

First Christian Church (Lawrence, KS)

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The Hope of Inheritance

1 Peter 1:1-9 (ESV)

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who are elect exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, 2 according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

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. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[Slide 1] Opening

Good morning church! I expect that last week was certainly one of the strangest Easter Sundays you've ever gone through. (I know it was for us here—a mostly empty sanctuary and no special Easter breakfast together with all of you.) Still, it was a wonderful day to celebrate the foundation of our faith—the reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. But the great thing about Easter isn't the pageantry of the annual celebration. It's that the power of the resurrection in our lives is an ongoing reality—Jesus transforming us daily as we follow him.

We're going to be delving deeper into what that means for us over the next three months, starting with this series I've titled, "*Resurrection Hope*," which will be followed by a series on "*Resurrection Life*." We'll be taking a journey through the book of 1 Peter, one of the richest and deepest books in the New Testament. Throughout our time in this short, but powerfully-packed, book our focus will be

on these key ideas: What does it mean to live in hope? And what does it look like to live as people who have what our text today calls “*a living hope*”?

Our starting point today is this: Peter calls this “living hope” an “inheritance,” which he says is ours because of the resurrection. Let’s begin with some important definitions and a little background to set the table properly. Then we can unpack the four key qualities that describe this inheritance.

[Slide 2] *Introduction*

The most important definition we must understand is the definition of the word “hope.” We use the word, “hope,” a lot in our everyday lives, especially now while we’re sheltering in place (which is the fancy, polite way of saying “stuck in our house”). So we say, “*I really hope that our groceries arrive before we run out of toilet paper.*” Or, “*I hope that this cough isn’t anything serious.*” Or, “*I hope that things get back to normal pretty soon.*”

What we mean by “I hope” in those sentences is something like, “*I would prefer that . . .*” or “*I really want this to happen . . .*” or “*it would be nice if this happened.*” We are expressing our wishes for a future that we can’t be certain of, but which we would like to see come to pass. It’s a way of saying, “*This is the kind of future that I wish would happen. If anyone is listening, I’m putting in my vote for what ought to happen.*” We might have some sense that what we’re hoping for is actually possible, maybe even likely, but we can’t know for sure, and we can’t count on it happening. It’s just what we would like to see. That’s why people say, “*Hope is not a plan.*”

[Slide 3 (start with emphasis on slide)]

But that’s not what the authors of the Bible meant when they used the word, “hope.” When the Bible uses the word, “hope,” it means this: “*the confident expectation of future good which is not yet here, but is certain to come.*” Having a biblical hope is looking to the future, but not just for a possibility that you would like to see happen. It is looking to the future for a definite good that is coming because God, who never lies, has promised that he is going to bring it about. Because it’s not yet here, because we can’t see it yet, because it hasn’t been realized yet—it’s hope; what we’re expecting is still in the future. But it is certain because God always keeps his word and never promises what he cannot do.

[Slide 4 (start with emphasis on slide)]

The second word is easier to understand—“inheritance.” An inheritance is the acquisition of possessions, conditions, or traits from someone else that comes to you as a gift. It is passed down to you from an earlier generation. Sometimes you have to wait until the person dies for you to be able to take possession of what

has been designated for you to inherit. But you might know well in advance of that person's death what it is that you are going to receive, so you have a confident expectation—a hope, if you will—that you are going to have an inheritance come your way. *[shift emphasis to me]*

Of course, the value of an inheritance can vary widely. My parents were divorced when I was very young, and I grew up with very little contact or involvement with my father. But by the time I was old enough to understand what an inheritance was, I had figured out that I shouldn't be expecting anything from my father. Right before he died, I was able to visit him, I'm so grateful for that time. I was able to pray with him to receive Jesus, to connect with him a little, and to help him understand what it meant to trust in Christ for salvation, even on his deathbed. *[shift emphasis to slide]* The day before he died, he gave me this watch that you see on the slide. It looks nice. It's way more complicated than I can fathom. I have no idea what the various dials are supposed to be measuring. And I really don't know if it has any value at all. I know it's not working. The other thing I know is that this is my inheritance from my father. *[shift emphasis to me]*

