

Because He Lives

Call to Worship: Psalm 2

1st Scripture: Matthew 28

2nd Scripture: 1 Peter 1:1-5

Introduction

One might naturally think that our present “crisis predicament” would prove to be a hindrance and interference that would keep us from celebrating Resurrection Sunday. However, I want to suggest to you that there is no better time to celebrate Resurrection Sunday than there is in the present. For, it is the reminder of Christ’s resurrection which gives us all of the hope that we could ever desire (and so much more), which would enable us not only to persevere through this trial, but furthermore, to stand out as faithful witnesses before a watching and frantic world. And so, for this morning, we will consider the glorious resurrection of our blessed Savior, within the broader context of what that resurrection has secured for us, according to Peter’s very encouraging opening to this letter. And I trust that such a message will prove to be ideal for the present divinely-ordained crisis, through which, we are traveling together.

Firstly then, we briefly note that the audience, to whom, Peter was writing, was suffering from some form of heavy persecution. And there was the clear need for them to patiently and obediently endure the trial, without turning to some means of ungodly retaliation or some form of quick-fix lust to ease their burden. They needed to trust God and to stand firm in their faith.

And as an opening encouragement, Peter begins by reminding them of the fact that they are “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” Their Triune God, had been working, and would continue to work, for them, never abandoning them in the midst of their trials. While much could be said about this opening statement alone, we will fix our attention on that which follows.

And it is no surprise that Peter continues to remind them of what God has done for them, so that, they would find every motivation for staying the course, and not growing weary or faint, in the fiery trial that they were presently experiencing. Remember, the Biblical authors often

used indicative reminders (especially concerning who they were in Christ, and what God had done for them), as a means of motivating their audience to remain faithful and to keep the imperative commands that would follow. And if we are going to find motivation to do anything, especially in the face of very difficult trials, our eyes must be turned toward God, and away from us and our circumstances. Who God is, what He has done, and what He is doing, will always provide us with a sure and immovable foundation to rest our souls upon. And because we can often be a forgetful people; because we are prone to let trials eclipse what we know about God, we need to be reminded over and over again, of the truths that are encased in the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ. And that is exactly what Peter does here, again, before charging his readers to do anything themselves.

I. Blessed Be God

And so, Peter begins verse 3, with the phrase, “Blessed be God...” Remember, he is seeking to get his readers to fix their eyes upon God, over and above their circumstances. He wanted them to remember that God is much bigger than whatever they are facing. And so, he blesses God for something God has done, which because God has done it, guarantees certain eternal results that must and will follow, and which, no trial or opponent or enemy (or anyone for that matter) could ever change.

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...” This is not just any God. This is not one god, among many of the impotent heathen gods, which were no gods at all. This is the true and living God, and He is the Father of the One, upon whom, we have cast all of our faith and hope. Our Gospel is not founded in just another religion among many religions. It is the one true Gospel, and the only hope for sinners, guaranteeing their unending and unchanging adoption into God’s household. This is who we have put our faith and trust in, Peter says, as it were. And because of this, we can be certain that we will never be put to shame; that nothing, anywhere, ever, can separate us from the love of God, which is given to us, in our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, and who is seated as our everlasting intercessor, at the right hand of the Father! “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy...” Here, Peter is going to provide his suffering and challenged audience with the essential

motivation, which drives everything God does for His people in Christ. Notice, Peter doesn't say, "Blessed be God, who because of how well we have fared, how strong our faith is, how faithful He knew we would be...etc, has done such and such." No, the motivation and drive for all that God has done for us, is grounded in His abundant mercy! And because it begins with God, it will end with God as well, which gives us the incomprehensible hope of knowing that He will complete what He has begun. Again, for the suffering Christian, this is a critical and essential motivation for taking courage and pressing on, in all circumstances! What is God's mercy? It is God's willingness to extend an immeasurable blanket of forgiveness and grace over all of our sins, swallowing up every offense that we have ever committed against Him, permitting us to maintain our sonship, with no threat of ever having it jeopardized. Where sin abounds, grace abounds much more. In short, brethren, we can persevere; we can continue in spite of present faults and struggles with sin; we can know for certain that God is always for us, even though we are naturally offensive to God, because God is merciful toward us. No, He is abundantly merciful toward us! And this abundant mercy comes to us, not by God contradicting His holiness and overlooking sin, but rather, through the legal and legitimate sacrifice and shed blood of Jesus Christ! This is what Peter wants his readers to remember here!

