

FIRST PETER

Lesson 3

Security for the Suffering

1 Peter 1:3-5

What is the one thing a Christian needs when undergoing persecution from the non-Christian world or when deeply suffering? He needs assurance. He needs hope. He needs the confidence that the suffering he is experiencing is really worth it all. A Christian in suffering needs to have a sense of security; that is, no matter what happens, no matter how intense the suffering, God will be with him in the suffering and one day will take him to heaven where there will be no more suffering from sickness, pain, sin or persecution.

So often when suffering hits us as Christians, we ask ourselves the questions, “Am I really saved? Am I really in a special relationship with Christ? Does God really care about me?” Peter wants his readers to have answers for these questions when suffering comes into their lives, so in 1 Peter 1:3-5, he speaks about the absolute security of the believer in Christ.

First Peter 1:1-12 is a doctrinal section and verse 13 begins with a “wherefore” indicating the practical application of the doctrine that has just been taught. The doctrinal section is dealing with the whole concept of salvation which is related to the future (1:3-5), the present (1:6-9) and the past (1:10-12).

Another interesting observation about this doctrinal section is that Peter seems to relate it to the exodus of Israel. The audience to whom he was writing was the “dispersed,” namely physical Jews who had trusted in Christ and believing Gentiles who were spiritual Israel because they too had trusted Christ. Therefore, there is much Old Testament terminology with which they were familiar. Notice that they are called aliens” or “strangers” (1:1) which is connected closely with the Israelites who were called “strangers” on a pilgrimage. “*And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers*” (Ex. 6:4 KJV). However, these New Testament believers were aliens and strangers to this world, on a journey, not to the Promised Land, but to a heavenly country, the New Jerusalem.

The Old Testament believer was given the inheritance of the land of Canaan (Gen. 17:12), but the New Testament believer is given a heavenly inheritance. The Jews, while wandering in the desert, had all kinds of trials and testings which were designed by God to confirm and purify their faith before they entered the land. So, too, New Testament Christians undergo various kinds of suffering before they reach their heavenly home (1:6).

PERMANENT HOPE**“Blessed”**

After stating in the salutation the Trinitarian salvation God has provided for the Christian (the Father chose us; the Holy Spirit sanctified us by setting us apart to obey Christ; the Son washed us in His own blood), Peter begins to bless or eulogize God for His provision of an eternal salvation for all true believers. This was a typical Jewish letter. The salutation

was followed by a blessing. It was quite common for Jews to begin their letters with “*Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel.*”

“be the God and (even the) Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”

Peter praises the Father, relating Him to Christ. This, at first glance, does not seem to be a Trinitarian statement because Christ is said to have God as His Father, for some people reason that Christ could not be God if the Father is His God. However, this statement is looking at Christ from His mediatorial office on earth where He was in submission at all times to the Father. Notice carefully, however, that Jesus is referred to as “Lord” (God or Sovereign of the universe), “Jesus” (only Savior) and “Christ” (the anointed Messiah). It is always difficult to state clearly the Trinity because it is such a profound subject.

Whatever the Trinitarian difficulties may be, Peter was praising God the Father for the salvation He has provided in and through the Lord Jesus Christ. The Israelites blessed God as the Creator of the world and as their Redeemer from Egypt. Christians bless God as Father of the incarnate Son and the One who raised Jesus from the dead.

“who according to His great mercy”

Salvation is not something humans get by their own efforts, but it is received only by the mercy of God. Mercy is God’s loving compassion, pity and kindness which He shows to the outsider and unworthy sinner. In compassion God reaches down to the helpless, the weak, the impotent, the wretched, and gives them the new birth, which results in salvation.

“has caused us to be born again”

This is obviously speaking about regeneration. It was God the Father who supernaturally shot spiritual and eternal life into us. He caused it to happen by His sovereign power. In this act of regeneration, the Father imparts divine life into the sinner, making him a new creature in Christ. “*Therefore if any man is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come*” (2 Cor. 5:17). This new spiritual birth brings a person into the kingdom of God. “*Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God*” (John 3:5), or the family of God, “*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name*” (John 1:12).

God causes the new birth and a sinner responds to Christ by faith. At that one brief moment, the believing sinner enters into a new sphere of life, and that life is ever present with the Christian. James also relates the new birth to the Word of God. “*In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the firstfruits among His creatures*” (James 1:18). Peter also relates the new birth to the living Word. “*For you have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, that is, through the living and abiding word of God*” (1 Pet. 1:23).

