

Eternal Hope For the Weary Sufferer

1 Peter

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If you have your Bibles, and I hope that you do this morning, please turn with me to 1 Peter 1. We will be in a passage that I know all too well. I have actually preached it a couple of times, though I confess this is the first time I've really seen it for what it truly is. That is not to say that I have this passage figured out because there is so much theology in here that it would take an entire lifetime to fully understand it, but there is a depth and a beauty to this that I am now seeing for the first time. So it is a joy to be able to dive into God's word this morning.

Look with me at 1 Peter 1, we'll start in verse 1 and then we'll ask God's blessing on our time this morning.

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood: May grace and peace be multiplied to you. 3 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, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Let's go before the Lord in prayer.

Most gracious heavenly Father, we thank you. We thank you, first of all, for the privilege of gathering together to worship you, to worship our risen Savior. We thank you that all around the globe your church is meeting, whether in public as we are or in private as many are. We thank you that you are a God worthy of all of our praise. Our Father, we

thank you that you have revealed yourself in such a way in your word, and we thank you that you have sent Christ to purchase a people for himself. Lord, our hearts are overflowing with thanksgiving in this moment. I pray that as we dive into your word and begin to merely scratch the surface of the theology that is present here, that we would be struck anew by your mercy, struck anew by your grace, your sovereign power, and that we would be reminded that no matter the circumstance, you are good, worthy of all of our praise and at work. So God, grant us eyes to see, ears to hear, and hearts that are open to your truth. Be with me as I proclaim your word; may I not do so out of any form of pride but would your name be glorified through all of it. We pray for your blessing on this time and we ask it all in Jesus' precious and holy name. Amen.

This morning, we will look into things that are very difficult. We will wrestle with many past pains and struggles. We will be reminded of the difficult trials that are happening right now and we will come face-to-face with the truth that there is a great deal more suffering that is to come, but this morning, I hope we will also see how we are able to rejoice in that suffering, rejoice even in the midst of our greatest pains. Now let me tell you who this sermon is for this morning. If you are here this morning and you have endured a great many trials and a great deal of hardships, this sermon is for you. If you are here this morning and you are in the midst of a very difficult season of life, this sermon is for you. And if you are here this morning with trials on the horizon, this sermon is for you. Essentially this sermon is for everyone in this room. It is not if you will suffer, it is when you will suffer, and I recognize that that sentence is very gloomy, it's a very hard to hear sentence, it is not if but when you will suffer, but these are not my words, they are the promises of scripture and John 15:18 and 20 Jesus says to his disciples, "If the world hates you, know that the world has hated me before you. If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you." In Acts 14:22, literally right after Paul was almost stoned to death, Paul and Barnabas warn/encourage the church saying that "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Later on in the book that we are looking at in 1 Peter 4:12, Peter writes, "do not be surprised by the fiery trial." And Paul wrote these words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

Beloved, suffering is inevitable. If you are in Christ, suffering will happen but as we endure the various trials of this life, as we are carried by the grace of our God and the mercy of our God, we will grow to a more intimate and much deeper relationship with the Father and we will know what it means to rejoice in the midst of all circumstances.

Now for those of you that have gotten to know me over this last year, you will know I'm a big fan of Charles Spurgeon. You walk in my office and the library is filled with his books. If you walk in my office and immediately turn to the left, you'll see two things hanging on the wall: a map of the world with a bunch of push-pins in it where we have missionaries, and then a handwritten Charles Spurgeon sermon note. The previous church that I served as an elder at actually gave me that sermon note before I left to come here. Ironically, it's titled "To the worst man on earth." I don't know if they were telling me they were mad at me for leaving but I was very thankful for the gift. Charles Spurgeon has written a great deal that has impacted my life. He is one of the great expositors of the

text. He is a very strong man, very wise, a powerful orator, and if you look at the note in my office, he had really bad handwriting which makes me feel better about what I'm looking at right now. Yet with all of that, this strong-willed man of God, he was no stranger to suffering.