Please don't misunderstand me. I'm not angry at my father for leaving me without a financial inheritance. I don't feel like I've been ripped off or cheated. In truth, I was ripped off and cheated—but God has healed me of those wounds, and I'm not angry. I'm only bringing this up today to point out the contrast between an inheritance that has no value and the inheritance that the apostle Peter says is ours. *[Slide 5 (start with emphasis on slide)]*

That is the third definition that matters today. Who is "us"? Who are the "we" that have this hope, this inheritance? Peter's opening to his letter makes it pretty clear, and it will be reinforced repeatedly throughout the body of the letter. He is speaking to those who are the people of God, to those who have been born again, who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ, and are following him as disciples. *[shift emphasis to me]*

So there's our set of definitions—the terms that allow us to understand what it is that this author, the apostle Peter, is saying to the church, to us, today. He is writing to Christians, to those who have been born again by placing their faith in Jesus Christ. He says that we have a hope—a confident expectation of future good yet to come—that is for us an inheritance, a gift that has come to us from God through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[Slide 6] Background

Now let's look very briefly at the historical and literary background for two important details. First, this letter comes from the chief apostle to a group of

churches who were facing serious threats from the outside world, including the very real possibility of persecution. The churches consisted primarily of Gentile believers, most of whom were fairly young in their faith. Second, it was written when Peter was in Rome, sometime between the years 62-66 C.E.

What is significant about the dating and place for this letter is that in the year 64, the emperor Nero began an intense and grisly persecution of Christians in Rome as a way to shift the blame from himself for a fire that had destroyed two-thirds of the city. Christians, who were already widely regarded with suspicion and disfavor, were an easy target. So if Peter is writing after the fire happened and the subsequent persecution had begun, his focus on preparing the believers to face persecution is easily understood. Or if he is writing prior to the fire, when the social conditions of widespread animosity towards Christians prevailed, that in itself would be adequate warrant for warning these Gentile believers of what could be coming their way.

[Slide 7 (emphasis on slide)]

Verses three to five are where we want to focus our attention this morning. Let's read them again:

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.

[Slide 8]

Notice that the object of our hope—that for which we are waiting, that which we are expecting—is not just a change for the better in how things are going in the world. The “living hope” that Peter says is ours is connected to a salvation that is going to be revealed in the last time—the time of the return of Christ. So the Christian hope is not simply religious optimism. It's not having a positive outlook on life. It's not being cheery in the face of difficult circumstances. All of those things are good. All of those things are admirable, desirable traits for anyone, especially Christians, to have. If you're going through tough times, it's always better to go through them with someone who is helping you to stay positive and to look for the good that God can bring out of a bad situation. But that's not what Peter is talking about. He is not counseling cheap optimism as a better way to get through the day because you're cooped up in a messy house. He is saying that our

hope is tied to something that isn't here yet—our salvation. Jesus is bringing it with him when he returns. *[shift emphasis to slide]*

The biblical view of salvation, particularly here in 1 Peter, is complicated. But an easy way to picture it is that salvation is something we have now as a promise, for which we've been given a down payment, and the rest of it is coming in the future. Salvation is fully and finally here when Jesus returns to set up his forever kingdom. Our hope is tied to that day, to that event, to that fulfillment of God's purposes and plans, when salvation will be fully and finally realized.

So what we're hoping for, the living hope, is bound up with the realization of that time when salvation is fully experienced, a time, Peter says, is yet to be revealed. It's certain. It's coming. We just don't know when it is yet, because Jesus hasn't yet returned. When he is revealed, at that time, our expectation will become realization. Our hope for the future good will become our experience of present good in the presence of the kingdom of God.

[Slide 9]

Our hope is tied to something in the future—our confident expectation of what is yet to come. But it is also tied to something in the past. Our expectation is based on a promise and it is grounded in God's history—the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Because of that resurrection, because Jesus conquered the grave, we have a “living hope”—a hope that is alive because Jesus is alive to maintain it. Our hope isn't, “*Well, if such-and-such happens, we're in good shape*” (like Royals fans would be saying if we were having baseball this year). No, our hope is alive because the “living one” has conquered the thing that stands between us and the realization of that hope, death itself. Because we are in him through our faith, we have the assurance that his victory is ours, death is defeated, and we may confidently expect the full realization of what God has promised us—the inheritance of eternal life in the presence of God.

