



LEADER GUIDE

MARCH 21, 2021

OUR FUTURE IS BRIGHT! (1 PETER 1:3-9)

TAKEAWAY:

Thanks to the resurrection of Christ, your future is incredibly bright!

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT:

In a global pandemic with its masks and lockdowns, rising gas prices, civil unrest, economic instability, and difficult personal issues, life probably doesn't seem incredibly bright.

GOSPEL CONNECTION:

Your salvation has nothing to do with you. Your new life has been given to you through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION

- What are some reasons a person might think his or her future is bright? What are some reasons a person might think his or her future is grim and dark?
- When in your own life have you had the greatest sense of optimism about your future? Why?
- What about right now? Do you tend to think your future is bright, or do you tend to think your future is grim? Why?

Simon Peter had denied his best friend then watched Him be murdered on a cross. His future probably didn't seem too bright, either, but the resurrection changed everything. Thirty years later, we read Peter's hope-filled words as he continued to lead the Church, even through great difficulty and persecution. The resurrection of Jesus gave Peter living hope. And the resurrection of Jesus gives you living hope, too.

UNDERSTANDING

> Ask a group member to read 1 Peter 1:3.

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.

- What have you personally learned about God the Father that would lead you to praise Him as Peter did in this verse? What was Peter's optimism (i.e. "living hope") based on?
- What was God's motivation for giving you new birth? What key event does your salvation hinge upon?
- Why is the need for "salvation" a culturally unacceptable idea?

Peter launched into the body of his letter by praising God the Father who revealed Himself supremely in His Son. God has given us what we do not deserve because of our rebellion against Him. Instead of the wrath we deserve, He has given us new birth. He did this not because of anything inherently valuable in us, but because of His great undeserving love. Such a message clashes against a culture that finds inherent good and greatness in mankind in general.

- What does it mean to have received a living hope, and how does Jesus' resurrection deliver it to you?

Biblical hope is the confidence that what God has done for us in the past guarantees our participation in what God will do in the future. This contrasts to the world's definition of hope as a feeling that one's desires will come true. Many of Peter's readers had come out of pagan idolatry and its accompanying immorality. At that time they had lived in hopelessness. Since then, they had received the hope that comes with new life in Christ. Hope always looks ahead. No longer living merely for the pleasures of the moment, they could anticipate the future with certainty because of Christ's resurrection.

> Ask a group member to read 1 Peter 1:4-5.

To obtain an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

- What key words in verses 3-5 describe the evidences or results of salvation?
- What do these verses tell you about the character of God? What do these verses tell you about people who put their trust in Him?
- What are believers shielded from (v. 5)? How does God's power shield you through faith?

We have God's protection from every assault the world or Satan may make on us. We cannot necessarily see this protection, but we claim it by faith. Just as God the Father was sure to raise Christ from the dead, He is sure to protect His children.

- How do you see evidences of God's provision in the past, present, and future in verses 4-5?

God's people are being protected for a salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. The New Testament speaks of three tenses of salvation—past, present, and future. We were saved in the past (Eph. 2:8); we are being saved right now (1 Cor. 1:18); and we will be saved in the future (Rom. 5:9). The salvation we received in the past and possess in the present will be revealed in its fullness when our Lord returns.

- Which idea in 1 Peter 1:3-5 encourages you most? Why?

> Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 1:6-9.

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ⁸ and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.

- In what ways does suffering provide an opportunity to show you believe in Jesus and rejoice?
- How can testing or trials actually strengthen your faith?

Peter wrote that persecution would produce two results. First, it would demonstrate the genuineness of these believers' faith. Like gold was refined by fire, heated to a high temperature to make it more pure, persecution would refine these believers' faith. Secondly, persecution would result in praise, glory, and honor. Peter did not spell out who would bestow and who would receive the glory of which he spoke. God will crown His people who are faithful through persecution with all the honor heaven can bestow. The faithfulness of God's people will also result in praise and glory to God. God is praised and glorified when His people are honored.

