



Central Peninsula Church

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1 Peter 1:3-5
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Our True Home, Our Living Hope

SERIES: *A Guidebook for Aliens*

Last week we started a series in the encouraging New Testament letter of 1 Peter. We're calling our series "A Guidebook for Aliens." You need to know that we're not studying extraterrestrial life or following the Mars probe. But the word "alien" is a reminder that we as followers of Jesus are really like resident aliens here on earth. We live and function in a world that is not our true home. And the letter of 1 Peter is like a travel guide for spiritual aliens as we pass through this life on our way to our homeland.

Merhan Masseri lived in an underground terminal at the Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris, France for over a decade. In 1977 he was expelled from Iran because of his political views. His expulsion left him without a passport or proper identification. For the next four years he bounced around Europe applying for refugee status but was denied again and again. In 1981 it looked as if good fortune had turned his way when he was finally granted political asylum by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees. But on his way to apply for citizenship in England in 1988 his papers were stolen, leaving him stranded in Paris where French officials denied him entry, but because he had no documents and no country of origin he could not be deported. So he took up residence in Terminal One. And through a maze of legal battles he cannot be expelled from the airport nor can he be allowed to leave the airport onto French soil. So that's where he lives. Sitting at the same table everyday, reading and writing in his diary, eating airport food, shaving in the public restroom; living off the kindness of airport employees and travelers. At first he fought the system and made various attempts to apply for citizenship, looking for a way out. But over time his zeal faded. He settled in. He had given up. So in 1999 when French officials finally presented him with the papers he would need to enter the country and settle in France, Merhan casually put the documents in his pocket and went back to his writing. He wasn't planning on going anywhere. You see, at age 53 after 11 years of airport living, Merhan had lost all hope.

One reporter wrote: "His is a story of broken hopes and bureaucracy, of a trip across Europe in search of a homeland that became a journey into mental chaos and despair." The airport's doctor said that he expected Merhan to be leaving the airport soon and that it wasn't "normal or healthy for him to live underground in an airport terminal. But the problem is he is afraid to leave. He has become fossilized here." Without the hope of a homeland Merhan accommodated himself and made himself at home in the strange surroundings of an airport terminal.

That's a bizarre story, isn't it? But just like Merhan we too are tempted at times to accommodate ourselves to our surroundings. To give up on the distinctives of Christian living, becoming discouraged and apathetic about our future. And when that happens of course, just like Merhan, we begin to blend in

with the values and priorities of the world around us. Without hope we become dulled to who we really are. Without hope we are tempted to give up on fighting what the apostle Paul calls the "good fight" of faith. And so we settle in. We compromise. We make ourselves at home in the world.

Maybe that's how you came here this morning; limp and hopeless. And you're at that place as you look at your life where you wonder is trusting God really going to be worth it in the end? And you're asking yourself why should I keep pressing on? Or maybe like Merhan you've gotten used to eating airport food. You've slowly watched as little by little apathy has set in and it's turned to compromise in some key areas in your life today. That's what happens in the absence of hope.

So today we're going to talk about this critical principle of hope. The kind of hope you and I need to stand firm and make the hard choices to follow after Christ in our world. If you were with us last week you'll remember that the apostle Peter is writing in 64 AD to men and women of Asia Minor who may soon be required to give their lives for following Jesus. So this is the hope that he offers them and us this morning.

Let's pick it up together in 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 3-5. **"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, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."**

I. Hope: By His Great Mercy

In the opening verses that we looked at last week Peter gave us a short course in salvation essentials. And in verse 1& 2 we discovered who we really are. We are being restored and made useful for God's purposes. We are loved and chosen by God the Father, sanctified and made whole by God the Spirit, and cleansed through the sacrifice of God the Son. That's who we are as followers of Jesus Christ. But we are also an alien people. Non participants in the values and ambitions and rewards that the world has to offer. And because of our alien status we'll find life on earth, awkward, difficult and even painful at times. So Peter turns now in this section to the topic of Christian hope.

Peter begins in verse 3 with a blessing, **"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."** In fact in Greek, verses 3-12 are one long run-on sentence of worship, adoration and praise. That's where Peter begins. Bless God! Bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because he has acted in kindness towards us out of the quality of His great and abundant mercy. Of course we often speak about grace. Grace is God's kindness towards the undeserving but the great

mercy of God that Peter talks about here is His kindness extended to the weak and frail. You see, God does not help those who help themselves. He helps the helpless and the broken. That's His mercy in action.

