

When my wife and I drew up our first will after our second son was born, we hardly had any material assets. So, our will primarily addressed who would care for our children if we predeceased them. We later revised our will a couple of times to include instructions about who will inherit what when we die. Now, of course, we own our home, but we’re a very long way from becoming independently wealthy. In fact, a financial planner once told me we should “put the pedal to the metal” to provide for our long-term financial security. As a result, we made and continue to make some retirement contributions. But financial investments are risky. Some investments that have the highest potential for earnings also carry the highest risk for loss. Like others we ask ourselves just how secure we need our investments to be. With markets dropping, financial security seems to be in fairly short supply right now. Some stock values have plummeted.

The *Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation* calls itself “an independent agency created by the Congress to maintain stability and public confidence in the nation’s financial system by insuring deposits ...” Its website boasts, “Since 1933, no depositor has lost a penny of FDIC-insured funds.” So, a monetary inheritance from insured financial institutions is at least reasonably secure. But the same can’t be said for other investments. It’s not just that recent events have battered worldwide financial markets. It’s also that, as experts repeatedly remind us, **“Past performance is no guarantee of future results.”** So financial advisers encourage investors to make good investing decisions based on sound strategies. Compare that to our heavenly inheritance. God’s “past performance” is *precisely* what guarantees God’s future “results.” **By his Word and Spirit God graciously insures our heavenly inheritance.**

Peter writes this letter to people we might call “a group of investors.” He even uses investment language, speaking of an “*inheritance*” and “*gold*.” Ironically though, the “investors” who initially received Peter’s letter had practically no financial security whatsoever. They were among the poorest people in the

world. But Peter calls his materially impoverished friends to sing to God a hymn of praise: *“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, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade”* (vv. 3-4)

In my first year of seminary Jayne and I were invited to have lunch with folks at Calvary Presbyterian Church in Riverton, New Jersey. Out of courtesy or custom most of the time they invited the new seminarian in their home to pray before lunch. One Sunday, I remember that after I gave thanks for the food and the family that hosted us we also sang the Doxology. Led by the seminarian’s wife, we joined our voices to offer praise and thanksgiving as Peter does here: *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”*

But let’s keep in mind that the circumstances of the lives of most of Peter’s readers weren’t conducive to spontaneous praise. Peter’s brothers and sisters in Christ knew just how quickly the reasons we have for praising God can vanish, as we do. The apostle declares in verse 3, that in God’s great mercy, God has given us *“new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.”* God promises a completely secure and reliable *inheritance* because of a HOPE THAT LIVES. And this HOPE is ours because of Jesus’ RESURRECTION.

At the heart of this promise are two terms, *“new birth”* and *“living hope,”* as well as the word *“inheritance.”* **Hope That Lives** is a wonderful gift, but Peter claims that the result of our *“new birth”* into a *“living hope”* is the *“inheritance”* about which he is writing. Then, the subsequent phrase, *“that can never perish, spoil or fade”* suggests that God’s children will inherit something far greater than stocks or bonds or funds in a retirement account. What God’s children ultimately receive is what verse 9 calls *“the salvation of our souls.”* Quite simply, the inheritance of followers of Jesus is God’s gift of peace that is given by means of Jesus’ rescue and redemption through his death and resurrection.

We could say it this way: God has “left” to all his heirs, the forgiveness of our sins. But God’s beloved people have also “*inherited*” a restored relationship with our neighbors and with all of creation. Our “*inheritance*” is “*salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time*” (v. 5). Of course, this inheritance might look to us like a Christmas gift of socks or a shirt looked to my young cousin David. When he opened a present like socks or a shirt, he’d toss them over his shoulder and move on to more interesting and fun gifts. Most of us are naturally inclined to be more interested in material gifts than spiritual ones. But we know that no material inheritance will ever outlast us. We know that “You can’t take it with you!” By contrast, Jesus’ followers don’t just enjoy *peace with God* now, but forever. We can never “spend” it all!