- When have you experienced times in your life that seem like those Peter was describing—times that you felt great distress but in the end you were able to praise God? How can this be possible?
- In verse 9, what did Peter identify as the goal of your faith? How is this goal achieved?

Followers of the crucified and risen Lord can face any animosity or persecution with confidence. Our security flows from the salvation awaiting us in eternity, a salvation we already experience daily. This salvation is the goal of our faith. All of history and divine revelation have been moving toward what we experience now and expect to receive in the future. No matter what sufferings Christians face, they know those trials are not their final experience. The trials are temporary, yet they are valuable because they refine and strengthen faith; thus they make believers more useful to God.

- If salvation was at least partially of your doing, how might that impact the way you lived in the midst of persecution and suffering for your faith?

APPLICATION

- Pastor Jeff made the following points of application in this week's message: Jesus has shown that He has a track record of keeping promises. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work protecting you. Your future is as sure as the resurrection. Which of those three statements speaks to you the most about your present and your future? Explain.
- When have you experienced difficulties and been encouraged to continue to have faith because you trusted God's promises? In what situation do you need to do that now?

PRAYER

Thank God for salvation through Jesus Christ, and for the truth of His resurrection that you celebrate on Easter. Thank Him for the hope you have and the assurance that, in Christ, your future is incredibly bright! Ask that God would continue to reveal Himself to you, remind you of His great love, and make your story more like Jesus' story each day.

COMMENTARY

1 Peter 1:3-9

1:3. Peter piled up expressions in verses 3–5 to talk about a believer's relationship with God through salvation. His opening words are those of worship and praise, reminding us that salvation did not come because of who we are or because of what we have accomplished. Salvation came as a gift of mercy. Salvation represents a new birth (see John 1:13), a changing of who we are. Salvation makes us dead to sin and alive to righteousness in Christ.

Peter linked our salvation relationship to what he termed "a living hope." Peter is without question the apostle of hope. The hope that he had in mind is the eager, confident expectation of life to come in eternity. Hope in the New Testament always relates to a future good! Amid present and difficult dangers we are justified in viewing the future with optimism because we are securely attached to the God who deals in futures. Furthermore, our hope is a living hope because it finds its focus in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Our living hope comes from a living, resurrected Christ.

1:4. Peter used the word inheritance to describe our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Inheritance emphasizes the believer's eternal home in heaven. Peter used a triple word picture to describe this inheritance. Our inheritance can never perish, spoil or fade. These three verbal adjectives indicate that the inheritance is untouched by death, unstained by evil, and unimpaired by time. Our inheritance is death-proof, sin-proof, and time-proof. This inheritance is kept in heaven,

for believers. Kept means “to guard or reserve.” The tense of the verb emphasizes the state or condition and underlines the fact that the inheritance already exists and is being preserved. God himself has reserved this inheritance in heaven for believers, and it continues to be there, still reserved for us. The difficulties we experience cannot undermine the certainty of our coming inheritance.

1:5. The salvation that is ready to be revealed is synonymous with the inheritance described in verse 4. Believers are cared for by God the Father. We are shielded by God’s power. Shielded means “to guard” or to “watch over.” This military term describes how soldiers guard someone. The present tense emphasizes the continual nature of this shielding. It does not suggest that believers are shielded from pain, difficulty, or anguish. It means that God himself guards and watches over our salvation, our inheritance. Our relationship with God now as we grow more like Christ is a foretaste of that salvation which will be revealed when Christ returns.

1:6. This kind of care from God the Father suggests a response of great rejoicing. Verse 8 repeats this emphasis on joy, calling it an inexpressible and glorious joy. Such joy springs from the contemplation of God and of the salvation that comes to us from God.

This joyous response occurs even in the midst of grief caused by suffering through all kinds of trials. Suffer grief forms a metaphor derived from a military expression for being harassed. It includes the inner mental distress or sadness that comes because of painful circumstances. All kinds of trials literally means “varied, multicolored, or diversified” trials. This takes on a depth of meaning against the background of the ghastly persecution led by the Roman emperor Nero. In that persecution, Christians were wrapped in freshly slaughtered animal skins and fed to dogs and wild animals. They were dipped in pitch or tar and set on fire as torches to light Nero’s gardens at night. This persecution was the first of nine that took place under the Roman Empire during the next 250 years. Peter himself very likely died during this first persecution.

