

On April 5th, 1943, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was arrested and imprisoned by the Gestapo for his political activities against the German Nazi regime. He saw that the church was being persecuted and that his country was heading toward the abyss, and he decided to do something about it. So, he spoke out against the Nazis, but eventually his words caught up with him, and two years later, he found himself facing the death sentence.

On the day when the sentence was to be carried out, a Sunday, he led a service in the prison which housed men of various nationalities. One prisoner, an English army officer, who was also facing the death sentence but was later set free, wrote these words describing the last day of Bonhoeffer's life:

"Bonhoeffer always seemed to me to spread an atmosphere of happiness and joy over the least incident, and profound gratitude for the mere fact that he was alive... He was one of the very few persons I have ever met for whom God was real and always near... On Sunday, April 8, 1945, Pastor Bonhoeffer conducted a little service of worship and spoke to us in a way that went to the heart of all of us. He found just the right words to express the spirit of our imprisonment, and the thoughts and resolutions it had brought us. He had hardly ended his last prayer when the door opened and two civilians entered. They said, "Prisoner Bonhoeffer, come with us." That had only one meaning for all prisoners – the gallows. We said good-bye to him. He took me aside: "This is the end; but for me it is the beginning of life." The next day he was hanged in Flossenbürg. ""

How could Bonhoeffer seem to hold it all together in light of the persecution that he suffered? How could he stare death in the face with such hope? That's what I want to explore with you this morning as we continue our study of **1 Peter**.

If you recall from last week, Peter wrote a letter, because the recipients of this letter were suffering in a very hostile world.

If you remember, Roman Emperor Nero had set the city of Rome on fire – he wanted to rebuild the city according to his own liking, but when the people of Rome began to turn on him, he found a scapegoat, and he blamed the innocent Christians for setting fire to the city. Within a few months, Christians were being severely persecuted all over the Roman Empire – to include these churches in the providences of Asia Minor to whom Peter wrote. It was a very difficult time – a time of intense suffering for these Christians, which again raises the question:

How can Christians, like Bonhoeffer and so many others, have hope in the midst of their suffering?

Let's look for an answer, so turn with me to **1 Peter 1**, beginning with **verse 3**, where Peter says,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Tell me, where in the Bible does it say, "*God helps those who help themselves?*"

Nowhere. It's not in the Bible, in fact, the Bible teaches just the opposite – God helps those who are utterly helpless – they can't help themselves. And for those who are helpless, we are told in this passage that God is moved by **mercy**, which is a compassion for those who are in distress, and case in point, Peter reminds us that our salvation came as the result of God's mercy towards us because we were in dire straits, we deserved God's punishment for our sin, and we were helpless – utterly helpless to do anything about it. We were in distress and needed mercy!

And because of God's great mercy towards us, He provided salvation to us – a salvation that is only found in Jesus Christ. Paul tells us in **Acts 4:12**,

"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Salvation is provided through Jesus and Jesus alone, and for those who would come to Jesus by faith – for those who would trust Jesus as their Savior and Lord, God caused them to be born again, to experience a new birth – a new life in Christ.

And if you noticed, Peter tells us that we are born again to a **living hope**. Not just any hope, but a living hope. Salvation brings a living hope, a hope that has life in it, because it is focused on our living Savior. Jesus is our source of living hope – a hope that tells us death is not the end.

A man had a checkup and then went to see his doctor to get the results. The doctor said he'd better sit down – that he had bad news and worse news for him. Then the doctor asked the man, "Which do you want to hear first?" The man was a bit puzzled and said he'd rather hear the bad news first. The doctor said, "The bad news is that you have only 24 hours to live." When he heard that, the man jumped up, totally shocked. He paced back and forth and said, "24 hours to live? I can't possibly get my affairs in order that quickly. I can't believe this! What could be possibly be worse news than this?" The doctor said, "The worse news is that I was supposed to tell you this yesterday, but I forgot. Sorry."