There's a great scene in the movie *Seabiscuit* that happens after Tom Smith, a broken-down, unemployed cowboy, rescues a horse from being shot after he had broken his leg. Millionaire Charles Howard, who is about to engage in a horse racing enterprise, has a campfire interview with Smith, and asks why he had rescued the old race horse. Tom replies, "You don't throw a whole life away just 'cause it's banged up a bit." Every horse is good for something, Tom claims.

Later on in the movie, Tom is outraged to find out that their jockey Red Pollard, who had just lost a critical race was, in fact, blind in one eye. And he was stunned by the loss and betrayal, so he urges Mr. Howard to fire Red. But when Howard denies his request Tom demands a reason. Mr. Howard states, "You don't throw away a whole life just because it's banged up a bit."

That's just like God's great mercy towards you and me. You may be banged up this morning. You may be bruised and bloodied; wounded by the past or overwhelmed by the present. You may feel like that broken down race horse. But God doesn't condemn you for your blindness or inability to run. No; He looks at you through the eyes of His great mercy. And He acts in kindness and tenderness as you turn to Him.

Many of you in this room know this mercy well, don't you? You know the depths to which Christ was willing to go to find you in your weakness and frailty. You've discovered at the core of who you are a deep helplessness to change apart from the powerful work of a merciful God. And you know that it's at this place of helplessness, when we recognize that we are too broken to change, that God acts in mercy. And when God acts according to His great mercy, we are "born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." We're "born again." Our old life was such a disaster, it had to be entirely reborn. Have you ever taken your car to the mechanic thinking all you needed was an oil change and a tune up but discovered you needed a complete overhaul? We were dead in our sin. We needed new life. God couldn't just tune up or dress up the old life. It was beyond any extreme make over. Instead He puts it to death. And out of the ashes of that old life comes what the Bible calls the new birth.

II. Hope: Living and Confident

Peter says we were born again to a hope that is living and certain. We've been given a living hope that stands in contrast to all the dying hopes that the world depends upon. The hopes of success, wealth, beauty, youth, intelligence. The hopes that initially hold out promise but never deliver the goods.

In Rosie O'Donnell's book *Find Me*, she describes a conversation that went on between her and her executive producer when it came time to renew her contract for the Rosie O'Donnell show. Here's what she says about that

conversation:

"Jim said, 'Rosie, your ratings are better than ever. We would like to renew your contract sooner than later.' I wasn't expecting that. I just looked at him. He touched his nose, and said, 'You are renewing, aren't you?'"

"Well, Jim, I'm thinking, no."

"Oh, come on Rosie. Your show is the best thing going on daytime TV."

"I laughed and said, 'That's nice of you to say, but there may be other things, other interests.'"

"I didn't finish my sentence. I was thinking about a conversation I had had the night before with someone who asked me, 'So what's fame like for you?' I didn't think. I just spoke the truth I knew but hadn't been willing to utter."

"I said, 'I used to think that fame would fix everything, that I would get there and it would be better. Everything that had happened would stop hurting and all the new things wouldn't hurt at all. Like paradise. Or heaven. I was wrong.'"

"After I said those words, I couldn't fall back asleep. I had literally been up all night trying to figure out what I meant. The hair. The makeup. The glitz. The glamour. It's pretend. Empty. It's not as it seems."

More than a few of us have been there, haven't we. Not that we were necessarily placing our hopes on fame. Maybe it was a relationship, more things, prestige, greater success, that for a while seemed to offer the answer but in time we came to the same conclusion; it's pretend, empty, it's not what it seems. It's a dying hope. A hope that cannot make good on its promise in the end.

But our hope is both living and certain. You can count on this hope, believe in this hope, rest in this hope, place your hope in this hope. Why? Because it's based on the certain reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Our hope is living and certain because of Easter and the empty tomb.

A few weeks ago I ran across a list of some of the world's worst predictions for the future. Like this one: In 1954 the then Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles said, "The Japanese don't make anything the people in the United States will ever want." Or the words of the shortsighted computer scientist John von Neumann who said in 1949, "It would appear that we have reached the limits of what is possible to achieve with computer technology." Or the enthusiastic prediction of Arthur Summerfield, who was the United States Postmaster General in 1959, who said: "Before man reaches the moon, your mail will be delivered within hours from New York to Australia by guided missiles. Ladies and gentlemen we stand on the threshold of rocket mail."

