crawling on the ground. A born-again Christian is the only kind of Christian there is, and only God can make a person be born again.

When you think about it, what did you contribute to your physical birth? The answer of course is nothing. Your mom and dad contributed something, but they did not create you. God knit you together in your mother's womb and brought you into life in this world (Psalm 139:13). Likewise, you can't do anything to make yourself spiritually born again. It's a miracle of God.

It's not a decision you make. It's not a prayer you pray. A Christian is not someone who's just trying to improve his life. It's not about becoming more religious. It's about receiving a radical new nature. It's about new creation—a miracle of birth. In fact, the word Peter uses in 1 Peter 1:3 and again in 1:23 to refer to the new birth is only used by Peter in this chapter in all of the New Testament. It's a unique word that means "to be fathered anew." God takes a person who is spiritually dead and "fathers that person anew." He gives them new birth, new life. Who needs that? Everyone, according to the Bible, because we were all born dead in our trespasses and sins.

Sometimes we look around at people and think, "Well, that person seems more spiritually dead than that person over there." But if you went to a morgue and found two people who had died in the last 24 hours—one who had died in a car accident, the other who just fell asleep and never woke up again—and you asked the medical examiner, "Which of these two is more dead than the other," he would tell you with no uncertainty, "They are both equally, certifiably dead."

The same is true of all humanity, spiritually. We are born spiritually dead. Whether you're a drug dealer, a murderer or a nice homeschooling mother, we all stand equally in need of this miracle of new birth from God.

How does this come about? Well, Peter says it's "*through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*" Because Jesus shattered the gates of death and now reigns as the living Lord, He is able to make sinners like you and me recipients of new life. Because He lives, we can also live. The new life which brought Jesus from the dead is also reaching down into the world today and giving that new life to humanity.

But how does an event that took place 2,000 years ago invade my spiritual deadness today and make me alive? The answer, as we'll see, is in 1 Peter 1:23. It's through the living and abiding Word of God. As this gospel of the life, death and resurrection of God's Son invades our lives, it becomes a living seed that produces new birth, new life, in the souls of everyone who believes.

Now, how do you know if you've been born again? How do you know if you've experienced this miracle? Well, it's kind of like asking me, "How do you know, David, that you've been physically born?" I could answer that question in a couple ways. One way would be to say, "Well, come with me on a journey. We'll drive up to Kenosha, Wisconsin, and go to the county court house. I'll find my birth certificate there and prove to you that I have been born. I have been

physically alive in this world.” That’s one way. Or I could just say, “How do I know I’m alive? Well, look. I move. I see. I taste. I touch. I feel. I’m alive.”

The same is true of us spiritually. When we are spiritually born again, we are given new appetites, new affections, a new will and a new desire to obey the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the marks of the new birth we’re going to see next week in 1 Peter 1:8 is love for a Savior we cannot see. In fact, the One we love the most is Someone we’re still waiting to meet face to face—our Lord Jesus Christ.

## **2. Is there anything left for me to look forward to?**

That leads us to the second question: is there anything left for me to look forward to? Question one, “Can I begin again?” Yes, you can! By God’s mercy, you can become the recipient of the miracle of new birth. Wonderful news! But in this life, which is often a fiery furnace full of suffering and trouble, sometimes we wonder, “Is there anything left for me to look forward to?” That’s our second question this morning.

Now, a furnace can either burn something to a crisp, or it can refine it into pure gold. I’m sure you’ve noticed how two people can go through similar ordeals, similar trials, but one person comes out of that bitter, cynical, sour and spoiled, while the other person going through the same ordeal comes out softer, more tender, alive, full of purpose, humble and more willing to help other people. How is it that from the same furnace, one person comes out burnt and the other comes out purified like gold? What makes the difference?

Peter’s answer to that question is hope. It’s hope that makes the difference. Hope in the Bible is not a mere wish for better conditions. In this life, we go through our lives hoping and wishing for things. And when one hope dies or fades, we wish for a new thing. We wish for another hope. But what happens to a person in this life when all hopes fade, when all hope is lost?

When hope is lost, people give up and die. So no matter your condition in this life—whether you’re in a concentration camp or you’re in a comfortable two-story home, whether you live on the streets in Calcutta or in the well-to-do suburbs of Chicagoland—you need a hope that goes beyond this life. It’s like Hamlet asking, “How is it that the clouds still hang on you?” The answer? “O how weary, stale, flat and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world.”