When he was 22, he was preaching in a very large gathering, I think the number was several thousand people, and someone attempting to pull a prank stood up in the middle of this service and screamed "Fire!" And what ensued was mass panic. People started running, they started trying to flee the scene out of the fear of a fire and what occurred was seven people were trampled to death and over 28 more were severely injured. He was severely opposed in his ministry; many of the people in his own church did not want him there, started rumors about him, threatened his life and the life of his family. Even his country was opposed to him and the things that he taught. At age 33, he was diagnosed with many severe illnesses including kidney disease which would be with him his entire life. Throughout much of his life, he combated severe depression of which I am no stranger. And yet through it all, he labored with joy for his King. He delighted in the hope of the gospel. For Spurgeon, what carried him through everything that he endured, and that was just merely a surface level observation, was this, delighting in the hope of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the eternal joys that were to come.

That is what carried him, that is what sustained him, and what we're looking at this morning, this passage was a friend of Charles Spurgeon. It's one of those passages that helped carry him through some of the darkest seasons of his life, but I want to ask you a question: what do you do when someone comes up to you and says they are suffering? What do you say? A lot of times we're used to being the person on the other side of the table, the one that's talking about our hardships and our struggles, we're telling a counselor or a dear friend of what we are going through but let's flip the script a little bit, sit on the other side of the table where often the friend or the counselor sits. What do you say when someone looks at you and says, "I'm going through one of the worst seasons of my life"? What do you say when someone says, "I have been sick for months and months and months and it's not getting any better"? What do you say when someone has just lost a loved one and they are grieving? Often I think we don't know what to say or we don't know how to say it. We say things like, "I'm so sorry that you're going through this. I wish that this hadn't happened." We even say, "I'm praying that it will be over soon." And all of those things are very well-intentioned, we mean well by them, but we don't realize the nature of what we are saying. We don't realize and we lose sight of the greatest need of every weary sufferer, and that is the hope of the gospel and the life that is to come. So as we dive into this text this morning, I pray that we would see these very things as well, that we would see that our greatest need is not for someone to pat us on the back and say it'll be okay, but that our greatest need is to know that Christ reigns supreme and will return to claim his bride, that this life is not all there is. So as we dive into this text, may we have humble hearts, soft hearts as we think through very difficult things.

Now to lay a bit of context into what we are doing here since we have not been in the book of 1 Peter which, by the way, I have to mention this. I really don't like being the one that has to follow Charles. He did an outstanding job last week and I really don't like

having to follow him because I'm not going to be able to match his skill. Luckily, that's not what I'm up here for.

Context. Our author says in the first verse, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." Who is this Peter? If you've been in the church, you know very well who this Peter is. He says it right here, "I was an apostle of Jesus Christ." In Matthew 4, he was called by Christ. He was a fisherman that Jesus approached him and upon calling him, he dropped his nets and immediately followed him. He followed him all the days of his life. I like Peter because he was a bonehead. He said a lot of really not so smart things and a lot of us like to sit there and say, "Well, Peter, that was really dumb, you shouldn't have said that," when in all actuality that's most of us. We are that Peter who doesn't think through before we say something. But by God's grace, Jesus said that he was going to be the rock on which the church was built. He was going to use his ministry to build his church.

Now why does he designate himself as an apostle? Is he just trying to namedrop? "I'm Peter. I'm an apostle. Look how great I am." I don't think that's what Peter is trying to do. I think he's actually trying to reflect who he's been sent by; not his official title but who he goes on behalf of. He stands as a messenger of Jesus Christ, sent by Christ under the authority of Christ and as one commentator put it, this letter does not simply represent good advice but it is a binding word to the church. So essentially stated, these words do not serve merely as an encouragement but as an exhortation to the church and are, therefore, instructive for us this morning.

The audience. He says in verse 1, "To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion," we'll come back to that phrase in just a second, "in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia." First of all, he's writing to believers. Most scholars agree that it's predominantly Gentile. They were likely Jews that were present but it is a predominantly Gentile audience. And the location of all of this, if we want to put it in modern terms, is modern-day Turkey. The entire region he's talking about is modern-day Turkey so it's a pretty large region that this letter is going to. But if you look at the structure of these places, you'll find that it forms a circle. Pontus is here, and then Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. Now what's interesting about Pontus and Bithynia as bookends is they were actually during this time just one region, they were one place. So what he's actually showing is that this letter did not just have one line and it stopped, it was circular and started here, it went all the way around and came back to the same region. It was designed to be circulated amongst the churches. It formed a geographical circle. And as we find out later in the book, it was carried by Silas for the purpose of building up and encouraging the church.

