

Sermon 3: 1 Peter 1:3-5: Praising God for our Salvation

OUTLINE

Merciful begetting
Kept inheritance
Powerful guarding

INTRODUCTION

“One day, on the way to visit some friends, John Denley was stopped and searched by the authorities, who found his written confession of faith. Denley believed the Church was built upon the apostles and prophets with Christ as it’s head, and that the present state Church, the Church of England, was not part of this true Church. In his time many of it’s teachings were not according to the Bible.

For this he was turned over to a local government official, who turned him over to the Bishop for questioning. Denley would not back down from his statement of faith, so he was condemned to die and turned over to the sheriff.

Within six weeks, he was sent to the stake to be burned. When they lit the wood beneath him, Denley showed no fear. He cheerfully sang a psalm as the flames rose around him. One of his tormentors picked up a piece of wood and threw it at him, hitting him in the face. He hoped to anger or silence Denley, but Denley only responded, ‘Truly, you have spoiled a good old song’. Then he spread his arms again and continued singing until he died.” (Jesus Freaks p61).

Often you hear about Christians like John Denley, who worship the Lord in all situations. And perhaps today you don’t feel like they do, you are in the middle of your difficulties and you are not full of worship and praises towards God. You don’t feel like Job who can say “though he slay me I will praise him”, or Paul who says “rejoice in the Lord always and again I say rejoice.” Well, the people that Peter is writing to are in very real difficulties, and Peter begins his letter with praise and adoration towards God. He does this on purpose in order to remind them of all that God has done for them that they will be able to praise God, be hopeful, and have what it takes to endure their situation. Worshipping God for the great salvation with which He saved us is what enables us to meet our difficulties with patience and hope. So today we turn to Peter’s opening reminder of the reasons we have to worship God. He is our Savior. Peter focuses our attention on three points of God’s saving work; his past work when he mercifully caused us new birth; His future inheritance laid up for us; and His present protection of us. Past, future, present. Our three points then are merciful begetting; kept inheritance, and powerful guarding.

Merciful begetting

V3, ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.’ Blessing God is a part of OT piety, Ps. 72:18-19, ‘Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!’ It goes without saying, that God blessing us, and us blessing God are very different things. He pours out His gracious mercy, and we return it as praise, and this is what Peter is doing here. Peter starts with the identity of God. Peter, like Paul in many of his letters identifies God as ‘the God

and father of our Lord Jesus Christ.' This is God as He is revealed in His Son and the gospel. This is not God at the end of a microscope or telescope, but who He is to us because of who He is to His Son. All of our salvation comes to us through the Son, and the close link between God as the Father of Jesus, and the resurrection makes me think of John 20:17, 'Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father; but go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' The Son's experience as the Second Adam sets the tone for our own sonship before God. Peter also identifies God the Son as the Lord, an OT title for God, but also the name given to Christ for His finished work as our representative, these realities coincide in the God-man; Jesus, His incarnate names which means YHWH our salvation; Christ meaning the anointed one, being the promised prophet, priest and king who alone can save us. And let us not forget that key word 'ours.' This God-man who has the name above all names and has all authority to save us; who is YHWH our salvation; who is our sufficient anointed one, is indeed ours.

The first aspect of our salvation that Peter chooses to focus on is God giving us new life. Firstly, we see what drove God to give us new life, His great mercy. Having mercy usually means taking note of a person's misery and being compassionate towards them. In Ex. 34:6-7, when God revealed Himself by giving His name to Moses, after stating the covenant name, mercy is the first description God gives of Himself, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'" Peter describes the dimension of God's mercy as 'great mercy.' God has dealt with us in our sin not according to His justice, but His mercy. His justice was not neglected, no, He turned that justice on Himself in the giving of His Son so that His mercy might be towards us.