All of this sheds some light on the expression Peter used to describe these varied trials: a little while. Suffering here is brief in light of our inheritance that lasts for eternity. Regardless of how long our trials last, that length of time is nothing in light of eternity.

1:7. Why does God allow this suffering to occur? Faith is being proved genuine through the trials. One purpose of trials is to sift out what is genuine in a person’s faith. Followers of God, in both the Old and New Testaments, know that God uses trying circumstances to test the hearts and lives of his people in order to mature them spiritually. Through difficulties God often tests whether our faith is genuine.

Peter cemented his point with the illustration of a goldsmith. To form a useful object, raw gold must be cast into a mold. For that to occur, the solid ore must be melted, requiring a temperature of 1,900 degrees Fahrenheit. When the gold is melted, the impurities rise to the surface, where they are skimmed off or burned off. A goldsmith knows the gold is ready to cast when the liquid gold becomes mirror-like and he can see his face reflected in the surface.

The parallel in a believer’s life is obvious. Through the refining heat of trials, we as followers of Jesus Christ grow spiritually and thus reflect more of Christ’s character in our lives. The language

of this illustration may also refer to the first-century process of making pottery. Potters baked clay pots to give them strength. The process sometimes cracked pots that had flaws, but the ones that survived the process were then marked with the same Greek word that Peter used here (dokimos) for “genuine.”

Warren Wiersbe reminds us, “The trials of life test our faith to prove its sincerity. A faith that cannot be tested cannot be trusted. A person who abandons his/her faith when the going gets tough is only proving that he/she really had no faith at all” (Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Hopeful* [Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1982], p. 25.)

Peter moved his focus from our present life to look forward to the day of the second coming of Christ and the testimony our approved faith will declare on that day. The faith of these first-century Christians met with scoffing, rejection, and persecution on earth. When the Lord returns, the scene will be reversed. Gold is certainly valuable, Peter said, but it is not as valuable as our proven faith. Gold is temporary, but our proven faith is eternal. The fact that our faith in Jesus is tested and has been proven genuine results in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

God’s purposes in present grief may not be completely known in a week, a year, or even a lifetime. In fact, some of God’s purposes will not even be known when believers die and go to be with the Lord. Some will only be discovered when Christ is revealed to everyone at the Second Coming.

1:8. How could these Christians face their suffering? They chose to love Christ and to believe in him even though they had not actually seen him in the past and had not encountered him visibly in the present. Most of Peter’s readers had no personal contact with Christ while he lived on earth. They were a generation removed from the time of his earthly ministry. This did not become an excuse. Instead, by accepting the testimony of those, like Peter, who had seen Christ, they entered into a personal relationship with Christ marked by love and belief.

“Believe,” as used here, means “to trust or rest your confidence in someone, to depend on them.” Having trusted Christ with present salvation from sin, you can also trust him with future salvation from pain and suffering. The result of this active trust is an inexpressible and glorious joy even in the midst of suffering. Peter repeated the theme of joy that he introduced in verse 6. This joy issues from gratitude to God for who he is and for what he has provided through salvation. Joy comes especially from our hope of seeing Christ one day. Although our trials may result in temporary grief, this need not extinguish our deep, abiding joy anchored in our hope in Jesus Christ.

Biblical joy does not depend on circumstances. Joy is inseparably connected to love and trust. Even during pain, the fullness of joy comes from a deep sense of the presence of God in our lives. We can experience joy in suffering when we believe our suffering has a redemptive or refining purpose.

1:9. Not only our joy but also the assurance of salvation is not contingent upon our circumstances. We are marching, even though in pain, toward the final goal of our faith—our place in eternity and in heaven. One day believers will enjoy salvation to the full in the presence of Jesus Christ. Pain and suffering will be no more.