And what then has God done, wholly and completely on the basis of His abundant mercy, provided to us in and through our Lord Jesus Christ? "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope..." To be begotten, is to be "born of," and here, Peter speaks of the new birth, when he speaks of our being "begotten again." In our natural state in Adam, we are cursed because we have inherited our sin nature. The Law of God condemns us unmercifully, as we cannot meet His righteous standard. And so, we are said to be dead in sin. But, as Paul also tells the Ephesians, "But God has raised us from the dead." God has regenerated us by His Spirit, and He has given us a new life and hope, in union with His Son. We have been transferred out of our dark, helpless and dead state, into a new life, in union with Christ, and every spiritual blessing that He has gained for us. We went from a state of dead hope (a state of certain condemnation and eternal dread), into a state of living hope (Having been reconciled to God through Christ, we are in a state of certain justification and eternal peace). We were enlivened, regenerated, begotten again unto this new

and living hope. And again, the basis for this regeneration had nothing to do with anything in us, but everything to do with God's abundant mercy. [Read Ephesians 2:1-10]

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...” While God's abundant mercy is the motivation for all He has done here, here, Peter encourages his readers by reminding them of the means, by which, God has accomplished these things. The power which has brought about our regeneration; the well spring which has brought about these blessings, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. For, it is in Christ's resurrection that our justification has been sealed. For there, our High Priest has emerged from the tomb, having successfully offered Himself as an atonement for all of our sins. He has conquered sin and death and the devil, and He has emerged victoriously as our High Priest, who ever lives to intercede for us. And that same resurrection power; that same power which was exercised in raising our Lord from the dead, Paul tells the Ephesians, is the very power that has raised us from spiritual death unto spiritual life. God's wrath has been propitiated; our sin has been expiated (in full), and God's good-will has come to us in its fullness, by the resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

And this marvelous work of God, which according to His abundant mercy in Christ, has begotten us again to a living hope, has secured a guaranteed destiny for all of His true children. And see how this is so relevant for the readers here, who again, are undergoing severe persecution. Their very lives are in danger and things seem bleak from the standpoint of their natural and material circumstances. And so, Peter reminds them of what God has done for them, leading to a guaranteed outcome, that can never be changed by these present circumstances (or any circumstances, ever, for that matter).

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away...”

In light of the present, very unstable, temporal, fading, defiled and broken creation, which makes up our present circumstances in this life, Peter reminds his readers of the end, toward which, God's merciful blessings are carrying them. First, he reminds them that they have an

“inheritance,” which assumes two things. One, it is yet to come. They have not yet received this inheritance. But second, it most certainly is coming. It is an inheritance, and since God is the one who has secured this inheritance, they most certainly will come into it. And so, they have an inheritance which is yet in front of them, but which is also guaranteed at the same time. But, then consider as well, the three ways, in which, Peter describes this inheritance, which is very relevant to addressing the temporal nature of their present circumstances and sufferings.

1) This inheritance is incorruptible. That is to say that, this inheritance cannot corrode or rot or experience decay. Unlike everything in this present world, the inheritance of the saints does not rot or rust or erode or wear away. It is forever durable, and always sustained and maintained by the power of God. Nothing breaks or dissolves or decays or loses its value. Everything remains in the pure and natural and perfect state that it is in.

2) This inheritance is undefiled. It cannot be influenced by anything ungodly or immoral. The present creation is cursed and defiled. The sin of mankind has defiled it. But, not so with our eternal inheritance, brethren. There will be no more sin there. And because there will be no more sin there, there will be no more weeping, sorrow, pain or death there. It will be an inheritance of the purest sort, without any impurity, or even the possibility of any impurity, ever entering in, to defile it. It will be morally and aesthetically pure.

3) Finally, it does not fade away. It is eternal. It is unending. It can never corrode, it can never be defiled, and it will never fade away. Heaven will be an eternal state of bliss, barring out all of the former sufferings and brokenness that fills this present, sin-cursed world. What an encouragement to the people of God, who often lose much, and even their own lives in this world! We don't have to hold on here, because our eternal destiny is secure, in Christ, in accordance with the abundant mercy of God, who has begotten us again unto this “living” and eternal hope!

And all of this, Peter adds, is “reserved in heaven for you.” We have not attained to this inheritance yet. We still experience the sufferings and sorrows and pains that plague this life and this world. But, none of that changes what is coming just ahead. There is an inheritance waiting for us, brethren. It is reserved in heaven for us! And that reservation can never be cancelled or changed or forgotten, because God is the One who has made it for us, in accordance with His

abundant mercy... His mercy which removes everything from us, that would naturally keep us from obtaining this inheritance. His mercy which comes to us wholly and completely in Christ!