So let's examine what Peter tells us about this inheritance we have coming. Let's just see what kind of value it has compared to what we know about life in this world.

[Slide 10] The qualities of the inheritance: imperishable

(1) The first thing that Peter says about this inheritance is that it is *imperishable*—you can't kill it! It can't be destroyed. It's indestructible. I think about that watch that my father gave me. That watch is not indestructible. It was broken when he gave it to me. Everything in this world is like that. The best things we have (stuff)—are all fragile, easily broken, and quickly obsolete. Even if my father's watch were worth millions of dollars (you know, I should check some day

to see if it is! Wouldn't that be a surprise!), all of that money and anything it could buy could be lost in a moment. It could all be destroyed. Just a few verses later, Peter specifically refers to gold, which in the ancient world, as today, was considered one of the greatest indicators of wealth. Gold, he says, "perishes;" it is like a piece of fruit in the produce section. The greatest treasures in the world, the largest inheritances from the richest billionaires share this in common—they are all destructible; they all perish; they all evaporate. They don't last. They can't last.

[Slide 11]

But the inheritance we have in God is lasting; it's permanent. It is eternal. And that's not because it's artificial. I have this plant in my office. It was a Christmas gift to me from a nice couple who were very thoughtful and generous. It's a nice plant. I forget what it is. But it's a nice plant. The problem is that I'm not a very good keeper of plants. They could have given me a fake plant and I probably wouldn't have known the difference. And I probably would have watered it occasionally when I thought about it and been very happy. I might even have thought that I was keeping it alive (and doing a nice job of it). But I would have been completely wrong. If the plant was fake, I wasn't keeping it alive, I'm maybe just keeping the dirt wet. (In fact, now that I think of it, I may have actually done this at some point in the past. I think I may have had an artificial plant that I was watering for a while until someone told me it wasn't real. I can't remember for sure. But it seems like it happened. It certainly could have happened.)

My point is this—the inheritance we have from God is lasting, not because it's artificial, but because it's imperishable. It's "never dying"—the life that sustains it is the eternal life of the living God. There is no death at all in God. He is the source of all life; he is the ever-living head of creation, whose life sustains us and causes our lives to flourish. The inheritance we have is ever-living, always fully and eternally infused with the life of God.

[Slide 12] *The qualities of the inheritance: undefiled*

(2) Not only is our inheritance of salvation indestructible or imperishable, Peter says that it is *undefiled*—it can't be ruined. The inheritance is pure, without any trace of corruption or decay. It is unspoiled: there is nothing in it to make it turn sour, or to become distasteful. [*shift emphasis to slide*]

Have you ever gotten a bunch of grapes that look so great—but then you bite into one and it's just sour or rotten? Or you take a big bite of a piece of chocolate that has gone bad, or bread that was baked with rancid oil? That is one of the most unpleasant experiences you can have. One minute your hopes are sky high, you're excited about what you're about to taste, and the next minute you're spitting

everything out and trying to clean off your tongue like a cat. *[shift emphasis to me]*

Or think of the times you've been looking forward to a great evening with your spouse or your kids or your friends. And someone comes in with a bad attitude, or, I don't know, wearing a K-State sweatshirt, and just spoils the whole evening. You had high hopes for a nice time together, and it all goes horribly sour and you feel rotten. You can almost taste the disappointment, which is the lingering take-away that you are left with.

Even the best times in our lives can disappoint us. No matter how great the time we have or how thrilling the experience, we're never satisfied.

But the inheritance we're promised in God is just the opposite. It can't be ruined; it can't be spoiled. It will never leave us disappointed. Imagine that first glimpse of the most beautiful and scenic place you've ever seen: all of the joy of that initial experience, lasting, without turning into a disappointment. Or that first taste of the most glorious dish of ice cream or grilled meat or fresh bread—staying with you and never turning to halitosis. Nothing to spoil your view or your experience; nothing to ruin the taste or leave you feeling sad because it wasn't what you hoped for. The inheritance keeps its goodness and its fullness forever.