Death is certain for us all – but just as certain, is the believer's living hope of eternal life. This living hope is as certain and sure as the fact that Jesus is alive.

Because Jesus arose from the grave, we know that death is not the end for those in Christ, in fact, just as Bonhoeffer said before his execution, “*This is the end; but for me it is the beginning of life.*”

The resurrection of Jesus is the basis for our living hope and this gives us reason for praise. In our passage this morning, this is the only thing we are called to do – to praise God for His great mercy – a mercy that has caused us to be born again to a living hope – a hope that reminds us that death in this life is not the end of life, rather it is just the beginning of an unimaginable life.

Peter continues, and he says our living hope in Jesus also guarantees the promise of a better future. Look at **verse 4**,

to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

Peter tells us that as born-again believers; our living hope in Jesus includes a future inheritance given to us as a free gift by virtue of our new birth in Christ. Heaven, our future home, is our inheritance.

One day, Jesus told His disciples He would be leaving them soon – Jesus knew that very shortly, He was on His way to the cross. And as you might imagine, the disciples did not take this news very well, so in **John 14:1-3**, Jesus said to them,

“Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.”

And where is Jesus? He’s in heaven. Now, some are under the assumption that when we go to heaven up there, that is our final destination, our last stop, but that’s not entirely the case. Turn with me to **Revelation 21**. John tells us, beginning with **verse 1**,

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death;

there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

Our inheritance not only includes a heavenly home when we leave this world, but after the final judgment, God will create a new heaven and a new earth, and God Himself will dwell on this new earth. Essentially, heaven, as we know it, as we can imagine it, comes down to earth, and where God is – there we will be also. As believers in Christ, this is the eternal future we hope for – **and how long is eternity?** Eternity is as long as God lives.

Now if you noticed back in **1 Peter 1:4**, Peter described our inheritance as being **imperishable**, it's **undefiled**, it **will not fade away**, and it's **reserved** for those who have been born-again.

Imperishable means our inheritance is free from death and decay. It can't be ruined and it can't be destroyed. We might say our inheritance is *death-proof*.

I have never received an earthly inheritance, so I don't know that experience, but if you want to add me to your will just so I can have that experience, that would be awesome. With that said, any earthly inheritance would be worthless if I died before I obtained it. But, unlike an earthly inheritance, our heavenly inheritance is death-proof, in fact, we get to experience the full reality of it only after we leave this world and go to the next. It is only fully realized and appreciated and experienced in the future – in the life to come.

We are told our inheritance is **undefiled**, which means it is free from moral impurity or uncleanness of any kind. It can't be cheapened or stained by sin. In other words, our inheritance is *sin-proof*.

Then Peter tells us that our inheritance **will not fade away**. It is free from the ravages of time. It does not wither. Earthly inheritances get used up over time, but our inheritance from God is inexhaustible. It is *time-proof*.

Our inheritance is untouched by death, unstained by evil, and unfading by time, and lastly, it is **reserved** in heaven. This is a great word and the idea is that our inheritance is laid up and kept for us in heaven. It is an inheritance that already exists, it's ours, it's guaranteed, and it is being safely watched over and preserved by God Himself in heaven.

Nothing can diminish or destroy what God has already determined to give to us. Our inheritance is in God's care, and it has been put aside for safe-keeping. Our inheritance is something to hope for, and it's this hope that changes our outlook for the future and our perspective in our present circumstances.

Several years ago, Parade Magazine carried the story of the self-made millionaire Eugene Land and how he greatly changed the lives of a sixth-grade class in East Harlem. Mr. Land had been asked to speak to a class of 59 sixth-graders. He thought to himself, “What can I say to make a difference in the lives of these students, most of whom would eventually drop out of school?” He wondered how he could get these kids from broken homes in this slum neighborhoods to even look at him.

When he arrived at the school and stood before the class of innocent faces, he scrapped his notes and decided to speak to them from his heart.

"Stay in school," he admonished, "and I'll help pay the college tuition for every one of you." At that moment the lives of these students changed forever. For the first time they had hope. Said one student, "I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling." Nearly 90 percent of that class went on to graduate from high school!