And then, finally, he adds the following words, as a clincher to the encouragement, lest we somehow should think, “What if we don’t make it?” “How can I be certain that nothing will keep me back from this promise?”

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Here, Peter encourages his readers by reminding them that they are kept by the power of God, so that they will most assuredly make it home, and receive their inheritance. We could never keep ourselves on the path of life. We are far too weak and frail, and we are no match for the higher powers and the spiritual hosts of wickedness, who seek to destroy the people of God. But God’s power keeps us going. God’s power keeps us persevering. God’s power holds us up, so that we are sure to overcome. Nothing can ever separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. We simply trust God. And that is the charge to us, during every difficulty and trial and every form of opposition that we must face. We continue to trust in Christ; we continue to stand firm in our faith; we abide in Christ, and God will bring us safely home. We are kept by the power of God through faith; God’s power resides on us and meets us, in our faith. We are never alone. He is always with us, and He is always faithful, and He always meets us, as we continue to trust in Him.

And the end, toward which we are kept, is that we would receive the completion of our salvation, which we have been promised in Christ. The fullness of our salvation; the coming into our complete inheritance, is certain, and though it has not yet come, it will; it must, and it will be revealed in the last time. Christ’s Kingdom will consummate. We will be given new, glorified bodies that are as everlasting, and as incapable of being defiled, and as incapable of corruption, as the entire inheritance that awaits us in glory!

This is the encouragement given to Peter's persecuted, afflicted and weary audience. And it is a great encouragement indeed. It is a great encouragement to "keep the faith," to persevere, to stay the course, to abide in Christ, unto the certainty that God will accomplish everything that He has promised us, in Christ.

II. Concluding Thoughts

Are these not great encouragements for us, brethren, or has God changed, in any sense, since Peter had penned this letter to his original audience? Is that not why this letter has been preserved for us? Are these not the Holy Spirit's Words directed to all believers, of all generations, because suffering is our lot in this life? We will reign with Christ, if we indeed suffer with Him, now, in the present.

I want to encourage you to share these words of encouragement with each other, often, and especially with those who are suffering any degree of hardship in this body. For, they are given for that purpose. And remember, it is God's good pleasure to give us these precious words of encouragement. Go back to God's compelling motive for all that He does. It has nothing to do with how good we've been or are, or how well we are fairing, or how moral we have been in the past...etc. It has everything to do with the abundant; the ABUNDANT mercy of God! God has an infinitely large bank account, and deposited in that account for us, is His incomprehensible mercy. Now, I don't know about you, but I can say that, if I need anything from God (and I need everything from God), I especially need His mercy... daily, hourly, constantly! Were His mercy to run out, we would be a people most to be pitied! But, His mercy is abundant toward us! It overflows and covers us from head to toe, for the entire duration of our lives. And that's because that mercy was not secured by silver and gold which perish. It was secured by the shed blood of the eternal Son of God!

Brethren, do we have to worry about a Coronavirus? Do we have to worry about any virus, when we know that all of these promises belong to us in the risen Christ! All of this has come to us in the resurrected Christ! And the God who commands ravens to feed his prophet, who utilizes a whale to transport Jonah safely to shore, who orders the hungry lions to keep their mouths shut in the presence of Daniel, who commands the winds and the waves to hush and they

are silent... this God has a leash on every single minute particle of the Coronavirus, and He steers them as He wills! Our God is with us, brethren! Even statistics bend to His will! And therefore, ultimately, we will not be moved! Some of us will get this virus. Some of us may even die from this virus. But, if you are in Christ, then this virus is nothing more than a vehicle of God's blessing for every last one of His children. And you can take that to the bank! Our Savior lives, brethren! And He has defeated death, for us! And because He lives, we can face tomorrow and every other day that stands in front of us, knowing that He who began the good work in us, will complete it, until the Day of Christ's return!

If you are a recipient of God's effectual mercy, here this afternoon, then you are richer than the richest person in this world, and you have more than all that this world has, combined! But, if you are not a recipient of God's mercy, then you are most to be pitied. For, that means that you do not have the Lord Jesus Christ! He who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son, does not have life, but God's wrath abides on him. Oh friends, if any of you are not a Christian this afternoon; if you are not trusting in Christ, then know that the wrath of God presently abides on you. Your sins are that offensive to God, and they will send you straight to hell, forever, if they are not dealt with in this life. And Christ is the only way of dealing with your sins, to the full. He alone can remove the indelible stain of your sin.

The Gospel!!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25