Now in terms of theology, there's a lot of it. We see that play out in the first verses here. There is a ton to unpack and we won't be able to fully scratch the surface of what is here so I encourage you, study the writings of Peter. For all of the goofy things he sometimes said, he had his theology down by the inspiration and grace of our Lord.

In terms of date, there's a lot of speculation out there as to when this letter was written. Some would suggest that it was post-64, some would suggest pre-64. There is an

importance to 64. In July of 64, AD that is, in July there was a fire that started in Rome, a fire that spread throughout Rome destroying a lot of the city. Most scholars agree that Nero was the one that started that fire. He desired to build these great ornate buildings and so he started the fire and then blamed it on the Christians and persecution ensued, so those that would argue it was after 64 AD is that he is writing to believers that are now being persecuted under the reign of Nero, and then there are those that say it was before, roughly around 62-63.

Now the reason for this belief is that it's very vague as to the suffering that Peter is describing. He says later on in the passage "tested by various trials, grieved by various trials." You would think if Rome had just burned and the Christians are being blamed, then he would speak specifically of that, "the persecution you are facing under the reign of Nero," and he doesn't. And at first when I first read this and the first few times I preached this, I leaned on the camp of post the burning of Rome, now I'm leaning just a little bit more towards pre because scholars are arguing about it, but an argument from silence is hard to really stand upon. We don't really know. He doesn't specify but it's not as if persecution started after the fire. Persecution had been going the whole time. In fact, those that argue for pre are saying that Peter is seeing the writing on the wall; he's starting to see the persecution is bubbling up, people being mocked for their faith, abused, beaten, arrested, put to death, and he can see something is building here. So whichever the case may be, Peter is writing to prepare them for the suffering that they are currently facing and for the suffering that they are going to face, and yet he is instructing them to rejoice, rejoice in the midst of all of this, rejoice in their future and eternal joys that are to come. He will do so, first, by reminding them of their identity; second, by giving them an eternal perspective; and third, he will instruct them in the beautiful purpose for their trials.

So number 1, we receive an identity reminder in verses 1 to 2. I lied to you, by the way, it's not 1:1-6 it's 1:7. I can't count. We all know this. Verses 1 to 2, an identity reminder. He calls them, he says in verse 1, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion," and then he gives the location. That's a really interesting thing to call the church, elect exiles. And again, his theology is on full display within the first few words of this passage. What is an elect exile? What does he mean by exile? I think there's two possible interpretations here. Exile, first of all, signifies their physical location, that these people have been moved out of their homeland and are exiled because of the persecution they're facing somewhere else. Many people have seen this as a simple physical location, they are not in their homeland, and yet I think this is too low a view of what Peter is describing here. I think it's true that he is calling them elect exiles in the sense that they have been pushed out of their homelands because of persecution and yet there is something much greater involved in these words. It's a spiritual reality. An elect exile meaning that those he is writing to, those believers, are no longer citizens of earth but are citizens of heaven, and we'll see that in the way that he spells this out.

What does he mean elect exiles? What's interesting is exilic language was used to describe Israel. As they were taken into captivity, they were called exiles. Over and over again as they are in a distant land, a land that was not their own, they are called exiles. It's

also used just as they are going throughout the world. God has called them a sojourner or stranger in a weary and distant land. It's a spiritual reality. So in calling these people elect exiles, I think what Peter is signifying is that the church is the new Israel, the church is the fulfillment of what Israel was to be. In calling them exiles, he is attributing Old Testament language to signify this transition and that's even furthered by calling them of the Dispersion. Again, language that was attributed to Israel in the Old Testament.

Now he is emphasizing an important detail concerning their identity. This is the greater purpose of all of this, they are no longer citizens of this earth but citizens of heaven. This earth is not their home any longer. Since they are in Christ, they are a new people. Their citizenship has changed from Jerusalem or Rome or wherever it was to now citizens of heaven. There is an identity shift here but what has brought about this change in identity? Well, that's found in the word "elect."

So they are exiles, citizens of heaven and not of this earth, and what has brought that about is the sovereign election of God. Now that is a widely disputed thing. There's a lot of arguments, especially if you go to seminary, a lot of arguments over the sovereignty of God. I remember the first night that I was in my dorm room with my new roommate, we differed a lot on where we were at theologically and we also had some very pointed discussions, I don't want to call them a debate because that sounds worse, but I didn't really know a lot so I was flipping through all my systematics that I could find trying to just read things to him. We struggled a lot with that but as I have gotten older and the further that I have gotten into the scriptures, it just seems so pointed. The sovereignty of God is all over the pages of scripture. It's almost screaming that, "I am in control of all things." And even Peter, he's just assuming they know this, elect exiles, you were chosen by God.