Just as God is the author of our physical life, so He is the author of our spiritual life. Furthermore, just as a baby does not choose to be born physically, so the depraved sinner does not choose to be born again. God alone causes the sinner to come alive spiritually.

Peter desired to teach these suffering saints that their salvation was of God. He caused them to be Christians. Therefore, God must allow or permit their suffering. “*For to you it has*

been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake" (Phil. 1:29). It is God who has control over our lives because He caused us to be born again.

“to a living hope”

Peter says that the purpose or end of the new birth is a living hope, an active, vital and animated hope. It is objective in that the Christian looks for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ where there will be a resurrection of all Christians, and new resurrected bodies free of all sin and suffering will be theirs. This is a “living” hope which is the very opposite of the dead, vain and powerless hope of the unsaved which is based on speculation or mere sentiment with no historical basis. The living hope is the hope of eternal life which the non-Christian does not have. The unsaved man has no hope, no confidence, for beyond the grave lies the dark unknown. Fear of death and judgment lurks constantly in his breast. He desperately tries to occupy his mind with other thoughts but the thoughts of death still quietly linger in his sub-conscious thinking.

This living hope is also subjective in that the Christian now has a living, energizing, divine principle working in him. This living hope produces confidence and optimism in light of the reality of death. This hope of eternal life invigorates the soul to action, patience, fortitude and perseverance right to the end of life. The fact that the Christian has divine life now and will be resurrected in the future gives him an optimistic view about life and death.

We should note that Peter is fond of the word living for he speaks of a “*living hope*” (1:3), “*the living word of God*” (1:23), “*(Christ) a living stone*” (2:4), and “*(Christians) as living stones*” (2:5).

We should also take a look at the word “hope” in the Bible and it always refers to things in the future: “*Christ in you, the hope of glory*” (Col. 1:27), “*a living hope*” in that we shall receive a resurrected body (Pet. 1:3), “*the blessed hope*” of the second coming of Christ (Titus 2:13), and a “*purifying hope*” for those who anxiously await the Lord’s return (1 John 3:3). It is this kind of hope that motivates Christians to push on when they are suffering in daily life.

“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”

The Christian’s living hope is not based on speculation or mere sentiment but on the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is the ground, the foundation and the cornerstone of the Christian’s hope. Christ’s resurrection not only gives the Christian a living, future hope of complete deliverance from sin and suffering at the return of Christ and the resurrection, but it also gives him a present living hope in that the resurrected Christ has taken up residence in him.

POSSESSION OF AN INHERITANCE

“to obtain an inheritance”

The Christian looks forward to the inheritance that is his because of being related to Christ. This inheritance is heaven. The word “inheritance” is taken over from the Old Testament promise with regard to the Promised Land (Gen. 17:8). It was used of each particular plot of ground each tribe would inherit. In the New Testament, the inheritance is not

Canaan but heaven itself. This heavenly inheritance is described for us in other Scripture as *eternal life* (Titus 3:7), *glory with Christ* (Rom. 8:17), *the kingdom of Christ* (Eph. 5:5), *salvation* (Heb. 1:14), and the *New Jerusalem, the heavenly city* (Rev. 21:2, 7). The realization of this inheritance is through the word of God (Acts 20:32); it is based on God's promise (Gal. 3:18); it is grounded in the New Covenant (Heb. 9:15) and the Holy Spirit's seal is a pledge or down payment on our inheritance (Eph. 1:14). Our inheritance is due to the fact that we are related to Jesus Christ by faith (Rom. 8:16).

When the Christian learns of his inheritance as a heavenly Canaan, he can sing:

*“When I tread the verge of Jordan,
Bid my anxious cares subside;
Death of death and hell’s destruction,
Land me safe on Canaan’s side:
Songs of praises, Songs of praises,
I will ever give to Thee.”*

“which is imperishable”

Peter desires to describe our heavenly inheritance by contrasting it with earthly things. It is not like these three negative adjectives at all, but they are so wonderful our limited minds cannot grasp what the inheritance will really be like. “Imperishable” means that our eternal inheritance cannot be destroyed and it will endure forever.

“and undefiled”

This again is a negative statement to indicate that the inheritance is without defect, pollution or flaw. It is eternally pure and perfect. Sin, misery and suffering have no place in our eternal inheritance of heaven.