And from this mercy Peter tells us, 'he has caused us to be born again/'rebegotten.' Here Peter stresses the sovereign work of the new birth. We do not birth ourselves but are born. Peter adds in v23, 'since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.' God uses the word as His birth canal, and the preacher is the midwife. James 1:18 likewise explains this mechanism, 'Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth.' 1 Cor. 1:18, 'For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.' Now Peter is stressing the great mercy of God giving us this new birth. This was not something we did or caused but was bestowed graciously upon the undeserving. Jesus stresses this sovereign act when explaining things to Nicodemus. John 3:1-8: Here Jesus is discussing salvation with a Pharisee. It is obvious from the first few verses that Nicodemus does not know who He is dealing with. He does not see Christ as the Messiah but merely as a teacher from God who can do signs. Jesus interrupts whatever he was going to say because He can see that Nicodemus does not yet have the Spirit for His cannot recognise the Saviour. In verse 3 Jesus reveals that the only way anyone can have the scales lifted from their eyes that they might recognise that the Kingdom of God is present in the person of King Jesus is if they are first born again, 'Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." The word 'see' meaning recognise or perceive. Nicodemus confirms his ignorance by getting bogged down in the

picture of birth, perhaps a little offended that Jesus would imply that he as a teacher and Pharisee is somehow lacking. Once again Jesus repeats Himself, this time stressing that entrance into the kingdom, that is becoming a follower of the King is dependent upon first being born again, v5, 'Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.'" Verse 6 is a very important verse because it reminds us that we do not have the power in our fallenness to bring about the spiritual birth so that we can see and enter God's kingdom, 'flesh gives birth to flesh.' Instead we need God to interfere and sovereignly move upon us helping us to do that which we cannot do for ourselves. When we are born again it is not an act of cooperation whereby we and God give birth. It did not happen that way in your physical birth and it does not happen in your new birth either. Verse 8 confirms the necessity of the new birth before entering and verse 8 confirms that God is the one who is free to decide who will and when.

God has birthed us, and He has no stillborn children, we are born again to a living hope. Some people do not want to bring children into this cruel world. Well God has done such a work in salvation that He delights to have children because they have a living hope, not a faint hope, not even a strong hope, but a living hope. How, 'through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.' The thing that God has done that enables us to be made alive from sin; that guarantees our hope will not fail is God raising Jesus from the dead. His death pays our sin debt; His resurrection ensures our own resurrection and the remaking of the universe. Our hope is living because Christ is living, because He lives we will live also. The resurrection of Christ brings about 3 resurrections in our own lives. We are resurrected with Christ in regeneration; we experience what John calls the first resurrection when we die and go to heaven; and our third resurrection is when we are literally resurrected when He comes again. If you are a Christian this is your past which guarantees your future, and this is to what Peter turns our attention next.

Kept inheritance

V4, 'to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.' God as the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and us seems to be an undergirding theme, as the Father begets us, a word that in particular speaks of the father's role in making children; now another family term of 'inheritance' is used. Every true born child has a birth right to the inheritance of its parents, and this is what we have in God. The Holy Spirit is given to us as a guarantee of our inheritance, Eph. 1:14. But inheritance also has strong connotations of gift and grace. You do not earn an inheritance it is a gift. It is not a salary granted to you for being a good child, but a love gift the parent gives to a child. The good news is, our parent can't die, we get to have God as our Father and an inheritance.

This idea of inheritance is rooted in the OT. This is another term that relates to Israel's hope that is applied to the new Israel of God. Canaan was Israel's the son of God's inheritance, granted to them because of His promise to Abraham. Number 25:19, 'Therefore when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget.' The promises to Abraham of land; offspring and blessing were typologically realized in Israel in Canaan as their inheritance; a nation of covenant members; and the blessing to the nations of God's presence and blessing. But these were never the end goal of the promises to Abraham.

Land was pointing to the New Creation; the nation that was the children of Abraham was pointing forward to Christ and His offspring by the Spirit; and the earthly blessings were pointing to the blessings of salvation to the nations in Christ. Abraham was not looking forward to an earthly land or Jerusalem, but to the new creation, the heavenly Jerusalem, Heb. 11:13-16, 'These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.'