How were they chosen? We see it play out in these first two verses three different ways in which they have been made elect exiles. 1. "According to the foreknowledge of God." Now that word can actually be translated and probably should be translated as "foreordained." God has foreordained them as his people. It's not as if to say that God looked to the future and said, "Okay, this person will choose me and therefore I will choose them." That's not the concept that's playing out here because it's choosing based on the person's character and we know that that's not going to work. If God were to choose us based upon our own character, we're all condemned to hell. It cannot be on our character. God chooses based on his character, on his sovereign choice.

So it was the foreordained choice of God that has called them to be elect exiles. The second thing that we see in calling them elect exiles is the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. It says, "according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit." The word sanctifying here is more likely referring to the conversion rather than the progressive work of being made holy. That is in play, the Spirit does progressively sanctify us and yet what is at play here in this passage is more specifically the conversion of sinners to himself.

So what we're seeing here. 1. God foreordained or chose a people for himself. 2. By the sanctifying work of the Spirit. 3. "For obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood." Obedience here could be roughly translated obedience in faith, the idea that God calls, the Spirit works within so that we might place our faith in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior accomplished through the sprinkling or cleansing work of Christ's blood. So if we were to summarize that sentence, it is the foreknowing work of God and the sanctifying action of the Spirit which results in obedience in the sprinkling of Christ's blood.

What's he describing? He's describing the truth of their conversion. He's telling them the truth of the gospel, reminding them of who they are in Christ Jesus. He's telling them of their identity, who they are, who they belong to. You are elect exiles. You are not citizens of this earth, you are citizens of heaven. And what has brought that about? The sovereign choice of God through the working of the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus Christ in the cleansing power of his blood. That's the gospel. That is the good news that we all need to hear. It is the gospel that saves us and it is the gospel that marks us. We do not belong to this earth anymore. If you are in Christ, your primary citizenship is not in the state of Georgia, it is not in the United States, and it's not even as a person of this earth. Your primary distinction is that you are a citizen of heaven, you belong to God and you are an heir of the promises.

Friends, the greatest need that you have every single day is this reminder, every single day you need to be reminded of who you are in God. You need to be reminded that this earth is not your home. You need to be reminded of the hope that is in the gospel. So my charge to you in these first two verses is very simple, wake up every single morning and preach the gospel to yourself first. You want to know how to start your day? Proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ in your own life. One of the things that we will see in this passage is that though we have received salvation, we have not completely received the fullness of the promise when we are longing for the day when Christ will make all things new, where sin will no longer be a problem for us. We will no longer deal with the difficulties of sin, we will be freed from it completely, completely pure, but as we are still walking in this life, we wrestle with sin, we wrestle with hardship, and so each day your greatest hope is the reminder of the gospel. You need the gospel and remind yourself that you belong to God, that this earth is not your home, that you are a citizen of heaven.

So Peter's greatest call to them in the very beginning in his opening words is reminding them of who they are and who they belong to and by what power they have been brought to that. The second thing that Peter is going to do in this passage is give them an eternal perspective. 2. An eternal perspective, and we'll see this play out in verses 3 to 5.

Now a couple of weeks ago, Scott and I went to California, we went for the Southern Baptist Convention and we were there for several days. It was a very entertaining trip. There were some hilarious moments and some not so funny moments. But one of the days, and I think we would both agree, our favorite day of the entire trip was when we got to see Ben Kuntz. We spent all day with him. We got to worship with him. We had lunch with him. We got to have some really deep and hard conversations. It was

wonderful, absolutely wonderful, and Scott and I are kind of in the same boat in terms of we don't like to go see the big famous sites that most people like to see, we're going to go do our own thing and we're much more impressed by natural beauty in the area, for the mountains and the ocean and all of that.