“and will not fade away”

This inheritance cannot dry up or wither away. It will never decay, become old or wear out. The delight of this place will never diminish or grow stale.

Commenting on 1 Peter 1:4, Albert Barnes says,

“The crown of glory, though worn for millions of ages, will not be dimmed; the golden streets will lose none of their lustre; the flowers that bloom on the banks of the river of life will always be as rich in colour, and as fragrant, as when we first beheld them.”

PRESERVATION OF THE INHERITANCE

“reserved in heaven for you”

A cautious reader may say, “Am I sure to attain this inheritance when I am suffering so? Am I sure to inherit it?” Yes, the inheritance is absolutely certain. Why? This inheritance has been and is (perfect tense) being reserved, guarded, watched over and protected by God.

This inheritance is guarded by the omnipotence of God as He waits patiently for each child of His to receive it. It is guarded by God Himself so the inheritance is perfectly safe. Heaven is the safety deposit box where God is guarding our inheritance for us under constant surveillance.

Notice once again, *“reserved in heaven for you.”* Of what use is it to talk of a home over there if we are not to enjoy it? Why should heavenly mansions excite our imagination if they are intended for someone else? This eternal inheritance is for us, God’s people.

PERSEVERANCE IN ATTAINING THE INHERITANCE

“who are protected by the power of God”

The inheritance is preserved for the Christian in heaven, but how can we be sure the Christian will hold out to the end? How do we know that the Christian will not falter because of the assaults of the world, the flesh and the devil? How can we be certain that the true believer will not be overcome by temptations, trials, testings or suffering? Will a genuine Christian lose his salvation by apostasy and forfeit his inheritance in heaven? Absolutely not! The word “protected” is a military term and means *to place a garrison around a city*. The Lord is guarding and protecting continually each individual Christian with His own sovereign, omnipotent power. Not only are the Christian’s possessions in heaven kept safe by God, but the Christian himself is kept safe also so as to arrive at his heavenly home. He has a guard who never sleeps; the guard never changes, and the guard never deserts. This is the doctrine of eternal security.

“For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6).

“. . . who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:8).

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand” (John 10:27-29).

Again, the Christian can sing

*“E’en down to old age all My people shall prove
My sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love.
The soul, that on Jesus hath leaned for repose,
I will not, I will not desert to his foes.
That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake!”*

“through faith”

God sovereignly keeps every Christian, but He uses faith as a means of accomplishing His own ends for the Christian. The believer's human responsibility is to continually exercise faith in this life. The Christian must keep on believing in Christ and will do so because God is working in him. *“Work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:12-13)*. Our faith lays hold of God's power, and this power strengthens our faith, and we are therefore preserved by God as we persevere in the Christian life. Therefore, continuing faith in Christ is not only nice but is absolutely necessary to attain the inheritance of heaven. In context, this persevering faith is in the difficult trials, testings and persecutions of life. Yes, Christians will persevere unto the end in all sufferings. Some will persevere better than others, but all will persevere in suffering to some degree.

This is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, which is that a true Christian will persevere unto the end of his life (Matt. 10:22; Mark 13:13).

“for a salvation”

This refers to future salvation when the Christian will be completely delivered from the presence of sin, suffering, trials, tribulations and persecutions. This salvation is the completion of our inheritance. At this future time, each Christian will have a full and complete salvation.

“ready to be revealed in the last time.”

The Christian's future salvation takes place at the last time. In context, this must be a reference to the second coming of Jesus Christ when all believers in Christ who have died from Adam on will be resurrected and united with their redeemed souls and spirits. Christians then will be perfectly suited to go into the presence of God with their resurrected, glorified bodies.

CONCLUSION

Christian, whenever any type of suffering comes into your life, remember that you are saved and destined for heaven where there is no sin or suffering. Your trials and struggles on this earth are just temporary. As a Christian, you have hope; you have assurance; you have confidence because you have a salvation that cannot be lost. You are kept by the power of an omnipotent God who will take you to your final destination in heaven.

If you are without Christ, if you are a non-Christian, if you have never been born again, you have no hope of life after death. You shall die in your sins. You shall have no comfort for your soul because only Christ can give a person a living hope and absolute assurance of heaven. Turn to Christ and be saved. Bow to Christ as Lord and come alive. Accept Christ as Savior and get comfort for your sin-stained soul. Only Christ can give you a living hope.