Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some years ago, a decision was made to build a hydro-dam across a valley in New England in the United States. The valley contained a town with beautiful, quaint, historical buildings and parks and houses, but the whole town would be submerged when the dam was finished, so everyone would need to relocate. Well, once the decision to build the dam was made, it wasn’t long before the buildings and streets and parks became broken ruins and full of weeds. So, instead of being a pretty little town, it quickly became an eyesore. Why did this happen? Well, the answer is simple. As one resident said, “Where there is no faith in the future, there is no work in the present.”

And I am sure we all get this. Hopelessness breeds despair and discouragement. If you believe that disaster is inevitable, there will be no joy or effort; you will just give up and await your fate. But on the other hand, if you have a solid hope for the future, then you have every reason to persevere and to keep working, even if there will be hardship along the way.

Well, we have seen from the introduction to Peter’s letter that his original audience was Christians who had been forced to flee their homeland because of persecution. That is why he referred to them as “*exiles*.” And they were incredibly discouraged and without hope, because of their situation. But every Christian is a *spiritual* exile. Our true home is heaven. And while we live on earth, we will experience the horrible effects of sin and we will face persecution. And this can leave us discouraged and hope-less. So, this letter of Peter is a gift from God, because it was written to remind believers that they have a solid hope for the future. And the encouragement began, already, in the introduction to the letter, which we saw in the first two sermons.

Well, Peter begins to unpack the reason why believers can have a solid hope for the future in the next part of this letter, which is verses 3-12. And many commentators call this section a **salvation song**. It begins with a shout of blessing and then it celebrates the saving work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in three stanzas. And God willing, we will look at the three stanzas of this Trinitarian salvation song in our next three sermons. So, we begin, today, with stanza 1, verses 3-5, where **Elect Exiles Bless** **their Father for Securing their Salvation.** And we are going to see thatour Father is to be praised for salvation work that was done **in the past** and salvation work that is doing **every day**. They will be our two main headings.

