

Kept by the Power of God

The New Birth Part 4

1 Peter 1:4-5 4-14-2012 & 4-15-2012

Summary: Before Peter gets to his big theme of joy in suffering he first has to lay the groundwork of hope. So he talks about our inheritance/salvation being imperishable, undefilable, and unfading (unlike anything in this world). And not only is our inheritance kept for us, we are kept for it. God preserves us by means of our faith.

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1 Peter 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Introduction

If you need to know how to have joy in the midst of suffering, you are going to love the book of 1 Peter. That is a major theme in the book, but the topic of suffering is not mentioned the first time until verse 6. Before Peter ever mentions suffering, he first talks about hope, because hope is the only way to have joy in suffering. Hope is when you are in an elevated mood right now because you are anticipating some really great thing that you know for sure is going to happen. And that is what carries us through suffering. If we do not have hope, suffering will overwhelm us, and we will fail at every point of the Christian walk. We will fail at obedience, fail at faithfulness, fail at joy, fail at perseverance, and we will be absolutely manhandled and destroyed by suffering. So before saying anything about suffering, Peter first pushes our attention forward in time to our glorious inheritance.

Secure Inheritance

3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope ... 4 into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade

The object of our hope is described in a number of ways. First he calls it an **inheritance**, then he calls it the **salvation that's ready to be revealed in the last time**. Later he will call it God's "wonderful light" (2:9), "heaven" (1:5), "the crown of glory" (5:4), the grace of life (3:7), an inherited blessing (3:9), and "eternal glory" (5:10). And each different phrase gives us added insight into what it is going to be like.

Inheritance

When God describes it as an **inheritance**, the purpose of that metaphor is to emphasize the fact that it belongs to you. And also that it is an entire estate – a whole, wide variety of things – everything your Father in heaven owns, and there is a share of that that belongs specifically to you. The fact that it is **kept in heaven** means the inheritance is not just our arrival in heaven. Don't think of final salvation as just getting to heaven. There is *something* up there that is being kept for you. Last week when I told you that Christ is the inheritance – I did not mean to imply that the only thing up in heaven will be God. Sometimes people speak of heaven as though there will be no material blessings. We do that because we are so acutely aware of the problem of idolatry with God's gifts now. So sometimes preachers make it sound like the only things that will exist in heaven are people and God. That is not true. There will be "stuff" in the eternal state, just like in this world – things that God uses to express His goodness and love. The problem of idolatry will be gone forever, but the way God eliminates that as a problem is not by eliminating gifts and blessings and mediated goodness. Rather, He prevents idolatry simply by eliminating all sinful tendencies in our hearts.

For You

So there is stuff waiting for us, and not just for us as a group, but for you in particular. Notice how Peter switches pronouns.

3 he has given us new birth ... 4 into an inheritance ... kept in heaven for you

Instead of sticking with that "us" and saying it in a generic way, Peter really wants the reader to think, "It's being kept for ME personally."

John 14:2 In my Father's house are many rooms ... I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

It is a place that has been prepared specifically for *you*. It is your possession. People in the world get lots of gifts from God, but not an inheritance. They get sunshine, rain for their crops, food to eat, all the delights of this wonderful creation – but no inheritance.

As God's children, we get personalized gifts.

Revelation 2:17 him who overcomes, I will give ... a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

There is a reward in heaven with your name on it. There is a crown that can never go on any head but yours. There is a seat at His table where no one else will ever sit – it is yours. 1 Kings 4:25 says that when the people of Israel got their inheritance from God, each man sat under his own fig tree. That is where the imagery of an "inheritance" from God originally came from. On the New Earth you will have your own plot of ground. And whatever fruit trees or forest or river or mountain or garden

that is on your property will be an everlasting gift from God to you and you alone, supplying you with unending enjoyment of God's love.

And it is not just a single object – it is an entire estate. It is all that the Father owns. It is a huge, massive, complex of wonderful gifts – more than you could finish exploring throughout all eternity.

