

## *“Divine Protection”*

*Psalms 100; I Peter 1:1-5*

May 29, 2022

I want to begin this morning with a little, “what if.” What if your house was on fire and you only had three minutes to get things out of it before it became too unsafe and everything else would be destroyed? What would you get? Would you make sure to get the car out of the garage? What about your flatscreen television, would you get that? Would you run back into a burning house to get stashed money or jewelry? I thought about this scenario a lot this week and I’m certain I know what I’d get. Assuming the cats got out on their own, Natalie has a cabinet filled with pictures of the kids. These are irreplaceable as they’re photos of the kids on sports teams, with Santa and school pictures and the like. The thing is, they’re irreplaceable whereas just about everything else can be replaced?

We continue this week our archaeologist-style excavation of the first section of First Peter. I continue to be amazed at this particular portion of the Bible as it contains information that is vital to the lives of Christians and it does so in a very succinct manner. Over the past two weeks, we’ve looked at this passage twice already. We talked about what does it mean to consider oneself an exile? Paul alerts us in **Philippians 3:20** that *“But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,”* to remind us that this world that we can grow so comfortable in, isn’t our home. Isn’t it good, especially this week to see the events in Uvalde Texas and know, we’re not from here? I mean, isn’t it good to realize that some of the dark stuff that happens here isn’t part of who we are? That doesn’t divorce us from the need to figure out how to stop events like Uvalde, but it should give us some hope that, in the future, school massacres aren’t part of the equation.

Life in exile is something the people of God have dealt with before, thankfully so we know what we’re supposed to do. Many, many years ago, when the Jews were living in exile in the land of Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah gave them these instructions – **Jeremiah 29:7** – *“But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”* That is to say that while we’re in exile here, we’re called to be the same good stewards of creation that God has been telling us to be since we were first in the Garden of Eden. We can be grateful not to be a part of the insanity but, at the same time, we are called to seek the welfare of the place where we are at.

We also looked at what does it mean to be born again? This is such a consequential part of being a Christian. That there is a time and a place where you simply come alive in the Gospel. Things are different and you know it. What being born again doesn’t mean is that you’ll find yourself suddenly perfect. That’s sometimes one of the reasons why we deny new life in us. We know what we do. It’s hard to square new life with whatever sin we’re nursing in our hearts. But Paul notes that this dynamic will go on throughout our lives. There is no being completely free of sin as our bodies here just are broken. Thankfully, First Peter provides us comfort in that regard as well. “According to God’s great mercy,” he has “CAUSED US” to be born again into a living hope. That is to say that GOD caused our salvation, not us. This is the most fundamental move a Christian can and must make. Our salvation is 100%, entirely, completely, absolutely, totally from God. That is to say, we have nothing to do with it. This is one of the hardest things to realize about being a Christian. It’s the most foundational and it is also the most difficult because it cuts against every iota of pride we have crammed into our bodies. Because God caused our salvation through Jesus Christ’s resurrection from the dead, it necessarily means that we had and have nothing to do with our salvation. God chooses us. That we are here this morning is thus a reflection not so much of our rectitude natures but instead exhibits the glory of God’s great mercy. Everyone here has been called, claimed in new birth by our Lord Jesus Christ. Awakened to the Gospel, you’ve responded exactly in the manner appropriate – you’ve come to worship a Father God who has saved you, though you deserve it not.

That, I believe, is the hardest part of being a Christian. That to fully embrace the belief is to fully embrace your own brokenness. We are sinners, that is the unfortunate fact. Everything good that we do isn’t a reflection so much of our will as it is God’s will being expressed through us by the power of God’s Holy Spirit. So, we’re exiles, but we’re exiles that have been born again into a living hope by God’s great mercy. Thank you, God! We do not deserve this salvation that You’ve shared with us yet, through the blood of Jesus Christ, You’ve provided for us with incredible provision and mercy. This has come about through an event we talk quite a bit about. This new birth that was caused by God happens through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Just as He is raised from death back to enteral life, so too are you raised from death into new life in Christ because you are totally and completely in Jesus Christ. As He has risen, so have you.