God’s beloved children have inherited this “*living hope*” because on the first Easter morning God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Because Jesus physically walked out of his tomb, God graciously includes all who receive God’s grace through faith in Jesus in God’s “will.” Even so, two things sometimes make God’s people question the *security* of our inheritance—that is our salvation. **The first is the ferocity of our suffering in verse 6.** The apostle Peter alludes to it when he talks about having to “*suffer grief in all kinds of trials.*” **The second is being “*refined by fire*” in verse 7.**

These are the kind of “**trials**” Christians in India, for example, must endure as they deal with what *International Christian Concern* calls a “spike in persecution.” It’s the kind of “**fire**” Nigerian Christians are walking through. Sadly, Nigeria has become known as the world’s center of Christian martyrs. In any given year, the number of Christians killed by extremist groups is rarely less than 4,000—more than the rest of the world combined. But it isn’t just overseas Christians who suffer “*grief in all kinds of trials.*” While there is suffering for us in economic terms, it cannot compare to the scale of what Christians in other countries suffer from persecution. A world-wide pandemic like we experienced five years ago is perhaps the only sort of thing that affects **all people everywhere.**

But family crises, health scares, and financial woes can wound any of us. Consider the challenges laid on some from mental illness, bitter loneliness, debilitating fears, or paralyzing worry. Or think about the extra abuse and neglect some are suffering because they're afraid to leave a toxic relationship. Among the consequences of our suffering may be to ask questions like, "Am I still loved by God?" "Has God kicked me out of his family?" To use the words of Peter, **"Is my heavenly inheritance, my salvation, still intact?"**

Crusty old Larry embodied another challenge to the reliability of our heavenly inheritance. He spent most of his life alienating people who loved him and cared for him. But Larry was dying and it clearly scared him. So, his wife called the pastor to their home to try to comfort him. Signs of the relational carnage that Larry caused were strewn all around him. Virtually all that was left of him was a crusty shell. Larry's wife told the pastor, "I keep telling him God saved him when he was baptized, but it just doesn't make any difference."

If I was his pastor, I'd offer Larry a chance to confess his sins to God. Then, I'd talk to Larry about God's grace alone by which we are saved. Yet this man who knew he caused others so much harm just sat with hands trembling and his chin quivering. God saves his sons and daughters by his grace that is only received by faith. Since Christians sometimes struggle and fail to love God more than anything and to love our neighbors as ourselves, we sometimes wonder if that disqualifies us from the *"salvation of our souls."* Has God snatched it away from us and given it to a more deserving person?

On this first Sunday after Easter, can any of us suffering Christians be sure we'll receive our inheritance from God? Can God's adopted children move through the uncertainties of life knowing nothing will happen to jeopardize our heavenly inheritance? Peter's answer is a resounding **"Yes!"** Our inheritance is **"kept in heaven for"** us. We don't keep our salvation by being ultra humble, ultra kind, or ultra obedient. Nor do we automatically squander it when we fail to be Christlike. **The inheritance that is our salvation is "kept" for us by the God who raised Jesus from the dead.** This

same God is so faithful that he will never let his dearly loved children's inheritance "*perish, spoil or fade.*" That means nothing can alter, waste or destroy our salvation.

I knew someone whose dying parents worried that she would squander her inheritance. So their will stipulated she receive only a tiny part of it each month. From the grave her parents *kept her inheritance* not only *for* but also *from* her. While we are quite capable of squandering a *material inheritance*, we simply can't squander our *heavenly inheritance*. It isn't ours, to begin with, to either keep or squander. **God keeps it *for* us but not *from* us.**

Yet most of us know people who at one time loved God but don't love the Lord anymore. **But shouldn't we trust that everyone who faithfully receives God's grace will have a heavenly inheritance that awaits us?** Even so, I'm quick to admit that there's more mystery in someone losing their Christian faith than I could solve in a hundred lifetimes. **God's children must leave the eternal fate of those who have turned their back on the Lord in the hands—the nail-scarred hands—of Christ our loving Benefactor.**

Because we have the guarantee of an inheritance that is our salvation, we can rejoice, even when we suffer "*grief in all kinds of trials.*" But let's not mistake rejoicing for being happy. Grief from trials doesn't make healthy people "happy." Yet, we often find contentment and peace when we face troubles, because we know they're part of sharing in Christ's suffering.

Christians who suffer, especially for Jesus' sake, experience a taste of what Jesus suffered for our sakes. Suffering is a kind of "confirmation" of the inheritance that is our salvation. This kind of peace and contentment makes all of us who trust in Jesus "oddballs" in a way. In fact, throughout his first letter Peter suggests that our inheritance in some ways *alienates* us from those who don't share our faith. The new way of life it gives us for making our way in this world doesn't make us *better* than non-believers. It does, however, make us *different* than the world around us. Mainly, we must all remember that our hope is not an empty hope. **It is "Hope That Lives."** Amen.