Salvation

So in that sense it is like an inheritance. In another sense it is like salvation, which is the term he uses in verse 5 to describe the same thing. And here Peter uses the word “salvation” in the future sense. There are three phases of our salvation – past, present and future. When Scripture uses the word “salvation,” sometimes it refers to the past - what already happened to us at our conversion. That is usually how we tend to use the word. We say, “When where you first saved?” Or “How long have you been saved?”

Other time Scripture speaks of salvation as an ongoing, present tense reality. We are being saved right now. Peter talks that way in verse 9.

1 Peter 1:9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

And still other times salvation is spoken of as a future reality. We are going to be saved in the future. And that is how Peter is using the term here. He is talking about salvation in the ultimate, final sense. And in that sense, none of us have been saved yet. None of us have received the full inheritance yet. It is something we will receive at the resurrection.

So by using these two terms – inheritance and salvation, Peter is showing us both the positive side and the negative side. On the positive side, he calls it an inheritance, to emphasize that it is a good thing we will receive. On the negative side he calls it salvation, to emphasize that it is also a deliverance or rescue from bad things that exist now. It is both the receiving of every good gift from God and the end of all trouble and pain.

Ready

And it is **ready to be revealed in the last time**. Nothing remains to be done. It does not need any final touches. It has passed all the inspections, God has the certificate of occupancy in hand – it is ready right now. Our inheritance is something that already exists, and only needs to be unveiled. The delay is not due to something not being ready yet. It is only because God's perfect timing has not arrived. It will be unveiled and we will receive it **in the last time** – the very end when Jesus returns and we receive our glorified bodies at the resurrection.

Unlike this World's Delights

So Peter tells us a lot just by the words he chooses to refer to it. But beyond that he wants to describe it to us further in verse 4. And the first thing Peter wants us to know about his inheritance is that it is utterly unlike anything in this world.

4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

Those three words rhyme in the Greek: *aphtharton, amainton, amaranton* - **imperishable, undefilable, unfading**. And all three are negatives – describing things that cannot happen to this inheritance. It cannot perish, cannot be defiled, and cannot fade. Instead of saying it in a positive way – eternal, pure, and enduring, he has to say it in the negative way so we can relate. Sometimes the best way to really understand something is to see what it is the opposite of. We are so immersed in the curse and the fallenness of this world that we understand best when God shows which of the bad things we are used to that will not be a factor.

Imperishable

And the biggest thing we are used to in this world is perishing. We live in a world where everything crumbles – everything eventually wears out, falls apart, breaks down, rusts, decays, gets corrupted. It does not matter if it is made out of steel, or gold, or granite – it will eventually fall apart. It happens to governments, civilizations, cultures, it happens to philosophies and ideas, it happens to musical styles, computer programs, organizations, relationships – everything in our world moves toward ruin in some way. So the only way God can communicate to us what an eternal inheritance is like is through the negative – it is *not* like everything else we are used to. Everything that disappoints you, frustrates you, leaves you unfulfilled in this life – none of that will be a problem when you receive this salvation. It is imperishable.

Undefilable

Secondly, it is undefilable. It is not subject to defilement or impurity of any kind. Unlike an earthly inheritance, there is never a situation where moral compromise might be required to get or keep or enjoy this inheritance. Earthly treasures can be defiled in all three ways. We sin to get them, we sin to keep them, and we enjoy them in sinful ways. None of that will be an issue with our eternal inheritance. We will not be able to spoil it by obtaining it in questionable ways or with wrong motives. We will not be able to ruin it by being greedy with it or holding on to it in some sinful way. And best of all, we will not be able to enjoy it or indulge in it in sinful ways. That last one just really blows my mind. We will not be able to turn it into an idol, over-emphasize a portion of it, get out of balance with it, we will not be able to use it in an unloving way, we will not be able to become distracted from God by it – none of that will be possible. All our enjoyment of it will only be pure and holy and honoring to God, because it is undefilable.