We in the Presbyterian Church don't talk a lot about new life but it is indispensable in the Gospels. As I read from The Gospel of John last week, Jesus tells Nicodemus – *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”* New Birth is the entry point into being a Christian. Now, there's a lot of hokum out there about being born again but just listen to the Bible. It happens and, most importantly, just like your first birth, you didn't have anything to do about it or with it. You, instead, were just the recipient of it. How do we know this? Well, first Peter tells us the cause of our salvation – *“Jesus Christ being raised from the dead.”* The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is our ticket from death in our sin into eternal, everlasting life in the Kingdom of God. This is our inheritance that Peter speaks about at this point. This is the Kingdom of God, “heaven” if you will.

There's something we don't talk a whole lot about in the church. Well, we do talk about heaven but generally briefly and with a great deal of uncertainty. There's a reason for that – the Bible doesn't talk that much directly about the Kingdom of God, choosing instead to inform us about it through stories and parables instead of specifics. In one, twin parable, Jesus talks about our inheritance, the Kingdom of God in this fashion. In Matthew 13:44-46, Jesus says, *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls,<sup>46</sup> who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”*

Parables are always short, imaginative stories that, in their entirety, capture some truth at a level deeper than just a description or definition would go. Here, the Kingdom of God (heaven) is thought of tangibly. As it's real and you can get your hands on. How often do we think of heaven in some kind of spiritualized way like a great light? But the Kingdom that comes, your inheritance, it is a very real place. Just as that treasure is real, just as that pearl is a real, tangible thing, so too is the Kingdom that comes.

Remember, Jesus Christ was resurrected into a real human body. One that broke bread even with his disciples. That is to say that our inheritance is something real, tangible, concrete. We're not just going to be beams of light shooting around the galaxies after our deaths. No, what God has in store for us is something far, far better. Because of Jesus resurrection, we can know several things about life in the Kingdom. First and most importantly, Jesus was recognizable to his friends. That means who you are now has a measure of fixity to it. You're not going to be somebody else or something else after your death. You, thankfully, are you.

Now that might not seem like such a great deal to you right now. Maybe you're disappointed in yourself for some reason and the prospect of being you for eternity just doesn't sound so great. Well, there is good news. From Revelation 21 we know this about the coming kingdom, that it will be a place without sadness so you can know, with certainty, that whatever troubles you have here, you will NOT have there. The parable also alerts us to the fact that there are two very different means by which you come to be born again. Some folks are like that laborer that happens to find a treasure buried in a field. Just as a note, this wasn't an uncommon occurrence back in those days before banks. Back then, treasures were often buried as the safest means possible of securing them. After all, your home could be broken into and there weren't any other places. Best to just bury treasure in a field with a map, no kidding. But the person wasn't really looking for a treasure. Instead, we imagine like a peasant out working the fields as he digs into a treasure chest. The other man, the pearl merchant, was out looking assiduously for pearls when he comes across the nicest one. Just as an interesting note, pearls were considered much more valuable in those days than even diamonds or rubies or any precious metals. But the point is, unlike the worker in the field, the merchant was on a quest to find it, so to speak.

The point being is that the Kingdom, new birth, can be found when sought and sometimes, even when it is not being sought. I am the last person in the WORLD that ever thought I'd be a Christian. Throughout my high school and college days, I wasn't the least bit interested in religion. If anything, I was hostile to it. I can remember making fun of the kids who went to Young Life and debating them vociferously about God. The whole idea seemed relatively ridiculous to me for much of my adolescence and young adulthood. But you know what, my life wasn't turning out so great. No matter how hard I tried, it felt like I was always stuck in second gear and things weren't getting better. One day, thanks to an invitation from my Mother, I went to church. There, during the declaration of pardon at Sharon Presbyterian Church in 2003, I knew. I knew that I

was the Lord's. Now, as anyone who knows me, KNOWS, that I have NOT been perfect from that day forward, but I have been, BETTER and, hopefully, getting better every day. So, mine was a pretty eventful day but they're not all like that. I went to seminary with a great deal of people whose experiences of new birth were all different. Some weren't even sure it had happened but, you could tell by their nature, that it had.

But perhaps the most comforting part of our reading from Peter comes at the end when it is declared that we will be kept safe by faith through God's power. That means you're never alone...ever. Hear the words of comfort that God provides us to remind us that we are joined by Him in this thing called life. **Psalm 5:11** – *“But let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy and spread your protection over them that those who love your name may exult in you.”* **2 Thessalonians 3:3** – *“But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.”* **Deuteronomy 31:6** – *“Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.”*

And that's where I want to leave us. IF you're facing something harrowing, know that you aren't alone. You will survive. And, if you don't you will be taken to your inheritance which is kept waiting for you in the coming Kingdom of God.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.