The first day, the first or second day we were there, we were driving around and it was, I say cloudy, it was smog, it was smoggy. As we're driving out of the city, we're looking and there's just this massive cloud bank in front of us. Man, that's kind of close to the ground. That's weird. So I looked at Scott and said, "Man, those clouds are kind of big. I think a storm's coming." And then we started driving a little bit further and I said, "Are those mountains?" And he went, "Um, starting to think they are." And the closer and closer we got, these mountains got bigger and bigger and bigger and more detailed.

Fast forward to the day that we were with Ben, we asked him, "Okay, we want to go see not the sites that everyone else wants to go see, we want to see something that's just truly beautiful." So he said, "I know the perfect spot." And we drove to this hill, I call it a hill, you'll see why in just a second. We drove to this hill and there was a famous, old, historic house or fort or something up there, I wasn't paying a ton of attention apparently. We were talking and we started walking up the hill hiking to the top, and when we got to the top of this hill, you could turn around and see the majority of the valley. It was beautiful. You could hear the wind whipping through but I could also hear cars and I hate hearing that.

So we were standing there and Ben said, "Well, what do you think?" I said, "Well, it's beautiful," but I started joking because I could see a mountain off in the distance. "That would be great if we could get on that mountain, I bet it's more beautiful up there." And he said, "Okay, get in the car." So we proceeded to drive up a road, questionably a road especially toward the end when it got really questionable. Drove up to the very top of this mountain, it took us about 30 minutes to get up there. Got to the top of it, parked in an area, walked up a little bit further and as we got to the top when we started to crest the hill, the beauty started to actually show. On one side, we could look out and we could see all of Los Angeles and its smog, and we could if it was clear, we could've seen the ocean. You turn to the other side and you're seeing this massive valley of landscape that I had never really seen before. And then I started looking, and I could not find the hill. On top of this mountain, I cannot see that hill that at once I thought was a pretty big hill and now it's nothing. You see, what had happened is I had a different perspective. We had a different perspective on what we were seeing. One thing was big and it was beautiful but once we got on top of the mountain, it completely changed. That changed perspective allowed us to see that there is something so much bigger at work and I was enamored by the fact that this massive mountain, the expanses that I cannot really pay attention to, God holds in the palm of his hand. You see, it's when we have the right perspective that we are able to face the various trials of this life. It's when we put into perspective with things of eternity, eternal perspective that we are able to look at whatever may come and say, "Do your worst because I serve a God that is far bigger and there are promises to come." So it's important that we put everything in perspective, that we have an appropriate perspective.

Thomas, if that's me doing the popping, I'm sorry.

So looking at these verses, verse 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Praise be to God. God is to be praised and in the remaining verses, you're going to see exactly why God is to be praised. First of all, he is to be praised because of his mercy. God is great and rich in mercy but what has his mercy accomplished? What has his mercy done? "He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." That sentence truly is praiseworthy. God is to be praised. He has caused us to be born again. He has taken us out of death and into life. We were once marked and marred by sin, a citizen of this earth, enemies of God, and yet by God's mercy he has called us his children, his people, elect exiles as the passage describes, citizens of heaven. It is God's mercy that has brought us to be born again.

The second thing is that it has been born again to a living hope. Now this has caused me to trip up a few times in reading this, just trying to understand what he's talking about and this is, again, one of those moments where I think we sometimes have too low a view of what's going on in the passage. It's easy to simply look at this and say a living hope, that's the gospel hope, and that's right but he connotes it and calls it a living hope. A living hope, and I think what is being played out here is that it is a hope to come. A hope to come. We have not fully arrived. We have not fully seen it in its fullness. We have not completely received it, and we'll look at that more in just a second.

And how was this accomplished? How were we brought into life? How were we born again? How did we receive this living hope? It is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. You see, it's the work of Christ on the cross and not only on the cross but being raised from the dead that salvation was accomplished. You see, if Christ stayed in the ground, death would have defeated him but at the resurrection we see that death was defeated by him. He has put to death death. He has killed it. Death is no more. It is swallowed up in victory. "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" You see, it's the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that has brought about this hope, that has brought about this new life. Christ has accomplished salvation for a people through his work on the cross and his resurrection. It is his victory over death and it has brought about this living hope.

Now an important theological concept that is in this passage, again there's a ton of it, is the idea of the already and the not yet, that we have received in part what we will receive in full in the last days. It is a theological phrase that salvation has been received and yet we are waiting for the day when we fully receive the promise of salvation and the eternal blessings that are to come. That is what he's describing by this living hope, that that hope has not been fully realized yet, that we have been saved but we are longing for the day when that hope will be fully revealed. Essentially, he is putting everything here in perspective.