The land of Israel was spoiled by being filled with sinners; the land of Israel could become unclean and needed cleansing; the land of Israel could be conquered by invading armies; the land of Israel could become barren and infertile, full of drought and plague; the land of Israel could be stolen and Israel separated from it by exile. Our inheritance in the new creation, of which Jesus resurrection is the firstfruit and the guarantee, is not like Israel. It is Imperishable, a word used to describe God Himself using the translation 'immortal', 1 Tim. 1:17. The same word used to describe our resurrection bodies, 1 Cor. 15:52, 'in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.' Our inheritance is 'undefiled.' It cannot spoil, is untainted. The same word used to describe Jesus sinlessness, Heb. 7:26, 'For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens.' And thirdly, it is 'unfading.' The same word used to describe our crown, 5:4, 'And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.' Beauty fades our inheritance will not. All the things that afflict our bodies, and our things, and our environment now. The thorns and the thistles, the sickness and the pain, the loss and the fatigue, the boredom and the law of diminishing returns, our waning experience of life will be utterly renovated. And all of this is kept in heaven for you, in God's hands; beyond the grasp of thieves or moths or rust; untouchable by satan, sin or death; waiting for you when you die! Your best has not been had, it is yet to come. Many people when they age reach a point where it all feels downhill, not so for the believer, your best life is your next life.

Powerful guarding

V5, 'who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.' It is cold comfort if we are saved by God's begetting us, and we have the hope of an imperishable inheritance before us, if we do not make it to the end. But here is the good news. Not only is heaven kept for you, but you are also kept for heaven. Here is where the encouragement really picks up even more speed.

Peter tells us that we are guarded by God. That word 'guarded' is a very rich word in meaning. This word is used in two ways: firstly, it is used to describe the watching and guarding which prevents someone from escaping. In 2 Cor. 11:32, Paul tells the Corinthians that the governor of Damascus guarded the city to catch him when he left it. Well, Peter applies this word to us. God is guarding us, so that we cannot escape. We cannot fool God, he is not a man that we can pull the wool over his eyes, he guards us, in this regard, perfectly. The second

use is to guard from attack. And this God does too, although we are in a war, stronger is he who is in us than he that is in the world, we will not be overcome, we are more than conquerors through him who strengthens us. In the great commission Jesus tells us that He will never leave or forsake us.

Now what does it mean that we are guarded through faith? It does not mean that we use the word of faith tactics to exercise our faith by flexing our will to chase off demons, activate blessing, order angels around, and loose the Spirit. Some have tried to take one of the possible translations for this word 'faithfulness' to be its meaning, that we are saved by our faithfulness. Now it is true that God works in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure; but our salvation does not finally rest upon our faithfulness, Peter is trying to encourage us not discourage us. No, faith here is about walking by faith not by sight or feel when we are persecuted and discouraged. Linked with all the talk about our living hope and inheritance it has to do with believing the promises of God as ballast against the storms enabling us to push through and not give up. It is more like the shield of faith that Paul describes with which we quench all the fiery darts of the enemy. Our confidence rests on God's character which cannot lie; His promises which cannot fail; His power that cannot be overcome and His plans that cannot fail. Our faith rests on these truths and takes courage from them, is strengthened by them and God's power blesses the truth of them to enable us to hold fast.

So in conclusion, how do we push through trials? Peter is teaching us to turn to worship, not as a therapeutic technique to manufacture emotions through music, favorite melodies, lights and smoke machines. No, but by thinking deeply about God as our Savior, in particular about His past work where because of His great and sovereign mercy He raised the dead when He as a Father begot us. By thinking about the future inheritance that God is keeping for us better than anything we can experience in this world and which the powers of this age cannot rob us of. And by thinking about God's present guarding of us, and how our faith informed by who He is for us is strengthened to lay hold of Him and His promises. And all of this causes our hearts to rise and bless God enabling us to meet our own trials head on.