

Hope When Life is Hard...



A VERSE BY VERSE
EXPOSITION OF
THE EPISTLE OF
FIRST PETER

Preserved by the Power of God 1 Peter 1:5 (682)

1 Peter 1:1-5 ... *Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen ² according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure. 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, ⁴ to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and 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.***

1 Peter 1:1-2 constitutes the formal introduction of Peter's letter. In verses 3-5 Peter demonstrates how our redemption (**1:18a**), determined in the deep counsels of the Trinity (**1:2**) and accomplished on the cross of Christ (**1:19; 2:24**) is applied to us in time and in our human experience. Basically in verses 3-5 Peter supplies a summary of the Christian life.

In **verse 3** Peter's focus is on its beginning. *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.* According to **Ephesians 2:1** as fallen sons of Adam we were all *dead in trespasses and sins*. Mercy is the divine response to this desperate condition brought about by sin. As Berkhof says, "the mercy of God contemplates [man] as one who is bearing the consequences of sin, who is in a pitiable condition, and who therefore needs help" (p. 72). Beloved, this condition of spiritual death is answered by the great mercy of God in the new birth. We call this new birth "regeneration." Regeneration is the *gracious* work of God by which new life is communicated freely to the soul.

In **verse 4** Peter's focus is on the goal of God's election spoken of in verse 1 - our taking possession of the promised inheritance. We are chosen; we are born again *to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.* In the new birth (**1:3**) God has made us His children (**John 1:12**). Consistent with our new status as children born of God is the expectation of an inheritance *from* God (**Gal. 4:7**). Indeed, a heavenly reward awaits the children of God.

In **verse 5** the focus shifts to our earthly pilgrimage in which we are kept by the power of God. *Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* Here's the connection. In **verse 4** we are assured that our inheritance is kept for us (*reserved in heaven for you*). In **verse 5** we are assured that we are kept for our inheritance. Michaels says, "The inheritance is 'reserved' for the believers, and the believers are guarded or protected until they come into their inheritance" (*1 Peter*, p. 22). Kelly agrees, "If

the inheritance is being vigilantly guarded, so are those who are predestined to receive it" (*1 Peter*, p. 52). Sometimes we become anxious about whether we will have strength to remain faithful to Christ if persecution or suffering becomes intense (see Grudem, p. 58). Verse 5, indeed, verses 3-5 are designed for our assurance. We may rejoice in that our perseverance is made sure. God, by His almighty power, "will strengthen our faith and keep it from failing until we come into the promised inheritance" (Nisbet, *1 Peter*, p. 18). Indeed, our faith is weak. It is sorely tried and falters. It needs propping up. It needs strengthening. God has promised to keep us in faith through faith. Let's study verse 5 phrase by phrase.

Who are protected. Of course, "who" refers to those saints who received and heard Peter's original correspondence. It also refers to those of us in this room who are trusting Christ alone as He has been offered to us in the gospel. The Greek word translated "protected" is a military term. It means *to be guarded* or *to be kept under guard*. We would be correct if we envisioned a fort defended by a contingent of troops. Luther had it right: "A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark never failing." The word is used in this literal sense in **2 Corinthians 11:32**. Paul said, *in Damascus the ethnarch under Aretas the king was guarding the city of the Damascenes in order to seize me*. It is used metaphorically in **Philippians 4:7** of the inward garrisoning by the Holy Spirit. *And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*. Now, guard duty is serious business.

"Private John Collins was on guard duty. He tapped a barrel. Just one little sip wouldn't hurt. Just one more. Another. Soon he was drunk. Private Hugh Hall came up; Collins offered him a drink; Hall accepted. Soon they were drunk

together. It was just after midnight, June 28-29, 1804. The Lewis and Clark expedition had completed its westward trek of nearly 400 river miles across the present state of Missouri and arrived at the mouth of the Kansas River. At dawn, the sergeant-of-the-guard put [Collins and Hall] under arrest, and shortly thereafter [Captain] Clark began drawing up court-martial papers. The court deliberated and sentenced Collins to one hundred lashes on his bare back. A few days later, after an Indian scare, on the night of July 11-12, 1804, Private Alexander Willard went to sleep on his post. Ordway found him and turned him in. The offense was one of the most serious possible – punishable by death, according to the regulations. [Captains Lewis and Clark] themselves constituted the court – rather than privates, as in Collins’s case. The captains conferred. After considering the evidence, they found Willard guilty. They sentenced him to one hundred lashes, each day for four days, beginning that evening at sunset” (Stephen Ambrose, *Undaunted Courage*, pp.147-150). Guard duty is serious business because it is a matter of life and death. The One who guards us is not fallible.