But this hope of ours is not based on some shot in the dark prediction of man. It's not even based upon a panel of market analysts, experts who study the trends and analyze the graphs to scientifically determine the future. No, our hope is based upon the historical reality of a living and resurrected Lord. A Jesus who was brutally executed, who was buried and who was resurrected from the dead. And Peter remember, was there. "I saw Him. He talked with us on the seashore while we ate breakfast together. Jesus is alive!" And because He is alive we have a living and confident expectation for that same resurrection power to deliver us from the grave.

It could be that you're here this morning and you've been so wounded by the broken promises of others, spoken or unspoken, that you can barely move beyond the wall of suspicion here. There have been so many hopes that have failed you in the

past you can barely dare to believe it. This hope can be trusted and lived in with great confidence. It is a living and certain hope because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And this hope is like a heavenly inheritance that is reserved in heaven for you.

III. Hope: A Heavenly Inheritance

He says that this hope looks to the day when we will **“obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.”**

Did you know that when you accepted Jesus Christ, God wrote your name down in the reservation book of heaven? It's not like a restaurant. We don't get to tell Him how many people will be in your party or what time you'll arrive. He'll take care of the details. But we can rest assured that the reservation will be there when we come.

Last year my wife Nancy and I made plane reservations to visit our daughter in Peru through an online ticket service. I made my reservations, got the confirmation and waited and waited for my tickets to arrive through a delivery service. Finally I called the ticket service and they said that according to their records my tickets had been delivered weeks ago, I later found out that the default on the website had me accept delivery without my signing for it so the carrier had no record but they were sure they had delivered it. So, our only recourse was to pay for 2 new tickets that we would be reimbursed for after our trip. We ordered two more tickets. Only this time we made sure that they were to be delivered here to the church where I could sign for them. A few days later we received one ticket at home without a signature. By this time it's getting pretty close to our trip and I still needed a ticket. So I called again and explained that we there was still one ticket short. It came a few days later again to the house. Only this time when we opened it up my ticket was there along with someone's Amtrak ticket to Atlanta, Georgia!

Now that's a crazy story. But I tell you that only to say that when God says that there is an inheritance reserved in heaven for you, you can count on it being there. It won't get screwed up through an online error or lost in delivery. And that's what Peter tells us here. Our hope is a secure inheritance. It's a sure thing. It can be counted on to be there when we arrive. And he describes that certainty through three different pictures, expressed here by three verbal adjectives: imperishable, undefiled and unfading.

The first word is something of a favorite with Peter. He uses it in contrast to things of the world that are perishable, things that one day succumb to the forces of death. This inheritance of ours is something that will not die. It will not perish. Paul uses this word in 1 Cor. 15 to describe the imperishable nature of immortality when he says, **“Now I say this brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.”** In heaven we trade in these sagging, failing, perishable flesh suits of ours for new imperishable bodies that will last throughout eternity.

Last week we went out for dinner with a few friends to celebrate our anniversary. And we suddenly realized that we were surrounded by young Stanford students with all of their youthful enthusiasm. I didn't pay much attention at first but then it hit me. I turned to Nancy and said, “You know, 28 years ago when we got married none of these people existed.” And occasionally this truth confronts me. I'm aging. Like it or not my body is perishing. And

you know what? So is yours. You may have different markers. Maybe your son is consistently beating you to the hoop and making the layups. Or maybe your daughter's adolescence and beauty reminds you of your fading youth. Believe me, all you need to do is live long enough before you realize our bodies are perishing.

Some of you today are struggling with the pain, the frustration, and the limitations of perishable flesh. You may be reminded daily of the frailty and declining nature of your mortality. You're caught in the maze of medical opinions, buried in a pile of insurance forms and prescription refills. But Peter says our inheritance is imperishable; it looks forward to the day when we put on new immortal bodies that are no longer subject to the disease and fatigue of perishing flesh.

And our inheritance is “undefiled.” It's without defect or stain. Peter says in verse 19 that we are redeemed by the blood of an unblemished lamb. That's the same word he uses here. In fact Peter is making a clear reference to the sacrificial requirements of the Old Testament where you would bring an unblemished perfect, spotless lamb to be sacrificed for the forgiveness of your sin. The sacrifice was to be unstained because your life was stained by sin. The lamb needed to be undefiled in order to pay for the defilement that was yours because of sin. But our inheritance is unstained, undefiled.