Unfading

And third, it will be unfading. The term “fading” was used to describe what happens to flowers. They lose their beauty and loveliness. Unfading is the opposite of that. This inheritance will never fade in beauty or desirability. Everything in our existence gets old. You stand at the rim of the Grand Canyon and you are blown away – for a while. But eventually you get used to it, and you have taken in all there is to take in, and you turn around and go home. Even the most exciting thing in this world, if you do it too much, gets boring. The greatest food in this world, if you eat it too much, becomes unpleasant. Nothing in the whole creation could possibly satisfy us for eternity. Given enough time, even the most wonderful things in life lose their beauty in our eyes.

But our eternal inheritance will not be like that. That joy and happiness you feel when you first get something really great – it will start like that and just increase from there, rather than decrease.

So this inheritance is death-proof, sin-proof, and time-proof. It is out of reach of the curse. It is out of the reach of sin. It is out of the reach of even of time. Nothing can happen to it.

Luke 12:33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

Treasures that are subject to decay or loss provide a dying hope. Even that \$400 million inheritance I told you about last week is a dying hope. That is why many times millionaires have committed suicide. It is a dying hope. It does not deliver what it promises. It just exchanges one set of headaches and heartaches for another. And it is a constant battle just to keep from losing it. But your eternal inheritance is **kept in heaven for you (v.4)**.

Secure Inheritors

“OK, the *inheritance* is secure, but what about me? I am not worried about God fumbling my inheritance on His end; but I am really worried that I will not be able to persevere. I have temptations and weaknesses, and I am so prone to wander from God, and I just do not know if I can stay faithful for the rest of my life. What if it just becomes too much for me and I fall away?”

That is an important question, isn't it? What good is it if the inheritance is secure on His end but not on our end? If the treasure is locked in a vault, what good is that to me if I never make it to the vault?

Is Perseverance Necessary?

Some teachers answer the question this way – they say it does not even matter if you persevere to the end – you will get the inheritance either way. People like Charles Stanley teach that if you believe for a moment, that locks you in, and after that you could turn away from the faith and ultimately deny Christ altogether, and still you would go to heaven. (I don't mean to rip on Charles Stanley. He does say a lot of wonderful things. However in his book titled Eternal Security he said that a person can get saved by believing temporarily, then stop believing altogether and walk away from the faith and still go to heaven.¹) That is the opposite of what the Bible says.

Colossians 1:22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-- 23 if you continue in your faith

If you do not continue in your faith, you will not be presented pure and forgiven on Judgment Day. Final salvation is conditioned on our persevering to the end. “But what if I believe at one point, but I do not continue in that faith all the way to the end?”

1 Corinthians 15:2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

If you are not a believer at the time of your death, whatever you did in the past is in vain. Do not let anyone lead you astray on this. You must persevere all the way to the end in order to be saved. That is very clear in Scripture.

Matthew 24:12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, 13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

So if you have some concern about whether or not you will be able to hang in there all the way to the end, that is a legitimate concern. If it were not, there would not be the many, many urgent warnings in Scripture exhorting us to make sure we persevere and do not fall away.

Kept by the Power of God

So when Peter says, “Don't worry – God will guard your inheritance,” we say, “That's great, but what about me? I'm afraid I won't be able to preserve all the way to the end” – what is the solution to that? If the solution is not to say, “Oh, don't worry – even if you fall away you'll still go to heaven” – if that is not the answer, then what is?

Peter is not going to leave us with just half of our salvation secure. He knows that I need God to not only keep a grip on my inheritance, but to also keep a grip on *me*. I need God to not only keep my inheritance for me, but also to keep me for my inheritance. And that is exactly what God promises to do.

¹ Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security*, 74.91,93.

4 [He has given us new birth] into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you, 5 who, by God's power, are shielded...

It is not just the inheritance that is guarded and protected and preserved; we are too. On His end, God sees to it that no hostile force can come and take your inheritance. And on our end, God works in us to enable us to persevere all the way to the end. He keeps us. That is why you are still saved. If you think you are capable of keeping yourself saved, your level of self-esteem is WAY too high. If it were not for the preserving grace of God acting on our hearts, we would all fall away. If you are a Christian right now, you will not still be a Christian by bed time tonight unless God pours out His preserving grace.