[Slide 13]

Think about this. None of us has ever experienced pure joy. All of our joys, no matter how great, how long they lasted, have always been tempered with some measure of sadness. Either the joy isn't sufficient to overcome the sadness we have, or it doesn't last very long, and the sadness returns. (Again, the Royals come to mind. Ahh—let it go, Barry.)

But Peter says that our inheritance, the thing we're hoping for, is undefiled. It won't disappoint us. We will experience not only pure joy, but unmediated joy. Unfiltered joy. Joy without any hint of sadness; nothing to diminish or ruin the experience of unending, unstoppable, relentless joy. No pain to interfere with it; no fear to limit it; no death to drown it out. Joy that is continuous, not occasional; full, not partial; satisfying, not merely teasing.

[Slide 14] The qualities of the inheritance: unfading

(3) The third thing Peter tells us about our inheritance is that it is *unfading*—it can't be diminished. Our inheritance will never lose its freshness, never lose its luster. It will never grow tiresome. It will never get old or boring.

You all have gone through this—the new Christmas toy that the kids play with for three days and never look at it again; the new car you bring home from the showroom, so excited to finally have it in your driveway, and within a week

you've got three dings in the side and spilled coffee on the floormats. Everything in this life fades. After the initial high of newness wears off, you're left with tarnished goods, diminished enjoyment, . . . and a warranty that doesn't cover whatever it is that has gone bad.

We even have a name for this experience—it's called the "*law of diminishing returns*." All of our normal experiences in life conform to this rule, this law. Our first experience of something grand, or thrilling, or pleasurable, is never matched by later attempts to repeat the experience. It's what creates junkies and addicts of all types. We crave the experience that so thrilled us the first time, so we try again and again, only to find each succeeding attempt leaving us less and less satisfied.

[Slide 15]

But all of those experiences of being dissatisfied, being less than fulfilled, are meant to send us a loud signal. They are screaming at us to pay attention. They are intended to grab our attention—because we were created by God to be satisfied, designed by God with the capacity for experiencing fulfillment and joy. But nothing in this world can meet that need. We understand that our sinful appetites won't satisfy us; those appetites are the product of our own depraved lusts, which can never bring us any sense of satisfaction. How could they? They weren't good to begin with. But even our natural appetites, our God-given appetites, can't be satisfied in this world, because we were designed to be satisfied only by that which the presence of undiminished joy can provide. We were made for joy. But we only get glimpses of it in this world.

So it's hard for us to imagine what it would be like to be fully satisfied, to enjoy an experience of being fully at peace, completely thrilled, and thoroughly happy. And it's even harder—probably impossible—for us to imagine feeling like that continually, with no diminishment of the pleasure. Ever. Every moment being totally filled with joy and wonder and peace that is always new, always fresh, always full, never gets tiresome, and completely satisfies.

But that's exactly what Peter is saying is true of our inheritance. Of salvation. It can't be diminished. Our experience of salvation when we receive the inheritance will never lose its freshness, never lose its "*AHHHH*" factor.

[Slide 16] *The qualities of the inheritance: reserved in heaven*

There's one more very important quality of this inheritance we have from God. (Let's pause just a moment on that step, shall we? This is an inheritance from God! If you ever imagined you were the kid of someone famous or rich, some celebrity or billionaire and thought about how great that inheritance might be, think about this: your inheritance comes from GOD! The creator of everything!!)

The final quality that Peter says about our inheritance is that it is *reserved in heaven*—that means it can't be taken away from you. It's reserved for you. No one else is taking your spot. Think about how great you would feel if you had a reserved ticket to see KU play in the Final Four—ok, I know that thanks to COVID-19, we are now right back on point number two about being disappointed. But stay with me here. If you've got a reserved seat at the Final Four, with your ticket in your hand, all you have to do to sit in that seat is show up. It's paid for. It's reserved. You have the ticket. It's a done deal. Or if that picture is too hard for you to relate to, try this: imagine you have a reserved spot in the line at Wal-Mart to get your groceries. Same deal. Spot is reserved, stuff is paid for, you've called ahead and you're there in line. No one's getting your stuff instead of you. It's reserved.