1. So, let’s begin with **verses 3-4** where our Father is blessed for salvation work done **in the past**.
   1. Who here loves **grammar**? Anyone? Well, as you look at the sentences and phrases in verses 3-4, which phrase gives us the main verb? And a verb is a word that describes an action. Can you see it? It is “*caused us* *to be born again*.” That is the thing that happens to believers in these verses. Everything else in these two verses says something more about our being born again, but the main thing is that we are born again. And does anyone know the theological term for being born again? It is regeneration.
      1. Jesus spoke about it in **John 3**. He told a man named Nicodemus that no can enter the kingdom of God “*unless he is born again*.” Nicodemus assumed Jesus meant a physical re-birth, which is impossible. So, Jesus explained that this was a **spiritual rebirth**. To be born again is to be “*born of the Spirit*.”
         1. And the idea behind this language is best understood with **birthdays**. We typically calculate how old we are from the day of our birth. We all know that life actually begins at conception, but we typically count day one of life as the day we were born. Well, for every believer, there is a spiritual birthday. It is the day when the Holy Spirit enters a person to give them a new spiritual nature. Using biblical language, they were spiritually dead, now they are alive. They were in darkness, now they are in the light. They were an old creation, now they are a new creation. They were hostile enemies of God, now they are His friends and adopted children. So, being born again is the event that begins the Christian life.
   2. So, now let’s look at **everything else that these verses say about our being born again**.
      1. And the first thing to note is that **we do not born again *ourselves***; we do not make *ourselves* spiritually alive. Look at verse 2, “*He has caused us to be born again*.”
         1. And that is why the language of birth is used. Did you give birth to yourself? No. Your mother gave birth to you. You did not even decide to become a human being; that has to do with your parents and with God. So, in the same way, we do not born again ourselves; “*He has caused us to be born again*.”
      2. And the “**He**” who “*caused us to be born again*” is? “*The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ*.”
         1. The Jesus who lived on earth as a human being is also the Son of God. Mary was His human mother, but God is His Father. And God was His Father even before He was born to Mary. This is the key point of John 1 – Jesus always *was* and *is* and *will be* the Son of God.
         2. And if you believe that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, the Christ promised in the Old Testament, and you receive Him as your Saviour and Lord, then His Father is your Father also. It is He who “*caused us to be born again*.” So, we have Him to bless and thank if we are believers!
      3. And notice also that this is put in the **past tense** – “*He has caused us to be born again*.” So, in terms of himself and every believer who reads his letter, Peter says, we have been born again by the Father; this part of the work of salvation is done, complete, finished. And this makes the Father worthy of our praise because Romans 8:30 makes it clear that regeneration ends with glorification – our arrival in heaven. So, if He has caused us to be born again, he will bring us to heaven!
      4. But we are also given the **reason** why the Father caused us to be born again; it is “***according to His great mercy***.” Two words that we come across in the New Testament, again and again, are grace and mercy. And the difference between the two is that grace is about us getting what we do *not* deserve, and mercy is about us not getting what we do deserve (repeat).
         1. So, let’s say that you boys and girls disobeyed Mum, who told you that if you did not tidy up the Lego by 5pm, you would not be allowed to play with it tomorrow. But you just tried to add a few more bits on to what you were building and 5pm has come and the Lego is not tidied up. So, what do you deserve? No Lego tomorrow. That is the punishment that you deserve. But tomorrow comes and you tell Mum that you are really sorry, and she let’s you play with the Lego. That is mercy. You have escaped the punishment that you deserved. But then, Mum hands you a box of new Lego. That is grace! That is you getting something that you just did not deserve!
         2. Well, we have seen mention of grace in verse 2, and now we have mention of “*His great merc*y” in verse 3. Before we are born again, we deserved judgment and eternal hell. But God chose to deal with our sin and guilt by putting it all on Jesus and punishing Him when He was on the cross. That is mercy; that is us not receiving the punishment that we deserved. But He also gave us the Holy Spirit who caused us to be born again, so that we might believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins and receive His righteousness and eternal life. That is grace; that is us getting what we do not deserve! And that is what is meant by “*according to His great mercy*.” And it is **great**, isn’t it; we do not deserve this at all!
         3. And this makes our Father worthy of praise because we did not deserve to be born again; it is all of His great grace and mercy!
      5. But there is more about our having been born again in these verses. For next we see that it is “*to* ***a living hope***.”