Psalm 121:1-8, *I will lift up my eyes to the mountains; from whence shall my help come?*

² *My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.* ³ *He will not allow your foot to slip; He who keeps you will not slumber.* ⁴ *Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.* ⁵ *The LORD is your keeper ...* ⁷ *The LORD will protect you from all evil; He will keep your soul.* ⁸ *The LORD will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever.*

What is it that is being guarded? What is being garrisoned? We are given no assurances that disease will not ravage our bodies; that tragedy will not strike; that pain will not be ours to bear. The divine assurance is that our souls shall be

safe. Our comfort and security rest in the fact that the One guarding our souls is omnipotent.

We are those *who are protected by the power of God*. God's sovereignty refers to His *right* to rule. In short, God does as He well-pleases. Power, however, refers to God's *ability* to rule. In short, He can actually accomplish that which He is pleased to do. As the *Catechism for Young Children* puts it, "God can do all His holy will." Theology calls this ability omnipotence. If God has no power then we have a God who has wonderful desires and plans for us but who can do absolutely nothing to bring them to pass. If He has no power then heaven is vain imagination. If He has no power then promises of blessing are mere good intentions and promises of punishment empty threats. God's power is the bedrock upon which our faith rests. **Matthew 9:26-29**, *News of this spread through all that region. As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed Him, calling out, "Have mercy on us, Son of David!" When he had gone indoors, the blind men came to him, and he asked them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" "Yes, Lord," they replied. Then He touched their eyes and said, "According to your faith will it be done to you."*

Power is, of course, a divine attribute; a divine perfection. Within the span of the first five verses Peter has made reference to God's *foreknowledge* (1:2), God's *grace* (1:2), the *peace* of God (1:2), God's *great mercy* (1:3), and now God's *power* (1:5). You get the idea that maybe Peter believes that salvation is clearly a work of God. You think? This is exactly the point that underlies the entire Reformed doctrine of salvation. The perseverance of the saints is the doctrine that describes that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer by which the work begun in the heart is continued and brought to completion. All who are chosen

by God, redeemed by Christ, and regenerated by the Holy Spirit are eternally saved. They are kept in faith by the power of Almighty God and therefore continue to persevere in faith. **Hebrews 7:25**, *Hence, also, He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.* **2 Timothy 1:12**, *For this reason I suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day.* **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.* **John 10:28**, *“And I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all.”*

How does God protect us? Follow along closely as I attempt to answer this question. We must first understand the particular peril from which we are being protected. Satan is not after your body. Satan is not after your money. Satan is not taking aim at your physical health or your financial well-being as such as if by the ruin of those things he would achieve some sort of victory or accomplish his diabolical purposes. Satan's target is your faith; your trust in God's work in Christ; your reliance upon God's promises in the gospel. His goal is the destruction, the demise of your faith that your eternal soul might be damned forever. This salvation of which Peter so often speaks is tied to what? Look at **verse 9** - *obtaining as the outcome of your **faith** the salvation of your souls.* What is it that is sorely tried in suffering and hardship? Look at **verse 7**. It is *your **faith** that is tested by fire* isn't it? So God is guarding our faith. He is protecting our faith. He is preserving us in faith. Look again at verse 7. What is it that will *result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ?* It is **faith** that has been proven to be genuine. So we are preserved *in* faith. Of the patriarchs

Hebrews 11:13a says, *All these died in faith.* In other words, they sucked in that final breath still relying upon the promises of God.

Not only are we preserved *in* faith but we *are protected by the power of God through faith.* “The believer’s personal faith or trust in God is the means God uses to guard his people. [The idea is that] God’s power in fact energizes and continually sustains individual, personal faith” (Grudem, pp. 58-59). It is His gracious gift. Protection is suited to the danger. For example, if I were in danger of drowning, a heavy bulletproof vest would do me little good. I would be much better served by a life preserver. Faith is a certain conviction as to the truth of the gospel and a hearty reliance upon the promises of God in Christ. If the peril is the ruin of my reliance upon God then the power of God is exercised and displayed in the maintenance of that trust to the preservation of my soul.