And so He promises that grace. And oh, what a blessed promise it is! It is part of the New Covenant.

Ezekiel 11:19 I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them...20 Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.

Jeremiah 31:32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant

One of the promises of the New Covenant is that we will receive a new heart that will be inclined to continue in obedience and remain faithful to God. Our perseverance is His doing.

2 Corinthians 1:21 Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.

This is a doctrine that should cause us great joy and comfort, but some people are not comforted at all by it because, once again, they cannot understand how it fits with free will. They say, "It's up to me if I remain faithful to God or not. It's a decision I have to make." And they cannot imagine how God could possibly keep them faithful without interfering with their free will. Can God do that? Is He capable of keeping me from falling without overriding my own will? Yes – He can manage that.

Jude 24 To him who is able to keep you from falling ... be glory, majesty, power

2 Timothy 1:12 I am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

"But if He doesn't override your free will, then how does He do it?"

Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act

He does not override your will, He does not force you against your will – He works in you so that your will is voluntarily on board.

And this is not an obscure doctrine in the New Testament. We see these promises again and again.

2 Thessalonians 3:3 the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

It is God who preserves you. Think about it – why do you think it is that you are still a Christian after all this time, when you are so wishy-washy in every other area of life? You join a health club, you go faithfully for three weeks, then it peters out. You start up a new routine for your daily chores, a year later it is completely forgotten. How many of us have half-finished projects sitting in our basement or garage that just sit there as a monument to our lack of follow-through? You commit to a strict diet, it goes by the wayside. You once told someone, "Best friends forever!" and now you have not talked to that person in ten years. Many of you started out in one career path, but now that is a distant memory. Or you enrolled in school, but did not graduate. Some of us cannot even finish reading a book! We are so easily diverted.

And I am not saying that is always bad. Some paths are not worth continuing down. Not every degree or project or book should be finished. So I am not saying it is a bad thing that we are so wishy-washy; all I am saying is that we are wishy-washy. We bail out of almost everything we ever start.

And yet, the most difficult thing we have ever started in our lives is our walk with the Lord. All those things we have bailed out of – those things offered us immediate, visible, tangible rewards in this life, and we still could not stay committed. But Christianity offers us things we cannot see or touch, promises we will never receive until the next life, and it demands of us more than any other commitment we have ever made. And yet, after all this time – you are still a Christian! How do you explain that? It is so absolutely out of character for most of us, it should be obvious that there is another power – an outside force that is holding us in. And that is exactly what Scripture says.

1 Corinthians 1:8 He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 ... May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

God did not just throw you a copy of the Bible and say, “Sink or swim – good luck.” He preserves you.

By Faith

But how does He do it? What is the mechanism God uses to keep us? We have powerful forces fighting against us – the world, the flesh, demons, Satan – all marshaling considerable power against us to try to pull us away from God. What mechanism does God use to keep us from falling? Is it just automatic? No matter what we do, we just cannot fall away even if we tried? Does it just happen by itself? Or is there something we have to do to gain access to this preserving ministry of God? The answer is in verse 5.

4 ...[the inheritance is] kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power

It is not automatic; it is not independent of you. You do have a role. There is something you have to do in order to have access to the preserving ministry of God: faith.

Just like Everything Else

And that should not come as any surprise to anyone – faith is always the way to gain access to grace from God.

Romans 5:2 we have gained access by faith into this grace

It is by faith that we receive everything - including new birth.

John 1:12 to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God

It is by faith we receive justification (Ro.3:28), purification (Acts 15:9), sanctification (Acts 26:18), righteousness (Ro.1:17); it is by faith that we receive the promises (Ga.3:14, Ro.4:16). Even good works are by faith (1 Thes.1:3-4, Heb.11). Everything in the Christian life comes to us through faith.

So we won't boast

God made it that way so we would not boast.