         1. And congregation, there is so much we could say about this one phrase. Let’s consider the world we live in for a moment. What is it that consumes our world? What is the one thing that dominates the news? It is fear. We fear Covid. We fear climate change. We fear economic ruin. We fear crime. We fear war. We fear death. But as believers, we have been born again to “*a living hope*.” We know that what will end this world is the return of Jesus, not climate change! And we know that neither “*tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword [or] death … nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*.” And, when we die, our souls will go immediately to be with Jesus, and that after Judgment Day we will be with Him in the new heavens and new earth, for ever! So, when we hear those doom and gloom news stories, we can say, No. You are wrong. King Jesus reigns. I have hope!
      6. And this living hope is “***through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead***.”
         1. Boys and girls, did Jesus die on the cross? Yes. Was He buried? Yes. Is His body still in the tomb? No? What happened? He rose from the dead? Well, where is He now, then? He is in heaven? So, Jesus has risen and ascended to heaven. Are you sure? How do you know this to be true? The Bible tell us so!
         2. Well, do you know what else Jesus said in the Bible? He said that He has gone to heaven to prepare a place for us that where He is we may be with Him. So, as certain as it is that Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven, so, you too shall rise from death and enter into eternal life!
      7. And we see more of this glorious hope in the next phrase, which is that we elect exiles have “*an* ***inheritance***.”
         1. And inheritance is a very rich idea that you find right throughout the Bible.
            1. We saw it in our earlier readings from **Joshua and Lamentations**. God promised Abraham that the land of Canaan would be the inheritance of the people of Israel. And when the people of Israel arrived in the land, a portion of it was given to each family as their permanent inheritance. But many years later they were sent into exile. And when they returned, they were under the rule of the Greeks and then Romans. And now, the Christians that Peter wrote to had been forced to leave the land of their inheritance.
            2. But you see, what we saw in our **Hebrews** reading is that the Promised Land was only ever meant to be a symbol of something far more glorious. So, Abraham, “*was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God*.” And all of those Old Testament saints who trusted in Messiah, “*desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared for them a city*.” And that city is heaven! And that is the inheritance Peter is speaking about.
            3. In **Matthew 25**, Jesus said that on Judgment Day He will say to all of God’s elect ones, “*Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world*.”
         2. And people of God, this heavenly inheritance, unlike the land of Canaan, or the best gold and treasures of this life, “*is* ***imperishable, undefiled, and unfading***.” It cannot rust or be lost or destroyed, and it will never lose its shine or its value! And it is completely free of any impurity or imperfection or uncleanness!
      8. And what is more, it is not up to you as to whether or not you receive this inheritance. It is not up to you to do enough good works to be deserving of this inheritance. For we see also that it is “***kept in heaven for you***”; not *by* you, *for* you.
         1. The Greek word translated as ‘kept’ literally means reserved. In carpark buildings, the ground floors have all the reserved parking spaces. And there have been times when I have entered a parking building and gone past all the empty reserved spaces, to the upper stories where the public spaces are, but they were all full, so I had to go somewhere else to look for a park. And I thought, wouldn’t it be nice to have one of those reserved spots; to know that it was always available for me!
      9. Well, believer, it does not matter that you lose things, or your home, or your health in this life, or that you might even die, because you have a heavenly, imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance that your Father has reserved for you! You have a room in heaven with your name on it. You will receive, as we will see in chapter 5:24, “*the unfading crown of glory*.”
      10. And all of this has to do with our being born again; the salvation work that the Father has done, in the past, in every believer. It is why He deserves our song of blessing!
2. But He deserves it also, in the second place, because of the salvation work that He **is doing every day**.
   1. And we see this in verse 5: “*Who by God's power are being guarded*.” This is present tense – today, now, every day, ongoing, continuous. And again, this is a main verb – an action of God; we elect exiles are being guarded by God.
      1. Now, the NIV does not use the word “*guarded*,” it uses the word “***shielded***.” And this idea of guarding or shielding would have been a vivid illustration to people living in the towns and cities and villages of the Roman Empire. For each town or city or village was guarded by a military garrison. So, you went about your business each day secure in the knowledge that you were safely behind the shields of those guarding your city.
      2. And in the same way, we are guarded or shielded or protected by God. We can trust in Him! He will protect us from His and our enemies.
      3. But it is not only enemies out there that we need to be guarded and shielded from. **We also need to be shielded from our own doubts and fears**. The devil works very hard to convince us that we cannot be children of God, because of how much we sin. Or he will try and convince us that we have committed the unforgivable sin. But Jesus said, “*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out*.” And Jesus said, “*Everyone who looks on the Son and believes in Him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day*.” And Jesus said, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*.”
   2. And this is why **verse 5** continues, “*are being guarded* ***through faith*** *for a salvation ready to be revealed at the last time*.”