What Peter is telling us is that without a living hope in the living Christ, we are without hope and without God in this world. We experience what is weary, stale, flat and unprofitable, hopes that continually fade. But Peter is saying that through the great mercy of God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, believers have been delivered from that hopelessness. We’ve been given new birth and guaranteed an inheritance to look forward to.

Now, children, you might be wondering, “What actually is an inheritance?” An inheritance is not something you worked for. It’s not something you’ve earned. It’s a treasure. It may be money or property that someone else has worked for, that someone else has earned. That person loves you or they think well of you when they’re alive, so they write you into their will. When that person dies, what they worked so hard for becomes your treasure. It’s a gift of love.

God’s Word is telling us today that when God the Father gives us new birth, we are born into a great inheritance. We are born into massive wealth; not wealth that’s physical and financial, but wealth in a Person, Jesus Christ, seeing Him face to face, being with Him, being made like Him. Everything Jesus earned and deserved to enjoy for all eternity, we now get to enjoy along with Him in glory. Jesus becomes our priceless treasure. Jesus becomes our source of purest pleasure. Jesus becomes our dearest friend. He is our inheritance. He is our living hope.

Have you ever looked at someone who was well off in this world and envied that person, wishing you could have what they have? Kind of like in Psalm 73, when a believer envies the prosperity of the godless. What Peter is saying to us here is, “If I could only show you what you have in Christ, you would never envy those who are outside of Christ again.” But Peter is also saying, “It’s impossible for me to describe it to you. It’s so vast, so great, I cannot put it into words. All I can tell you are three things it is not.”

Here are three things your inheritance in Christ is not.

**First, it’s not perishable.** It’s not something death can touch. It’s not something that can decay with age. It’s not able to be destroyed. Think about that. Everything we enjoy here on earth is subject to death and decay.

The singer who puts her hope in her beautiful voice may find that a day comes when she cannot string together a simple melody. Or the carpenter who finds great hope and joy in the workmanship of his hands may find that a day comes when he can no longer hold a hammer or drive a nail. Or the great scholar who puts her hope in her marvelous writings may find that a day comes when she’s not even able to read a line of her own books. That’s the way the hopes of this world are—they fade and perish.

But when we are brought to life in Jesus, we find a living hope that is imperishable. Like Robert Lewis Stevenson describes in his poem, “When the stars are gone”:

The stars shine over the mountains  
The stars shine over the sea  
The stars look up to the mighty God  
The stars look down on me  
The stars shall last for a million years  
A million years and a day

But God and I will live and love  
When the stars have passed away

That's because our inheritance in Him imperishable.

**Secondly, it is undefiled.** It cannot be defiled. We have a saying, "You've got to take the bad with the good." That's because we're conditioned to expect everything in life to be tainted. Nothing we enjoy here is totally pure. All of it is tainted by sin. But our inheritance in Christ is undefiled and because we, the ransomed church of God will be saved to sin no more, it's also undefilable because we won't be able to spoil it with sin anymore. Praise God for that!

**Thirdly, our inheritance is unfading.** You know what it's like to finally get something you've been desiring for a long time. You're so excited to have it, but then after a while, the pleasure kind of fades and eventually it ends up on a shelf or in a junk drawer or maybe even in the garbage. Possessions are like that. They fade. Enjoyments fade. Physical appearances fade. The human body fades. It falls into a state of decay, where gravity starts to take over and skin doesn't stay taut. Long before our bodies finally rest in the ground, the inevitable descent into the earth is noticeably underway.

That's the way all the treasures of this life are. But, believer in Jesus, you have been guaranteed an inheritance that is pandemic-proof. It will never need a bail out by the United States government. It could never be improved by an economic stimulus plan, because it's imperishable, undefiled and unfading.

Can you name one thing in this life that can be characterized or described by all three of these attributes? I can think of none, other than our Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is all three of these. He alone is our all in all. He alone is our living hope. Do you know Him? Do you trust Him? If you do, be assured that yes, you have an amazing inheritance to look forward to. Yes, for you, believer, the best is yet to come.

### 3. Will I ever get there?

That leads me to the final question this morning, "Will I ever get there?" I'm thinking of a trip I made with a couple friends to Ukraine. It seemed to take forever. We flew from Chicago to Vienna and had a layover there. Then we flew to Kiev. Once we arrived in Kiev, we were met by our friend Andrew, who led us through the streets of Kiev on a long walking journey. We stopped and ate, then we walked some more and saw some things.

