

A Hope-Filled Life – 1 Peter 1:4-5

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INTRODUCTION

Have you ever received an inheritance? Or do you expect to come into one someday? Inheritances can be tricky things. Parents are often wanting to bless their children with a generous inheritance and they envision leaving something of great value to their kids that will bring great enjoyment to them and maybe even bring the family closer together. But all too often inheritances have the opposite effect. Brothers and sisters fight over them, or have hurt feelings if they think they didn't get a fair share, or they argue about what to do with houses, cars, businesses, cherished family heirlooms, and on and on. Too many times the inheritance brings out the ugly and the selfish and the unresolved family issues that have built up over the years. And what the parents intended to be a blessing actually becomes a curse on the family. Have you ever seen that happen?

Earthly inheritances have many other downsides as well. First, they only come through the death of a loved one. In order to receive our inheritance someone has to die. And material goods are always a very poor substitute for a living, breathing family member. Secondly, in most cases they only come to us very late in our lives when we may have very little time or energy left to enjoy them. Setting our hopes on receiving an inheritance someday when a loved one dies and we're old and grey and worn out is a very empty way to live life. And thirdly, every inheritance we can receive in this world is subject to decay, wearing out, losing its value, fading, falling apart, being stolen, etc., and will quite likely add stress to our lives as we worry about how to spend it and use it and protect it and keep it from losing its value. Earthly inheritances, quite simply, are overrated and when received require great care in order to prevent them from becoming a curse that sucks us away from God's purposes for our lives and our relationships.

But the good news is, for those of us given living hope in Christ and living out the new life God has given us, we of all people, have what we need to avoid being sucked into the ugliness that so often arises with an earthly inheritance. And if we find ourselves sucked into it and setting aside God's purposes for an earthly

inheritance, we've gone off track and repentance is in order...plain and simple. Because if our perspective is aligned with God's and if we're conscious of the present reality of our living hope, we know that our true inheritance is never here on earth and by God's grace we won't allow any earthly inheritance to take priority over that and lead us astray from God's purposes. As Scripture teaches us, it's better to be wronged or defrauded than to allow an earthly inheritance to lead us into behavior and attitudes that harm our relationships and bring disrepute to the name of our God.

But, of course, we'll only be able to live this way if we truly believe that our real inheritance – the perfect one we really want – is NEVER here on this earth. And Peter is going to help lead us to that perspective this morning, which – let's be honest – we all struggle to keep at the forefront of our minds. As we continue our study in 1 Peter today, we're going to focus on verses 4 and 5 of chapter 1. To begin, and to get the full sense of this passage, let's read verses 3 through 5:

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

May the Lord bless the reading of his Word and enable us to be transformed through it.

This morning, as we dig into verses 4 and 5, I want to share with you *how everyone of us in Christ can have a hope-filled life by living in light of 4 present realities.*

OUR INHERITANCE IS IN HEAVEN, NOT ON EARTH

The first reality for every born-again Christ-follower, for every saved sojourner passing through a world not our home, and the one which we perhaps most need to embrace, is something we've already touched on this morning. And that reality is this: *Our Inheritance is in heaven, not on earth.* Such a simple truth, and yet so hard for American believers to really believe and embrace. Oh, we all know

intellectually that this is true. We're all ready to say, "Amen!" But when it comes to the way we actually live our lives and how we spend our time and energy and money, we too often reveal that we're still mostly pursuing an earthly inheritance. We're glad there's a heavenly one waiting for us someday, but right now there's too much fun stuff to get and do here. In other words, we're quite distracted in pursuit of an earthly inheritance, and all too often we're willing to set aside godly attitudes and purposes to lay hold of it.

But imagine what a change it would bring about in our perspective, our priorities and our purpose, if we were to truly believe and live out of the present reality that our inheritance is in heaven, not on earth...if we were to begin setting our hope fully on that future inheritance...the inheritance that is our living hope. And what an inheritance it is! Peter describes it with 3 powerful adjectives that put our inheritance in sharp contrast to any inheritance this world can every offer. He says it is *imperishable, undefiled and unfading*.