This life when we compare it to eternity and the living hope that there is, is honestly not that much. It is a vapor. It is a mist in the wind. When we start to look at things the way

that God has called us to look at things, we see them for what they are. We realize that the things that we go through in this life are nothing compared to eternity, and we should also realize that this life is not the best life that we're going to live, that if you are in Christ, if you have trusted in him, if you are born again, if you have that living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, there is so much more that is awaiting us, an eternity with our Lord and an eternity away from sin.

So when we put all of this in its proper context, its proper perspective, we are able to truly see things as God has ordained them to be seen. So as elect exiles, these people are passing through this life as citizens of heaven looking forward eagerly to the day when the promises and the glorious salvation is fully revealed. As one commentator wrote, "Those who are suffering persecution in Asia Minor are not dashed to the ground by their troubles. They look to the future with the sure confidence that inestimable blessings await them. Nor is their confidence baseless superstition, it is grounded and secured by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Their hope, in other words, is the hope of the resurrection, triumph over death, hence whatever happens to them in this world is light compared to the blessings of the future resurrection."

This eternal perspective, this confidence is founded on solid ground. Look at the nature of the language that's surrounding this inheritance. Verse 4, "to an inheritance that is," what? "Imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." What is this inheritance? It is the eschatological hope of believers, the promised inheritance ready to be revealed in the last times. But what is the nature of this inheritance because we could spend all day talking about what it is and looking forward to the future, looking forward to that end time hope, and yet he doesn't spend a lot of time there.

He gives some other words to describe that promise. It is imperishable which means it endures forever. There is not a moment in which that blessing and that promise of salvation is at an end. It is forever enduring. It's undefiled meaning it cannot be made impure or unclean. There's nothing that can be done to take away the luster and the beauty of our salvation. And it's unfading, it will never lose its brightness, it will never lose its beauty or its strength. So nothing in this life can cause our salvation, the future glories to perish, to be defiled, to fade away. How do we know this? By the next words, it is kept in heaven by God's power. This is emphasizing with the strongest possible words imaginable the security and certainty of the rewards awaiting believers.

I want you to consider for a second the most secure places that you could imagine on this earth. The church that I was an elder at before I came here was 20 minutes down the road from Fort Knox which is honestly a little underwhelming after we drove by it a few times. Anyway, you think of it as the most secure place or one of the more secure places in the world. We have phrases like it's as secure as Fort Knox, right? So we think of that, that there's no way that people are getting in there, now I want you to take Fort Knox and escalate it to the infinite degree. That's how secure your salvation is. There is nothing, and I mean nothing that can take that away from you, that can harm it, that can cause it to

fade away because it is guarded by the power of God. You want to talk about security, that's the most secure thing that you could ever imagine.

God is guarding your salvation. He is guarding the eternal glories that are to come. He is holding us known as the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. He will carry us on. This salvation is a reference to the future glory that believers will one day enjoy but there is a caveat here, "guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." To enjoy the future glory, one must endure in the faith until the last day. In other words, they must persist in the faith. They must continue on in the faith. There is no category for those who do not continue in the faith to receive the promises of salvation. There is a 0% chance. And yet the security is not in our ability to continue to walk. We have a responsibility, remain faithful, but it is God that is carrying us. It is God that is sustaining us. The good news is that God carries his people and gives them the strength to endure in the faith. God will continue to hold us until the very end when his promises are revealed.

It is as a means of encouragement that Peter tells them of the sustaining power of God, and when we see the hope of the promises that are to come and we reflect on the truth that God really will hold us to the very end, it is then that we are ready to rejoice even in the midst of various trials. But do you see this life as all there is? My friends, if you do, then you will be left with no hope. If you see this life as all there is and as some would say you're trying to live your best life now, you are left with zero hope. Or do you look with eager anticipation for the promises that are to come, then, friends, there is great hope, there is a secure hope and I think it's time that we started to look with an eternal perspective, realizing that we are exiles, citizens of heaven passing through this world and we are headed towards the fullness of eternal life.