      1. Believer, what will happen to your soul when you die? It will go to be with Jesus in heaven. And what is going to happen at the end of time? Jesus is going to return to earth and our bodies will rise from the dead and be reunited with our souls and then it will be Judgment Day. And what will happen to you on Judgment Day? You will enter into the joy and glory of heaven. How do you know this? It is in the Bible and you believe it. But could you stop believing this tomorrow? Might you lose your faith?
      2. And that is Peter’s key concern here. He realizes that everything that he is speaking about is a matter of faith. We can’t see God or heaven; we only have what is revealed and promised in the Bible, which we must believe. So, Peter wants believers to see that even their faith is *not their own*, it is produced in us by the Holy Spirit, who was given to us by God.
      3. **Hebrews 12:2** calls Jesus “*the author and perfector of our faith*,” and urges us to look to Him. Don’t look at yourself. Don’t listen to your guilty feelings. Don’t look at the world around you and its ideas and philosophies. Don’t look at your enemies. Don’t look at your circumstances. Look to Jesus, “*the author and perfector of our faith.*” Remember His words on the cross, “*It is finished*.” Remember His promise, “*In my Father's house are many rooms … I go to prepare a place for you … and … I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also*.”
      4. So, the gospel says, if you believe in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you shall be saved, and you will receive eternal life. It is here in the Bible, in black and white. And if you believe it, that belief, that faith, is produced in you by the Holy Spirit, who was given to you by God, and it is preserved and perfected by the Lord Jesus.
   3. So, do you see where Peter keeps pointing us? To our Father in heaven! Our salvation is secure because of Him! And that begs one last question that we must consider. And it arises out of two words in our text that we have not explored yet. And they are the two words that anchor everything else. And those two words are “**God’s power**.” We have seen God’s salvation work *in the past* – “*He has caused us to be born again to a living hope [and] … to a [heavenly] inheritance*,” and we have seen His salvation work *in the present* – “*He is guarding us through faith*…” So, at the end of the day, it all comes down to this, doesn’t it – **how powerful is God**? That’s the whole thing, really, isn’t it. When cancer comes, or your child is in hospital, or depression comes, or the storm clouds of persecution gather on the horizon, or any one of a thousand other hardships come, is God powerful enough to preserve your faith and to protect and heal, and to bring you to heaven?
      1. Well, let me answer that with the **opening words of the Bible**: “*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. And God said, "Let there be light," and there was light*.”
         1. So, look out the windows. Do you see the universe that God made? Well, He spoke and it came into existence. He didn’t spend weeks coming up with concept plans. He just spoke and the light, land and sea, the planets and the stars, and the laws of gravity and morality came to be, and none of it will ever be moved. And it all stands according to His command. And that is *power*!
      2. And then there is **Psalm 2**: “*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us."*” And that is the story of history, isn’t it – one king after another rejecting or ignoring God and His word. But how does the Psalm continue? “*He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in His wrath, and terrify them in His fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King [Christ Jesus] on Zion, my holy hill." … and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Now therefore, O kings, be wise; be warned, O rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. [Worship] the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath is quickly kindled. Blessed are all who take refuge in Him*.”
      3. Is God powerful to save and deliver and bring to heaven? Oh Yes! Is God powerful enough to thwart the plans of Kings and Prime-ministers? Oh yes!
      4. And congregation, if you have ever wondered why we sing very few of the songs that are so popular in much the wider church today in our church services and why we sing so many old songs, there is your answer. We do not need to sing songs about how I just want to lift you up, and I just want to adore you, and I feel your love, and I … I … I We need songs that set the power of Almighty God before us!

*1 Give to our God immortal praise; mercy and truth are all his ways:*

*wonders of grace to God belong; repeat his mercies in your song.*

*2 Give to the Lord of lords renown; the King of kings with glory crown:*

*his mercies ever shall endure, when lords and kings are known no more.*

*3 He built the earth, he spread the sky, and fixed the starry lights on high:*

*wonders of grace to God belong; repeat his mercies in your song.*

*5 He sent his Son with pow'r to save from guilt and darkness and the grave:*

*wonders of grace to God belong; repeat his mercies in your song.*

*6 Through this vain world he guides our feet, and leads us to his heav'nly seat:*

*his mercies ever shall endure, when this vain world shall be no more.*

And we need these sorts of songs, be they old or new, so that when we go out of here to the hardships and troubles and temptations and guilt, our hearts are full of the power of God.

The resident of the New England town who explained why the town quickly became a ruin said, “Where there is no faith in the future, there is no work in the present.” Well, the reason why we have a solid hope for the future is God’s power! As our Almighty God and loving Father, He is able and willing to preserve us in faith and to bring us to heaven. And that is the message of the first stanza of this salvation song. Hallelujah! Amen.