Romans 3:22 This righteousness from God comes through faith ... 27 Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? ... on that of faith.

If something is by faith, we have nothing to brag about. There is something we have to do, there is a role that we play, there is a responsibility that we have – but it is not something that makes us deserving. It is not something that gives us any bragging rights, because it is something that even a little child can do, namely – trust. Nobody in his right mind brags about doing something that even a

little child can do. So God gave us a requirement that gives us no glory, but that gives Him glory. We get all that grace just by trusting God.² So if everything else in the Christian life is conditioned on faith, it should not come as a big shock to anyone that the preserving grace of God is also accessed by faith.

2 Corinthians 1:24 it is by faith you stand firm.

In Romans 11 Paul is talking about how Israel fell away, and they became like branches that were cut off from a tree. But then he says this:

Romans 11:20 they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. 22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. 23 And if they do not persist in unbelief, they will be grafted in

Everything depends on faith.

Not Absolute in this Life

Now, I realize this raises a lot of questions. On the one hand God promises to preserve us and to keep us from falling away. On the other hand it is dependent on faith, which means if we refuse to believe – if we allow our faith to cease – then we will fall away. And Scripture warns us again and again about that danger. So how do those two things go together? If it is possible for faith to fail, then why does God promise He will preserve us? And if He promises to preserve us, then how can falling away be a real danger? How can both be true?

There are a couple different answers theologians have suggested. Some say it is just a paradox. There is no easy answer. It is just one of those mysteries where we have to believe both sides and not worry about how they fit together. Others solve the problem by saying the promise of preservation is a real promise, but it is not absolute in this life. God promises us lots of things that are not absolute in this life. He promises us inner peace and freedom from anxiety, and He promises us rest, He promises physical healing, He promises to protect us from Satan and keep us from sin, He promises to give us joy – all those promises we receive in a partial way in this life and in an absolute way in the next life. And some theologians would say the promise that God will preserve us and keep us from falling away is in that category. God provides it; He makes it available; but He also makes it conditioned on faith, so our experience of it depends on whether or not we are willing to continue in faith. And that is why there are warnings about falling away.

My personal view is that second view. And I gave a little more of a defense of that view in the appendix of the notes, so you can read that if you are interested. But whichever view you take, the important thing is this: Every moment that you continue to remain a Christian is due to God's preserving grace. While Scripture calls us to be alert and on our guard and vigilant to make sure we persevere to the end, one thing it never tells us to do is worry.

He Enables Faith

“But what if my faith can't hold up? What if some trial or hardship or temptation comes along that overwhelms my faith?”

That cannot happen. Nothing can overwhelm your faith. That is part of the promise of preservation. As long as you are *willing* to continue to believe, you will be *able* to continue to believe. Nothing will ever happen to you that will be too much for your faith to endure – ever.

² The act of trusting is itself a work of God. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit you would never be inclined to trust Him. So we thank God even for our own faith. However Scripture also places the responsibility to believe squarely on our shoulders, and it is definitely our responsibility. And how those two truths fit together is another one of the great mysteries.

1 Corinthians 10:13 he will not let you be tested beyond what you can bear.

God enables us to continue to believe. So when a huge trial comes – major suffering, or some irresistible temptation, or some impossible intellectual problem where you think you see contradictions in the Bible, or extreme fatigue or depression or whatever threatens to pull you away from the Lord – none of it has the power to overwhelm your faith. It will overwhelm your faith if you let it, but only if you let it, and you do not have to let it. You have the ability to continue to believe.

How does it Work?

And if you do continue in faith, you will not fall away. As long as you continue to believe, you will continue to obey and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Here is how it works: When major suffering comes into your life, your main question is not, “Why is this happening to me?” or “When will it end?” The biggest question is your heart is, “What does the Bible say about suffering? How does God want me to respond to this?” So you look to Scripture to find the answer, and when you find it, you accept it. And when I say, “accept it,” I mean you believe it with your mind, and you trust in it with your emotions and will. And if you do that, no suffering will be able to push you away from God.