First, it's *imperishable*. In other words, there's no possibility that the inheritance God has for us will ever decay, rust, rot, turn to dust, fall apart, burn up in a fire, or get stolen. Everything on this earth and even the earth itself is subject to decay and will one day perish altogether. I enjoy old books. I love how they look, how they smell, how they read, and that they're a piece of history from a different place and time. But old books are very perishable. The pages are often brittle. The bindings are fragile. Sunlight is not their friend. And one day they'll fall apart and turn to dust. Or they could burn up in a fire. They're fun to have, and I hope my kids will enjoy having a few of them when I come into my real inheritance someday, but they're perishable and fragile and not something to hold too tightly. But not so with the eternal inheritance God is keeping for us right now in heaven. It's completely indestructible. It will last forever and will be so much better than anything this world can ever offer.

Secondly, our inheritance is *undefiled*. It can't be ruined by water damage, torn up or broken by a careless child, contaminated by mold or mice, or infected with disease germs. It's being kept for us in pristine and perfect condition and protected from any and all contamination. And it never will be defiled or ruined, even after we receive it. Have you ever dropped your beautiful new cell phone in an unflushed toilet? Now that's contamination! That's defilement! What was shiny and new and all the latest technology is suddenly disgusting and 99% sure

to be broken as well. Every earthly inheritance, no matter how amazing, is subject to contamination, defilement. In an instant it can go from very valuable to completely worthless. But the inheritance of our living hope will never be contaminated, corrupted or infected in any way.

And thirdly, our inheritance is *unfading*. The Greek word here is interesting. It's *amarantos*, which is the word for the amaranth flower...a flower used widely in dried flower arrangements because it doesn't lose its color when dried. It's considered the unfading flower and has long been a symbol for something that lasts forever. And Peter uses this significant word to describe the inheritance God has given us. It's an inheritance that will never fade in beauty...that will never lose its glory or its value...that will never grow old and wear out....that after millions of years will still be just as beautiful and glorious as on the day we receive it. Can you think of anything on earth of which that could be true?

The inheritance that is our living hope is the only inheritance worth living for and setting our minds on and pursuing with all heart, soul, mind and strength. One commentary summed up Peter's description of our inheritance this way: "[It is] untouched by death, unstained by evil, and unimpaired by time. [In other words] our inheritance is death-proof, sin-proof, and time-proof" (*I & II Peter, I, II & III John, Jude*; by Walls, D. and Anders, M.). That's a pretty good sum-up, don't you think? Peter couldn't have been much more descriptive than he was about the incredible and lasting value of the inheritance we have in Christ! May this be the only inheritance we're living for in our daily lives.

Now, before we move on to the next reality, I do want to briefly answer the question you may be asking at this point. And that is: *What IS our inheritance exactly? What do we actually inherit?* We're not going to go through all the Scriptures on that topic today – that's a different message – but I do want to share with you the 3 primary elements of our inheritance revealed in Scripture. And interestingly, we're already receiving even now the firstfruits of each of these elements, but they will unfold fully in all their beauty, majesty and glory only at Christ's return. Until then, we're just getting a small taste.

The first element of our inheritance is this: *God himself!* We inherit God. Think about that for a moment. God himself is our inheritance. And even now we're receiving him as our inheritance though his Holy Spirit dwelling within us and

walking with us through life. Paul talks about this in Romans 8, verses 16 to 17, when he says:

16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.

We inherit God. What could be better than that? Peace with God right now, walking through life filled up with his presence, and then coming one day into his visible and glorious and worship-inducing presence in heaven...where we'll stay forever in awe of and overjoyed by his glory, goodness, majesty and power... where we'll see him face to face and enjoy him forever. That's our inheritance! Come Lord Jesus!