[Slide 17]

The other part of this, however, is that the inheritance is reserved *in heaven*. It's not coming to you on this side of the grave. I said it earlier: Christian hope is not a hope that things will get better in this life. Sure, we would like that to happen. And we ought to always be working toward that end, to make life better for those around us. But our hope is not for better societies, better conditions, better communities, a better standard of living. Our hope is for that which can only come when Jesus returns, the fullness of the kingdom of God. That's our inheritance; that's what we have in Christ.

What that means is this: we have to learn to live as people who are displaced, who are out of place. Our lives in this world matter. What we do in this world matters—our jobs, our families, what we do to help the people around us, what we do to honor the Lord by how we live, what we do to improve life on this planet for everyone, all of that matters. But ultimately, we're all going to leave this place, and we're going to live forever in a different place. If you belong to Jesus, that means living in the new world. And what will matter then—what will matter forever—is not what we've stored up in this life, but what we've stored up in that place. Our inheritance, our hope—it's tied to an entirely different age, a different world. And thinking about the resurrection of Jesus, about holding onto him, ought always to remind us that our “tickets,” if you will, are not for an upgraded room on this ship, but for an entirely different journey that doesn't begin in earnest until our departure from this life.

[Slide 18]

This idea, that our salvation is reserved for us in heaven, is also a reminder of something else. It's a reminder that the presence of God is not a place without

borders. In the Old Testament, God's presence was manifested in the central room of the Temple, known as the Holy of Holies, or the Holiest Place. Access to that room was limited, and there were degrees of separation from it that marked the various levels of entrance. Priests could go further in than ordinary folk, the high priest could go furthest in, and those who were ceremonially unclean or not part of the people of God were kept outside, barred from entrance.

[Slide 19]

The picture of the place of the presence of God in the next age has a similar feature. That is, there is a boundary, and there are those who are barred from coming in. All are welcome. But only those who are cleansed, who are born again, are given entrance. For they are the only ones for whom the inheritance is reserved. You can't just walk into the Final Four and sit down because you'd like to see the game. And you can't just walk into the presence of God because you'd like to avoid the alternative. You have to be invited—and all are invited—but you have to buy the ticket. You “buy the ticket,” not with money, not with promises to try harder, not with religious activity, not by “being a good girl,” not by paying your taxes and staying out of jail. You “buy the ticket” by admitting that you are a sinner, that Jesus died for you, that his death paid the way for you to enter the holy place of God, and that you are simply taking him at his word. Because he said that whoever believed in him would not perish but have eternal life. We call that “faith.” And all who believe, who put the weight of their life on Jesus, are given entrance to the presence of God. They're given an inheritance.

Peter says that this inheritance that is promised to God's people is for those who are “guarded through faith.” That's another way of saying that no one is going to take your place in heaven. Your seat isn't being given to someone more special, someone more famous, someone more holy. But you have to hold onto your ticket. You have to hold onto your faith.

I'm not saying that there's some special trick you have to know, some super-spiritual secret that will give you the power to make it. But heaven isn't automatic. It's not the destination for everyone who dies. Heaven has reserved seating only. It's reserved for those who have humbled themselves and said ‘yes’ to Jesus. It's reserved for those who hold onto the cross and the resurrection, who depend upon Jesus. Your faith, in a sense, is your “ID” that certifies that the inheritance belongs to you. It's the mark that shows that you belong in God's people. It's the sign that the angels see on your life, the sign that says, “*guard this one; take care that this one makes it home safely.*” Your faith—being born again,

living as a follower of Christ—is the ticket, if you will, that secures your reservation in the presence of God in the next world.

[Slide 20] *Transition to communion*

[Worship team, if you would begin making your way to the platform . . .]

We are about to take communion, the reminder Jesus gave us as a way to affirm our faith in him. If you have a piece of bread and some grape juice, or something that can stand in for them, go ahead and get them now, and set them aside. The worship team is going to lead us in a song, a prayer that you can use to reaffirm your faith in Christ, or to make your confession of faith for the first time. And the promise of God is this: if you sincerely repent of your sins and invite Jesus to be your Lord; if you confess that he is the Son of God who died in your place, to pay the price for your sins, then he will come in to your heart and live in you through his Spirit. You'll be born again. And you'll have an eternal inheritance of salvation that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, reserved in heaven for you. So use this song to make your prayer to God. After we're done singing, we'll finish by taking the elements together.

[END]