It works the same way with temptation. Some huge temptation comes your way. You are tempted to give up on your marriage, or tempted with some wrong relationship, or tempted to hold a grudge against someone who really hurt you – you respond by asking, “What promises has God made that are better than this thing that is tempting me?” Because what God promises is always better than what He forbids. And you look to God’s Word and find those promises, and you cling to those. You fix your thoughts on those promises until your heart really does prefer those things over the temptation. That is how to overcome temptation by faith.

What about direct attacks on your faith itself – doubt? What do you do when the enemy hits you with doubts? I think the best way to handle doubts is to doubt them. Why not? As long as you are on a roll of doubting, go ahead and just doubt all your doubts.

So a thought comes into your head, “What if none of this is actually true? What if I just believe Christianity because my parents told me it’s true, just like Muslims believe their religion is true just because their mom and dad told them? What if the skeptics are right, and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead really is just a myth?”

What do you do when thoughts like that come up? Do what any good scientist does when he comes up with a new theory – doubt it. Test it. Put it under scrutiny. If doubts pop into my mind, and I think, “What if Christianity isn’t true?” I just say to my brain, “OK, brain, if you want to explore being a non-Christian, fine. Let’s be non-Christian for a minute.” Now, I have got nagging doubts about my non-Christianity. What if this non-Christianity is not even true? What if Jesus actually did rise from the dead? If I want to continue in my non-Christianity with any kind of intellectual integrity, I have to explain what happened to Jesus’ body. Why was the tomb empty? What happened that made the Disciples go from not believing (even when they saw the empty tomb), to believing so much they were willing to suffer and die for the message that Jesus was risen? How do I explain all the appearances of Jesus after the crucifixion? How do I explain all the reliable, eye-witness accounts? How do I explain all the prophecies in Scripture, where specific details and even names are given hundreds of years in advance with perfect accuracy?

It does not take much of that to realize that the only way you can be a non-Christian is by blind faith in your non-Christianity. Because if you have any intellectual integrity at all you have to admit that non-Christianity cannot stand up to the facts. The reason people are pulled away from Christianity by doubts is because they want to be pulled away. They are willing to be pulled away, and so they turn their attention to all the problems and difficulties with Christianity, but they close their eyes to the problems and difficulties of agnosticism or whatever other form of non-Christianity they want to embrace.

Whatever the threat to your faith – as long as you are willing to believe the truth you will be able to believe the truth. And as long as you believe the truth you will follow the truth and obey the truth, and you will not turn away from God.

So we are kept by faith. Does that mean faith has the power to keep you? Is faith powerful? No. Faith has no power at all. The power that keeps you is God's grace. All faith does is open the valve. There is a fire hose of grace that is available – faith is just the valve that opens up the hose. Faith has no power at all. Only grace has power. But the only way to get that grace is through opening the valve of faith. And God has placed your hand on that valve. You are able to keep it open no matter what trouble comes.

Conclusion: Has Something Happened to Your Inheritance?

Why do you think God devotes so much real estate in His holy Word to passages that do nothing but tell us about our inheritance? They do not command anything, no direct imperatives – just descriptions of heaven. Why? Why not just make it a surprise? God wants us to know a lot about our inheritance because it puts His goodness on display and glorifies Him when His people live in hope - when our joy is untouched by the troubles of life because we understand that our inheritance is far greater than anything we ever lose or stand to lose in this world.

The next time you feel yourself start to get irritated over something, or you are tempted to lose patience with someone, or get angry or worried or overcome with anxiety – the next time that starts to happen to you just ask yourself, “Why am I upset? Did something happen to my inheritance? Did something happen to the object of my hope? Has the basis for my joy been jeopardized in any way? Is this thing I just lost even in the same ballpark of importance as the inheritance that I did not lose? Am I assuming God is no longer going to behave like God now?”

When the troubles of this world are able to touch my joy, my joy is coming from the wrong place, and I need to preach to my soul: “Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God. Nothing has happened to your inheritance!”

Benediction: 1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.