The second element of our inheritance is this: *eternal life*. We inherit life instead of death...life abundant...the life that is truly life which will go on forever and ever. Again, we've already received the firstfruits: *new spiritual life*. Those of us in Christ have been born again, re-created, brought from spiritual death to spiritual life through the resurrection of Christ. We are alive to God in Christ and able to walk in his purposes and accomplish his will by his power. But there will be a day when this eternal life reaches its full glory. And that's the day when Christ gives us our glorified bodies. Our whole person will be alive with God forever, never to die again.

And the third element of our inheritance is this: *the kingdom of God*. We inherit his kingdom, where we will reign with God forever and ever in the new heavens and the new earth. This life is essential preparation for that day. Through repentance and faith in Christ, we've already entered the kingdom...we've entered the realm where God comes to act with us and accomplish his will through us on this earth right now. But this kingdom is currently invisible to those who have not trusted in Christ. One day it won't be. It will unfold in all its glory and majesty when Christ returns and all will see the glorious kingdom of God that is our inheritance. In the meantime, as we live in this kingdom and allow God to powerfully accomplish his will through us, more eyes are opened as God's glory and power is revealed through us and others choose life with us in the kingdom of God.

These are the 3 primary elements of our imperishable, undefiled and unfading inheritance in Christ: *God himself, eternal life, and the kingdom*. May we live out of the reality of this wonderful inheritance being kept safely for you and for me in heaven, and of which we've already begun receiving the firstfruits.

GOD IS CURRENTLY GUARDING US BY HIS POWER

So now let's look at the second reality that leads us to a hope-filled life. Here it is: *God Is Currently Guarding Us by His Power*. Peter says in verse 5: ***who by God's power are being guarded***. This is something happening right now and continuously for God's people. And the image here is of a military guard surrounding us and protecting us. I think of that situation with Paul in Acts when word came that a group of Jews had taken a vow to eat nothing until they murdered him. What did the Roman tribune do when he got wind of this plot? He called together 200 soldiers, with 70 horsemen, and 200 spearmen and whisked Paul away by night. And yet even this impressive military protection, which proved quite effective, is nothing compared to being guarded not by men, but by the very power of God.

And this is the present reality for God's chosen sojourners living in a hostile world. God is surrounding his people with a military guard...his very own power and protection. This does not mean that we are being guarded from all physical harm, though God often does that for us. Clearly, as we've already seen and will continue to see in 1 Peter, suffering like our Savior accompanies us when we walk in his steps and get serious about God's purposes. But this does mean that God is committed and faithful to actively and effectively guard our souls, give us grace for each moment, and provide us with everything we need to accomplish his will in this life and endure whatever trials, testing and persecution comes with it. He will ensure that we arrive safely at home with him and come into our promised inheritance.

In the words of Jesus, from John 10:27-29:

27 My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. 28 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. 29 My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Never forget that God is actively and continuously guarding you by his power. No matter how difficult life gets, he's faithful to walk with you through it and making sure you come into your inheritance. What does this mean in a practical sense? It means we never need to be afraid. No matter what happens, God will provide what we need as we look to him and he will see us through. Proverbs 3:25-26 affirms this:

25 Do not be afraid of sudden terror or of the ruin of the wicked, when it comes, 26 for the LORD will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being caught.

Notice that the ruin the wicked seeks to bring upon us may come. Hard and difficult things and persecution will arise when we get serious about following Jesus, becoming like him and accomplishing the Father's will. But we never need to be afraid of it. No matter what comes, the Lord, who is guarding us, will be our confidence and will see us through to our eternal home.

FAITH IS THE MEANS GOD USES TO GUARD US

And this brings us to the third reality that will lead us to a hope-filled life. This one is tied very closely to number two. Are you ready? *Faith Is the Means God Uses to Guard Us*. God guards us by his power through FAITH. His guarding begins when we first come to him with faith in Christ, walking through the doorway into his kingdom. But just as our new life with him began by faith, so it must continue. Belief, trust, receiving and accepting God's Word, and refusing to abandon it, is the means God uses to guard us. We're saved by faith and we walk by faith.