Just imagine for a minute that your great aunt had willed to you a treasured painting as an inheritance. You hadn't seen the painting in years but you remember it growing up. You remember its color and texture, the way it caught the sun through the window. You had it shipped to you and insured it for its value. You were eager for it to come. But when you opened it up you found that it had been horribly stained. The colors had bled together. It was almost unrecognizable. The stain had defiled its beauty. You were devastated and deeply disappointed.

The inheritance that is reserved in heaven for you is unstainable. It can no longer be made ugly by the stain of sin. That's tremendous news, isn't it? It means that one day I'll be done with the battle with sin. I'll no longer need to repent for my failures. I'll no longer carry the shame of sin's stain upon my life. The stain of sin that has marred the beauty and defiled the glory of the image of God in this lifetime will one day and forever be removed. The apostle John wrote, **“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure”** (1 John 3:2-3). We shall be like Him. We ourselves will be spotless and unstained just like the Lamb of God.

We have a secure inheritance that cannot die, cannot be stained by sin, and it will not fade. This word is in contrast to things that are particularly vulnerable and susceptible to the decaying forces of time.

A few years ago I traveled up to Seattle to attend a conference. On the last day of the conference I had a few hours to kill before I had to be back at the airport so I decided I'd try and find the house I had grown up in. I had visited the neighborhood years before but I still carried an image of the place as I remembered it in my childhood; with a huge willow

tree in the backyard, a lush rock garden on one side and fresh paint throughout. But this time when I pulled up to the front my heart sank. The paint was cracked and faded. The willow was nothing but a stump, and the rock garden was completely overgrown. The brilliant picture I carried in my mind was now tarnished, dulled, dirty and tired. Time and neglect had taken its harsh toll. Decay had set in. Our inheritance says Peter, will not fade. It will not wither. It's not vulnerable to the decay of time. It will last in its splendor and glory. And it will startle us with its beauty throughout all eternity.

So our inheritance is imperishable, undefiled, and it will not fade. Max Anders in his commentary on the passage said: It's death proof, sin proof, and time proof. And it's reserved with certainty, in heaven for you. But here's the amazing thing. This heavenly inheritance is reserved for us and we are preserved for it.

IV. Hope: Guarded by the Power of God

This inheritance is **“reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”**

I think that the most pressing question on the minds of those brothers and sisters in Asia Minor that Peter was writing to was this. Is my faith sufficient to carry me to the end? Will I truly stand firm when the pressure comes? Have you ever wondered that?

And Peter says this. Not only are you on the reservation list of heaven, you are being guarded by the power of God to make it to the end. I've got to say that is an amazing statement. There are many times in these last 29 years when I truly didn't know if my faith would stand the test of time. But through battles of doubt, seasons of discouragement, and circumstances that produced great anxiety, I've been guarded by His power to preserve me. And that's His promise to you and me. To keep us, to guard us, to protect us to the very end. So that we will indeed receive the salvation to be revealed in the last times. When the façade of this life will be pulled back and the hopelessness of this world will be revealed for all it truly is and we will enter the fulness of our salvation.

So by the great mercies of God we have a living and certain hope. A heavenly inheritance reserved for each of us that is imperishable, undefiled, that will not fade. And each one of us is being guarded through the difficult journey of this life by the power of God so that our faith will stand firm to the very end.

This last week I read an article about the persecuted church in Burma. Their story is one of daily atrocities, civil rights abuses, starvation, brutality and rape. But in the midst of this suffering springs incredible faith and a living hope to press on as aliens and strangers in this world. This is what Pastor Simon writes about his people's suffering—and their living hope:

They call us a displaced people,
But praise God; we are not misplaced.
They say they see no hope for our future,
But praise God; our future is as bright as
the promises of God.

They say they see the life of our people
is a misery,
But praise God; our life is a mystery.
For what they say is what they see,
And what they see is temporal.
But ours is the eternal.
All because we put ourselves
In the hands of the God we trust.

This is the hope of each and every follower of Jesus Christ. Whatever presses on your life today remember this. You have a living and certain hope. A heavenly inheritance that is death proof, sin proof, and time proof. And you are being guarded by the power of God to make it to the very end. With such a hope as this, why would we ever want to make ourselves at home here. Don't settle down. Don't compromise your faith. Keep pressing on, and keep making the hard choices to follow after Jesus in this world. God has promised it's going to be worth it all.