But it's with that in mind that we are prepared to endure the various trials and sufferings of this world, so our third point, the purpose of the trials. Peter knew what these people needed to hear and as he is laboring through these verses, he is preparing them for the hard words that are now present before us. Verse 6, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Peter now transitions into the difficult nature of this text, suffering. His instruction will be clear, rejoice in the midst of that suffering, but how do we rejoice? What is the object of our rejoicing? The nature of the trial, it's grievous but you have been grieved by various trials. Trials still grieve us. The point of this passage is not to say that you should be happy your entire life, that you should just feel okay no matter what comes, you just smile constantly. The Bible talks about the fact that there is a time for weeping and mourning. Trials are real and though this command is to rejoice, it is clear here that trials are a grievous thing. They're hard and they cause us to be weary, to be downcast, and my intent is not to make light of the pain that those trials cause. They are very real and often very painful and Peter's language shows that they do, in fact, cause us to grieve.

It's also important to note that Peter calls them various trials. The reason why I tend to think that this was written before the persecution that occurred under Nero because he talks about various trials and is not as pointed but regardless, trials are happening, suffering is happening. Given the context, no matter where you're at in terms of the dating of this letter, what's clear is people are being persecuted. You look at the stories that were coming out during this time, there was illness, there was grief of losing a loved one, but a lot of the persecution they were facing was from their family members that rejected them because of their faith, friends that rejected them. Many of them were mocked openly, spat upon for what they believed. Some of them, their doors were kicked in and they were dragged out by their hair into the streets. Some of them were beaten and still some of them were put to death. So he says various trials, different types of trials and what's important is the varying types and degrees of which people will suffer. There is no one size fits all to suffering. Everyone will deal with their own difficulties in this life.

So what does he mean by a little while? I think this is, again, why it's important that we have that eternal perspective, that this life is actually just a little while, a short time. I don't think he means that you will suffer one time, you'll go through one difficult trial and you're done, you've hit your quota, it lasted for about a week and then I got over it and now life is all hunky-dory. No. Various trials, differing times, differing in nature. Everyone will face hard seasons, that's why we must have eternal perspective.

As we start to look at the fact that we are citizens of heaven and we start to consider the truth that this life is not all there is, in fact, it's pretty short, we're able to look at the trials we face and rejoice. What is the object of our rejoicing? I think it's twofold. I think, first of all, it is future-looking. We rejoice in the blessings that are to come, that there is an eternal inheritance guarded by God for his elect. We rejoice in that, that one day Christ will come and make all things new and the pains of this earth will be gone. But there is also a now-looking purpose, rejoice in the purpose of the outcome of the trial.

So what is the purpose of the trial? What is the purpose of our purification? The purpose is the purification of faith. In high school, I watched the show called "Gold Rush," which apparently is still being filmed. I didn't know that. It's probably pretty fake but it was enjoyable nonetheless on the Discovery Channel, where it's just following all of these people that love to go out and their career was going out and mining in places like Alaska, digging into the ground looking for gold. That's how they got rich. That's how they made their money. And it's honestly pretty fascinating to watch that as they dig up this dirt, they then pass it through a sluice box where it's shaken around with water to get rid of most of the dirt and any false golds or anything like that, and you're left with these flakes of gold. Some of them would be nuggets of gold, and yet those nuggets often had impurities in them, maybe they had veins of fool's gold in them. And so what they would do in order to refine it was burn it down. They would put high heat up with it that would burn off every impurity and every false piece that was in it and what you were left with was a more beautiful and refined piece of gold.

Friends, this is the example that's given here. The "tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire." Fire is not fun language. Fire is actually really hard language. It is tested by fire. Our trials test the genuine nature of our faith and they serve to purify, that there's no such thing for a Christian to have meaningless suffering. There's no such thing, that all of our trials and pains of this earth are doing something for us. They're refining our faith, building us up in Christ, teaching us to be fully dependent upon God and God alone. They're working in us.

There is no such thing as a meaningless suffering and yet I know so many of you in this room are struggling, so many of you are going through hard seasons. Some of you have dealt with a lot of sickness recently, surgeries because of pain. Some of you have dealt with cancer, many of you are still dealing with cancer. Some of you have lost many loved ones, are going through very difficult seasons of life in which it feels like you are just being crushed. But God is at work. That's not to make light of what you're going through and the pain that you're feeling, but it's to call you to put your hope and place your eyes fixed firmly on God who is at work within you. Ultimately through your trial God is preparing you for the glories that are to come. He is refining you and building up your faith through it all.