Never abandon faith in God and simple trust in the truths of his Word. That's the surest way to open up the door to attacks from the enemy. To abandon faith is to create a breach in the military guard that the enemy can sneak through. It's true that God will always be faithful to his children and always be seeking to guard and protect us, even when we struggle with doubt and unbelief. But each time we abandon simple trust in our good God, we create an opening for the enemy to inflict wounds, to create scars.

This does not mean, however, that we can't ask questions or that any doubt we have should be pushed down and ignored. Not at all! Let's be honest with ourselves and with God when we're struggling with unbelief. It needs to be dealt with and resolved by his power and his truth. And he knows all about it already. Let's dig in and uncover the source of it with God and sometimes with the help of others. Let's ask God to help us with our unbelief. He knows our weakness, our frailty, our tendency to doubt his goodness. He is merciful and wants to help us uncover the source and move to confident trust in every area of our lives. But as we work on these things and have conversations with God and others about them, always make the simple choice to keep following God's Word and seeking after him even when unbelief keeps trying to rise up.

The problem comes when we allow our unbelief to take over and we decide to start acting out of that unbelief...when we decide that: *Until I get this doubt thing resolved I'm just going to toss out God's Word and give up trying to put it into practice. I'm just going to live like an unbeliever until God fixes this for me.* That's when the breach in the military guard opens up wide and God may allow us to try that for awhile and see how it goes. He may allow us to experience the built-in consequences and discipline that always accompany sinful choices arising from unbelief.

In contrast, though we all struggle at times with unbelief, God implores us through his Word, to keep following him as we work through it. He implores us to never throw away our confidence in him. This can be especially hard in the trials, testings, and persecutions that are sure to come in each of our lives. And yet keeping faith and continuing to follow Christ – putting one foot in front of the other even when we're not feeling it – is the key to our endurance through those times. The writer Hebrews, in chapter 10, verses 32 to 39, ties this all together for us beautifully. He says:

32 But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, 33 sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. 34 For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. 35 Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward. 36 For you

have need of endurance, so that when you have done the will of God you may receive what is promised. 37 For, "Yet a little while, and the coming one will come and will not delay; 38 but my righteous one shall live by faith, and if he shrinks back, my soul has no pleasure in him." 39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.

This is a wonderful picture of how God's chosen sojourners – filled with living hope and keeping their eyes on their true inheritance – find themselves able to joyfully endure trials, testing and persecution through faith and receive what has been promised to them. Never throw away your confidence which has a great reward. Endure whatever life brings – even if it's the plundering of your property – endure it through faith, knowing God is guarding you by his power, preserving your soul, and bringing you into your imperishable inheritance.

OUR SALVATION IS NOT YET VISIBLE TO THE WORLD

And this brings us to the 4th reality that leads us to a hope-filled life, and that is this simple, yet important truth: *Our Salvation Is Not Yet Visible to the World*. That may seem like a "no-brainer" to you, and yet how often do we wonder about non-believers: *Why don't they get it? Why can't they see what's so obvious to us? Why do so many people love to hate Christians? Why can't they understand the simple message of the gospel and just believe it?* Well, none of this should be a surprise to us. Spiritually dead people who are deceived and being used by the Father of lies, shouldn't be expected to get it, and shouldn't be expected to be excited about a message that says they're spiritually dead and that the way they're living their lives is sinful. Our salvation is not yet visible to those without Christ and all they see, until the Holy Spirit opens their eyes, is a foolish message for weak people that's trying to infringe on their freedom to do what they want.