Application Questions:

- 1) What are two or three of the biggest disappointments you have endured in recent years? Talk with the group about how different your eternal inheritance will be than those things that disappointed you.
- 2) Some people err on the side of feeling so secure that they become complacent – as though perseverance were automatic with no real danger of falling. Others err on the other side – worrying and fretting over whether they will be able to preserve to the end. Which side do you tend toward? And what could you do to change that?
- 3) Of the three examples at the end of the sermon on how to tap in to preserving grace by faith, which is most important for you to try to remember?

- A. When major suffering comes into your life, ask, “What does the Bible say about how God wants me to respond to this?” When you find the answer in Scripture accept it.
- B. When a major temptation comes, look to God’s Word and find promises that are greater than the thing God forbids, and fix your thoughts on them until you really do prefer them over the sin.
- C. When doubts come – doubt them.

Appendix

Not Absolute in this Life

Now, I realize this raises a lot of questions. On the one hand God promises to preserve us and to keep us from falling away. On the other hand it is dependent on faith, which means if we refuse to believe – if we allow our faith to cease – then we will fall away and Scripture warns us again and again about that danger. So how do those two things go together? If it is possible for faith to fail, then why does God promise He will preserve us? And if He promises to preserve us, then how can falling away be a real danger? How can both be true?

The answer to that question is a matter of a great deal of debate, and it has been for hundreds of years. And I do not claim to have all the answers. There are differing views on this even within this church. I am not going to take the time to go into all the ins and outs of the whole debate right now, because I don't want us to get distracted from the main point of the passage. So I will just give you a brief statement of how I understand this controversy, and you can decide for yourself.

Of all the benefits we receive as children of God, some of them we receive in a full, final, complete form right away, and others we receive in a partial way in this life and in a full way only in the next life. For example – justification. That is an example of something we get 100% here and now in this life. Most benefits of Christianity, however, are only partial in this life. For example, the promise of joy. We get that in some measure now, but the full, complete joy of our salvation comes only in heaven. And so Scripture can promise us joy in this life, and yet there is still a real possibility of sorrow.

Another example is the promise that God will protect us from Satan. Is that an absolute promise in this life, or is there still some danger that we need to be alert to? Peter says we are to watch out for Satan, who prowls around like a roaring lion. Paul warns us to put on spiritual armor. So yes, we are protected in a partial way, but not in an absolute way in this life.

A third example is deliverance from sin. Does God promise to set us apart from sin and work obedience in our hearts? Absolutely. But do we get that in an absolute way here and now, or a partial way? We get it in a partial way. The reality is that even though we have been sanctified and set apart from sin, still – we struggle with ongoing sin in our lives. We get that promise in an absolute way only in the next life.

So the question is – this promise that God will preserve us – is that an absolute promise in this life – guaranteed in every case in an absolute way? Or is it in the other category – like the promise of joy? God provides it; He enables us to take hold of it; it is available – but it is not an absolute guarantee in this life? Which is it?

If you look up this word that Peter uses in verse 5 – **shielded** (your Bible might say, “protected” or “guarded”) – there is only one other time in the New Testament when that word is used in a positive way like it is here, and that is in **Philippians 4:7 the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus**. In that case, everyone would agree that the promise is partial and conditional. It is partial in this life in the sense that we do not have perfect peace. Sometimes we have only a little bit of peace, sometimes a little more – it comes and goes depending in large measure on whether we are meeting the condition (thankful prayer). And even when the condition is met, the promise of peace is not complete in this life. It is partial.

I believe this promise of guarding should be taken the same way. It is conditioned on faith, and our experience of it varies depending on how much faith we have. I realize that is a very controversial view, and if you hold a differing view I respect that. I don't think it is an issue worth dividing over – I just offer my view for whatever it is worth.

Hopefully what we can agree on is this – whether you believe the promise of preservation is absolute in this life like the promise of justification, or you believe it is only partial in this life like the

promise of inner peace and freedom from anxiety – either way, it is an exceedingly precious promise that should cause us to greatly rejoice.