So on one hand God is guarding our faith against all that would ruin it. On the other hand He is positively sustaining and strengthening the faith that we have. That’s the idea behind all this Word and Sacrament stuff we keep talking about. Listen to these four questions and answers from the Westminster Larger Catechism: **Q. 88. What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption?** A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption are, his ordinances, especially the Word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation. **Q. 89. How is the Word made effectual to salvation?** A. The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching, of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, *through faith*, unto salvation. **Q. 90. How is the Word to be read and heard, that it may become effectual to**

salvation? A. That the Word may become effectual to salvation, we must attend thereunto with diligence, preparation, and prayer; receive it *with faith* and love, lay it up in our hearts, and practice it in our lives. **Q. 91. How do the sacraments become effectual means of salvation?** A. The sacraments become effectual means of salvation, not from any virtue in them, or in him that administers them; but only by the blessing of Christ, and the working of his Spirit in them that *by faith* receive them.

Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Grudem points out, "Salvation is used here not of past justification or of present sanctification but of the future full possession of all the blessings (3:9) of our redemption (1:18) – of the final, complete fulfillment of our salvation" (*I Peter*, p. 59). God preserves us for blessedness. **1 Peter 3:9**, *for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing*. Right now the saints cannot see what a blessed inheritance is made sure to us. **1 Corinthians 2:9**, *No eye has seen all that God has prepared for those who love Him*. But one day we shall see. And what is it we shall see at last? It will be all of the glorious and beautiful promises of God that are ours in the Christ.

Beloved, you are protected that you might be openly acknowledged and acquitted by God; received into heaven; fully and forever free from all sin and misery; filled with inconceivable joys; made perfectly holy and happy in body and soul; joined with the company of martyrs, of innumerable saints, of just men made perfect, and of angels. You are protected that you might behold the immediate vision and fruition of and enjoy full communion with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are protected that your every spiritual longing may be satisfied. You are protected that you might know the end of fasting, praying,

mourning, watching; the end of fear, temptation, of grief, sorrow, sin, death, separation, tears, consuming cares, sickness, and weariness.

All of this is waiting for us. Indeed, Peter assures us that it is *ready*. The work of Christ is an accomplished work, a complete work, a finished work. All of the promised benefits in the gospel have already been won for us by our Redeemer, our Champion. The blessings are ready. Nisbet says, "The want of the full possession [of them] by the saints is not because it is not ready for them but because they are not ready for it" (*I Peter*, p. 19). Two things must happen. We shall not be ready until all of God's elect are gathered in. We shall not be ready until God has worked out all of His gracious sanctifying purposes in us in this life (**Eph. 4:13**).

All the same that time of revelation is fixed in the eternal counsels of God. Davids says, the *last time* is "the final scene of the age ... the intervention of God to deliver His people ... Every preparation for the final unveiling of this salvation is completed. The curtain is about to go up. Only the final signal is awaited. Thus there is no question that God plans and has in fact accomplished salvation for his people, nor that the last times are here. The only question is the exact timing of its revelation to the rest of the world" (*I Peter*, p. 54).

The revelation of our salvation will be coincident with *the revelation of Jesus Christ* (**1:7, 13; 2:12; 4:7, 13; 5:1, 4**). Why is that? It is Christ who, in His active obedience, performed all for us (His was a perfect faith, **1:9**). It is Christ who, in His sacrificial death, paid all for us. It is Christ who, as the Firstborn from the dead, took possession of all for us. It is Christ who, as our faithful Savior, has prepared all for us (**John 14:2**). And so **Jude 24-25** break forth from our own lips,

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.

We shall continue this theme as we worship at the Lord's Table in a few moments.

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In **verse 5** the focus shifts to our **earthly pilgrimage** in which we are kept by the power of God.

Here's the connection:

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who are protected

What is it that is being guarded?

The divine assurance is that our _____ shall be safe.

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The perseverance of the saints is the doctrine that describes that continuous operation of the Holy Spirit in the believer by which the work begun in the heart is _____ and brought to _____.

How does God protect us?

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Satan's target is your _____; your _____ in God's work in Christ; your _____ upon God's promises in the gospel.

Not only are we preserved *in* faith but we *are protected by the power of God through faith*. "The believer's personal faith or trust in God is the _____ God uses to guard his people. [The idea is that] God's power in fact energizes and continually _____ individual, personal faith" (Grudem, pp. 58-59).

If the peril is the ruin of my reliance upon God, then the power of God is exercised and displayed in the maintenance of that _____ to the preservation of my soul.

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God preserves us for _____.

The revelation of our salvation will be coincident with
the revelation of _____ (1:7, 13; 2:12; 4:7, 13; 5:1, 4).

It is Christ who, in His active obedience, _____ all for us
(His was a perfect faith, 1:9).

It is Christ who, in His sacrificial death, _____ all for us.

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It is Christ who, as our faithful Savior, has _____ all for us (John 14:2).