But make no mistake. There will be a day when every person, living or dead, will see our salvation visibly, and every knee will bow at the name of Jesus Christ. Our salvation is ready to be revealed to all in the last time. Until then, lost people can't see it until the Holy Spirit opens their eyes. And he does this as his people, praying continually for the Holy Spirit's work, risk themselves to share the hope they have with these lost people, even when it leads to mocking, rejection and persecution. That's how God makes salvation visible to people right now:

through his people reaching out in love and mercy and trusting the Holy Spirit to work through us as we do...trusting him to open their eyes and lead them into God's kingdom.

APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

Are you willing to risk yourself to be used by God in this way? What a privilege it is to be used by God to bring someone else into the inheritance God has for them, and to keep them from inheriting Satan, God's wrath and hell. But to do it we've got to risk ourselves. We've got to reach a point where we actually say the words of the good news of salvation and new life through Jesus Christ alone. And, my friends, if we want people to listen to this message, we need to listen to them first...to show them we care about them as people made in the image of God... even when their worldview and lifestyle choices are diametrically opposed to that of a Christ-follower. And really, what else should we expect from spiritually dead people who don't accept God or the Bible?

Now as we listen to people and show them we care, we need to pay attention to where in their life the gospel may speak to the challenges they're facing. Then we can carefully and lovingly share a different perspective when the time is right. But when we're ready to do this and we do it in dependence on the Spirit and continual prayer, God will bring new life and salvation to many of these people. We don't have to change hearts. But God will as we walk in the steps of our Savior and follow him into the mission he's given us of making disciples...making born-again, resurrected, believers who are ready to follow Jesus in their daily lives.

You know there's one thing that will do more than anything else to lead us into this lifestyle of sharing the hope we have with a hopeless world. And that is this: *giving up trying to find our inheritance here on earth*. Are you ready to do that yet? The riches, pleasures and worries of this life are so effective at choking out our fruitfulness and keeping us from living God's purposes. When will you be ready to release your earthly inheritance to fully seek after the imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance God has for you? He's giving you the firstfruits of it already: new spiritual life, his Holy Spirit dwelling within you, and life in his kingdom right now, where he's ready to work through you to accomplish his will as you simply follow him. He makes the weak strong. He gives grace to

the humble. He empowers frail human beings to accomplish his powerful work as they follow him and trust him to provide as they do.

Breathe in this picture Paul gives us of people who are doing this...people who are truly living for their eternal inheritance:

2 Co 4:7–11, 16-18

7 But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. 8 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. 11 For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh... 16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

This life on earth is preparation for the life that is truly life when we fully inherit God's glorious kingdom and reign with him forever. Do you believe that today? Are you allowing God to prepare you now for life eternal? Are you proving faithful with what he's entrusted to you as you use it to build his kingdom by his power? Are you living for your true and lasting inheritance, which Paul describes as an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison? Isn't that what you really want?

Let's be people who are set on laying up for themselves treasures, not on earth, but in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also (see Matthew 6:20-21). Set your heart and your full hope on the imperishable, undefiled and unfading inheritance God has for you!

For Additional Study and Application

Describe a situation in your own life or the life of someone you know, when an inheritance brought division and strife to a family. How could that have gone differently with the biblical perspective on our inheritance given by Peter?

Describe the 3 primary elements of our inheritance revealed in Scripture (see Romans 8:16-17; Titus 3:4-8; Matthew 25:34). In what ways have we already received a portion of each of these and in what ways will we fully receive them in the future?

What does it mean in a practical sense that God is currently guarding us by his power? What confidence does that give you? Does this ensure us protection from suffering? Explain. Read and discuss what 2 Corinthians 4:7-18 has to say on this.

Looking at Hebrews 10:32-39, what are the keys to enduring trials, testing and persecution in this life?

Our salvation is not yet visible to lost people. How are you currently seeking to reveal it to them and offer them the hope you have in Christ? What are some ways you can increase your contact with lost people and/or your effectiveness at showing them you care and speaking God's good news to their need?