That's what hope can do. In the here and now, we can view our future with optimism and praise, even in the midst of our present circumstances because we have hope – a living hope.

As a result of God's great mercy, He has provided salvation to us. We have a living hope because we have a living Savior, and our hope also includes an inheritance that is death-proof, it is sin-proof, it is time-proof, and it is reserved – it is guaranteed for us in heaven.

But Peter is not finished. Look at **verse 5**.

⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this passage, Peter shifts his focus from the inheritance to the heir of the inheritance – the believer. Peter says the believer is also protected, and he uses the Greek word “*phroureo*” which is best described as being guarded under continuous protective custody. So, the believer's inheritance is kept safe in heaven, while the believer is protected in this world – which makes sense when you think about it. What good is it to have a guaranteed heavenly inheritance if the heir of the inheritance is not able to receive it? It has to be all or nothing.

Our inheritance is kept safe in heaven, while we who are born again are protected in this world. Our salvation is secure because it is protected by the only One who

has the power to protect it. We are not protected by our own power; we are not guarded by our own strength – instead our protection is the result of God's power and we can be assured that God will finish what He started. Paul tells us this in **Philippians 1:6**,

"For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."

We are protected by the power of God through faith. We are born-again, saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and as born-again believers, we are to continue to live our lives in faith until our heavenly inheritance is fully realized.

Does this mean that believers are shielded from pain, and problems, and hardship, and suffering? No, unfortunately, not – but having a living hope about our future does change our perspective toward the circumstances we experience in the present.

I was reminded of something Paul said on the issue of our present suffering in light of our hope for the future. Turn with me to **2 Corinthians 4:16-18**. Listen to this.

Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

So, what is Paul telling us? Life is hard, and outwardly, the suffering, the hardships, the pressure, the stress, and the disappointments take their toll on us. To varying degrees, we take a beating in this life, so much so, that we become worn down and worn out.

But in spite of this, Paul described our suffering as being **light** and **momentary**. I understand what Paul is saying, but I suspect there are some who might disagree with him on his choice of words, because your troubles, and your suffering, and your afflictions may not seem light and momentary – instead they might seem hard and chronic and unbearable.

Paul wasn't minimizing the difficult and trying circumstances we all face – he wasn't down playing our problems and our suffering, rather he was giving us a different perspective – meaning the suffering we face in this present life is only considered minor and temporary in comparison to our future reality. Someone

once said, “*Even if one were to live for a hundred years and suffer every day, by the measure of eternity it is but for a moment.*”

Outwardly, we are wasting away, but inwardly – in the here and now, our suffering is transforming us spiritually, we are being made like Christ in preparation for the future glory to come – our inheritance. There is a purpose for our suffering. So, Paul says, do not lose heart, don’t give up, and essentially, Peter is saying the same thing to his readers, and to you and me as well.

There is no need to minimize our problems or pretend that we don’t suffer in this life. We do suffer and we do experience problems, but with that said, we have a living hope in the living Savior – Jesus Christ. We have a guaranteed inheritance that is safely kept for us in heaven, and as born-again believers, we are under God’s protective custody. It’s this living hope that changes our outlook for the future and our perspective in our present circumstances, as difficult as they may be.

There is a beautiful song called “Shelter” by the group Vertical Worship.

*The arrows fly, ten thousand fall
Still, You protect me through it all
The waters rise, the oceans rage
Still, You’re the One the storm obeys*

*In the shelter of Your presence
In the shadow of Your wings
I am safe, I am safe
I will hold onto Your promise
You will not abandon me
I am safe, I am safe*

*To You, I run when mountains shake
You are my shield, my hiding place
Almighty God, I will draw near
Your perfect love casts out all fear*

*In the shelter of Your presence
In the shadow of Your wings
I am safe, I am safe
I will hold onto Your promise
You will not abandon me
I am safe, I am safe*

Source Material:

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