I go back to the quote that I read just a second ago, their hope, in other words, is the hope of the resurrection, triumph over death, hence whatever happens to them in this world is light compared to the blessings of the future resurrection. He is not saying that your suffering is light in and of itself. Your suffering is not. It's really hard and difficult. It breaks us. It's painful. But when you put it with eternal perspective and you look at the promises that are to come, it does not compare. When we delight in God and we fix our eyes on him, he will carry us and sustain us through it all.

I recently asked a couple in our church, I won't say who they are but most of you will figure it out pretty quickly, who was going through the loss of loved ones, sickness and the return of cancer how they were doing. Most of the time when you ask someone that's going through a difficult season in life how they're doing, you'll get hard answers. "But just all well and good." "I want you to be honest with me." But their response just floored me. I said, "How are you doing?" And through the greatest smile that I have ever seen, they said, "We are trusting in God because we know he's at work." They realized, this is what they told me, they realized that this life was not all there is. They realized that God has the number of days on this earth numbered. He knows them all. You will not live one day shorter than what he has planned and you will not live one day longer. He is in control and God is to be praised because of his power to carry his people to his promises.

It is a glorious truth when we realize what God is doing for us, how God is working in us. It often brings us to our knees but it should bring us to our knees in praise of our Father for the salvation that he has given us, for the truth that he will hold us and carry us through it all, and for the truth that one day we will receive the fullness of the promises of salvation in eternal life. So my ask for you is simply this: suffer in view of eternity. Suffer by fixing your eyes on Christ and all of the joys that are to come. Trust that God is at work in you building and refining your faith as difficult as it is to see sometimes.

Honestly, it's hard to see through fire and that's why we need these words etched in our heart, that's why we need to get up every single day and remind ourselves of the hope of the gospel so that in the midst of the fire, even though we can't see out of it, we can see our Father, we can see Christ seated on the throne at his right hand, and we can see the Spirit working within us, and we can look with eager anticipation for the day when he makes all things new, where there is no more pain, no more sorrows, an eternity of rejoicing.

Beloved, are you suffering? Remind yourself of who you are. Remind yourself that you are a citizen of heaven called by God, sanctified by the Spirit, and cleansed with the blood of Christ. Are you enduring a trial? Do so with your eyes fixed firmly on Christ and the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last days. Are you feeling burdened and broken? Rejoice in the security of your inheritance and trust that God is at work in you in the midst of the fire.

Now these promises are reserved for those who are in Christ. If you are not in Christ, if you are not a believer, these promises are not for you. But if you are in Christ, if you have trusted in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, by the calling of God the Father through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, then these are your promises. God will carry you. God will sustain you. And God is securing and has secured your salvation ready to be more fully realized in the last days.

I want to read for you the final words from the pulpit that Charles Spurgeon ever spoke. "The Lord is the most magnanimous of captains. There never was his like among the choicest of princes. He is always to be found in the thickest part of the battle. When the wind blows cold he always takes the bleak side of the hill. The heaviest end of the cross lies ever on his shoulders. If he bids us carry a burden, he carries it also. If there is anything that is gracious, generous, kind, and tender, yea lavish and superabundant in love, you always find it in him. These forty years and more have I served him, blessed be his name! and I have had nothing but love from him. I would be glad to continue yet another forty years in the same dear service here below if so it pleased him. His service is life, peace, joy. Oh, that you would enter on it at once! God help you to enlist under the banner of Jesus even this day! Amen."

May we all strive towards the day when we receive the full promise of eternal life and hear the words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant."

Let's pray.

Our Father, we have looked at things that are often too marvelous for us to understand. We have seen that even in the midst of the greatest fire, you are there carrying us and sustaining us as we look to the day when you will make all things new. So God, for all of those in this room who are enduring any hardships, any pains and trials, I pray that you would encourage them, encourage them in the truth that they belong to you, encourage them with the truth that their citizenship is not on earth but in heaven. I pray that you would remind them of their need for the gospel each day as they endure. Father, I pray

that you would build them up in faith as you are refining their faith through the trial, and I pray that they may echo the words of Peter, "Praise be to our God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." Lord Jesus, we need you every hour. Be with us and carry us to the end when our faith shall be sight. Lord, it is by your power that we pray all of these things and in the name of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.