Finally it was night time. We went to a church there and participated in a seminar that went on. Then it was very late—probably about 10:30 or 11:00 at night—and our hosts decided it

was time to eat again. They wanted to get some pizza. Finally, we departed Kiev around midnight and had another journey ahead of us—an approximately five-hour drive to our final destination which was Poltava. I remember thinking, “This is the day that never ends. It just goes on and on and on and on.” I was so tired I couldn’t sleep if I wanted to. I was beyond weary.

That’s how life in this world can be sometimes. We wonder, “Will I ever arrive at that Promised Land?” Take heart, believers. This inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading—look at verse four—is *“kept in heaven for you.”* In other words, your reservation has been made. It’s under lock and key. It’s in God’s safe deposit box. So if your trust is in what Jesus has achieved, you don’t need to wonder along your earthly journey, “Will I finally get there? When I get there, will I be able to get in?”

When you arrive there, you’re not going to need a driver’s license. You’re not going to need to show two forms of identification. All you’re going to need to do is say, “I’m with Jesus,” and they’ll say, “Yes, He told us you were coming. Come on in.” Even better, He will be there to meet you, because He is the door (John 10:9).

So our inheritance is in the safekeeping of the One Who has gone ahead to prepare a place for us. He has passed through death into life again, and verse five tells us, *“...[you] are being guarded...”* You are being locked up in a garrison. It’s a military term. So not only are you safe from external attack, you’re also safe from your own cowardly retreat. You may slide around and slide back, but God has you under protective custody. He’s keeping you from your own infidelity.

You are being guarded *“...through faith for a salvation that is ready to be revealed...”* You can be assured that even if your faith is fickle and failing, God will guard you and keep you. That’s because the faith is ultimately not an achievement you do; your faith is in the achievement of the One Who has died and rose for you and Who is now in heaven waiting for you and keeping you. He’s got you in the grip of a love that will not let you go and what He has prepared for you, Peter says, is ready now *“...to be revealed in the last time.”*

You are being guarded by God’s power through faith for salvation that is ready—ready to be revealed in the last time. In other words, nothing needs to be added to it. The inheritance God has prepared for us doesn’t require any finishing touches. It’s finished, it’s perfect, it’s ready and you’re being guarded for it. That’s what gets you through the fiery furnace of this world.

Next week we’re going to look more at that in 1 Peter 1:6-9, but what I want to do today at the end of this sermon is ask you “Do you have this living hope? Have you been born again?” We’ve seen that being born again is not a decision you can make. It’s not an accomplishment you can achieve. It’s a miracle of mercy. You’ve heard today of a God Who is rich in mercy, a God Who miraculously raised His Son Jesus from the dead. As you hear this God, Who rejoices in raising



His Son and Who rejoices in giving new birth to sinners who trust in His Son, I want to encourage you, friend: don't look at the first miracle—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead—and conclude that God is finished doing miracles in the world today.

No, look at that first miracle and conclude that God is calling you to put your faith in His Son Jesus Whom He raised from the dead, and that this God Who raised His Son from the dead, Who is rich in mercy, is able to give you the miracle of new birth and new life.

The story is told of a medieval king who gave his new court jester the fool's scepter. He told him, "Keep that with you until you meet a bigger fool than yourself." Well, the years went by and finally that king was laying on his death bed. He sent for his jester and said, "I'm going on a long journey." "Where are you going and how will you travel?" asked the jester. "I don't know," replied the king. "Have you made any provisions for your journey?" asked the jester. "No," replied the king. The jester handed the king his fool's scepter and said, "Well, your majesty, this then belongs to you."

Friend, you can know where you're going, because provisions have been made and the way has been told to you in God's Word today. It's through faith in the risen Son, the Lord Jesus. Hear me, please. All other hopes in this life will fade, perish and will not last. But Jesus Christ is a living hope Who will forever remain imperishable, undefiled and will never fade away. Every other hope is a fleeting wish. Jesus Christ is a living hope—not a fading wish, but a rock-solid certainty.

Please, friend, don't foolishly ignore what God has done in raising His Son Jesus from the dead, and please don't delay in crying out to this God Who is rich in mercy and asking Him to have mercy on you. I believe He will, because He did this for me and He's done this for millions of others. He is a God rich in mercy. Cry out today to Him, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner."

When you have experienced this new birth into this living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, then join with all others who have likewise experienced such a great salvation and praise Him. Praise Him from the depths of your being. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, because He's given us new birth into a living hope

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*All Scriptures quoted directly from the Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.*

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