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 Scripture: 1st Peter 1:1-12
 Series: *God's Grand Story*
 Title: *"Safe in God's Hands"*
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I am told that the safest place on earth is Fort Knox, AKA The United States Bullion Depository, which is located just 25 miles south of Louisville, Kentucky. It houses 137 billion dollars' worth of gold—5,000 tons of precious metals—all behind a 22-ton door. The combination to that door has been disseminated to 10 different staff people. Each person has a partial code; no one person knows the total code. The code has to be inserted one person at a time.

As I said, behind that door is the safest place on earth. But, even if you are crafty enough to break the code and open that 22-ton door, you would have to get past infrared surveillance, video cameras, concrete reinforced granite walls and of course about 22 tons of armed guards.

But if by some miracle you get past all THAT---and GET some of those gold bars---you're going nowhere. Outside, there are more troops, tanks, artillery, Apache helicopters, etc. The sign welcoming you to the base gives you a hint.

Because of its well-known safety, at the height of World War II, Fort Knox had the privilege of housing some of the most precious documents in the world: the Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and the Gutenberg Bible. It has also housed the crown jewels of the English family and some of the national reserve of other European countries. It's known all over the world as a safe, very secure place.

But let's face it, there are some situations where 22-ton doors and granite walls and a huge army cannot protect us---cannot keep us safe. I'm talking about the things we face as fallen beings living in a fallen world---disasters, diseases and death. Even celebrities---people we think of as "bigger than life and all its troubles"---deal with these things. Even THEY suffer.

Michael J. Fox continues his decades-long battle with Parkinson's; Bruce Willis is suffering from dementia; Tom Hanks has type 2 diabetes. Olympic swimmer, Michael Phelps, suffers from depression; Kim Kardashian has psoriasis; Morgan Freeman endures excruciating fibromyalgia.

As you know *People* magazine always does an issue at the end of the year listing all the celebrities who died. The list is always long---and kind of shocking. The truth is there is no place on earth where ANYONE is safe from the realities that threaten our lives in this fallen world. Nowhere is safe; no amount of fame---no amount of money can protect you from aging, weakness, disease, and death. Thomas Gray's famous poem, *"Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard"* hits the nail on the head. Do you remember reading these words in school?

*"The boast of all heraldry, the pomp of power
 And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave*

*Awaits alike the inevitable hour
 The paths of glory lead but to the grave."*

Bummer! But cheer up, I've got good news. In Christ we are absolutely safe---our future is protected---our problems have no real power for we are even safe from death itself. Peter shares this wonderful news in today's text---our last in "God's Grand Story." What better way to conclude our study than to remind us that no matter what happens to us, as Christians, we know that for us, "God's Grand Story" has a happy ending?!

Turn to 1st Peter 1:1-12. Follow along as I read and if able stand in respect for God's Word as it is read.

1st Peter 1:1-12

1 - Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,

2 - who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with His blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.

3 - Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

4 - and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept---not in Ft. Knox---but in Heaven for you,

5 - who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

6 - In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

7 - These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than [all the] gold [in Ft. Knox], which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

8 - Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,

9 - for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

10 - Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care,

11 - trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when He predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

12 - It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from Heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

Before we go any further, let's get some context. In verse 1, Peter---the leader of Jesus' first followers---says he wrote this letter to "exiles." Some versions say "strangers." Both words fit because they were like many immigrants in the U.S. today who have fled persecution or war in their native countries. These 1st century exiles were a diverse group---Jews AND all kinds of Gentiles. They had landed in five different parts of the Roman Empire: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia---all of these regions of northern Asia Minor---or as we call it today: Turkey.

The people in Galatia, and Asia were probably from churches Paul had started. The people groups from Pontus and Cappadocia apparently became Christians on Pentecost Sunday. Acts 2 tells us they were there and heard Peter's sermon. They must have shared the gospel with people in Bithynia---because Act 16 tells us that God's Spirit forbade Paul to go there. Instead, Paul followed the Macedonian call and entered Greece.

In any case, this diverse group had two things in common:

- They were Christians---people who had put their faith in Jesus.

And then,

- ...because of their faith they were enduring severe persecution. We know this because at least 15 times in his letter, Peter referred to suffering.

In other words, these people were far from home, and they did not feel safe---and I can certainly understand why. I mean, these were the years when the world turned against Christianity in a persecution---at least in part---led by Nero. History tells us he was a crazed and cruel emperor, a pleasure-driven man who ruled the world by whim and fear. Why? Well, it appears that he was raised that way for his "homelife" was crazed and cruel.

His mother, Agrippina, managed to convince her husband, the fourth emperor of Rome, Claudius---to adopt her son Nero and put him ahead of Claudius' own son, first in line for the throne. She then murdered Claudius, and Nero became ruler of the world at the age of 17. Young Nero was tutored by Seneca a philosopher AND pedophile.

With this horrible home and school life---it is no surprise that Nero eventually had his mother stabbed to death for treason and his wife Octavia beheaded for adultery. He then had Octavia's head displayed for HIS mistress, Poppaea, whom years later he kicked to death when she was pregnant.

Unfortunately, that's not all. This wicked depraved man blamed Christians for the great fire of Rome in 64A.D. and doused many in oil and then burned them alive impaled on poles to light his gardens. Peter and Paul are said to have been martyred as part of Nero's cruel rule.

Political turmoil finally forced the wicked emperor to commit suicide. His last words were, *"What a showman the world is losing in me!"*

So, understandably these Christians did not feel safe. In those times to be a follower of Jesus meant you had a target on your back. But God used Peter to tell them something they needed to hear---something we NEED to hear. They were---we ARE---SAFE in the palm of God's Hand.

To drive this fact home, Peter gives specific examples of HOW we are safe. First, he says:

1.) Our INHERITANCE is safe.

Look back at verse 4 where it says that Jesus has given us, *"an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade---kept in Heaven for [us]."* This "inheritance" is our ultimate salvation, and it is guarded by a strong Protector. God Himself is presiding over our future to make sure the salvation Jesus has paid for is safely deposited in our hands when the time comes. He will not allow anyone or anything to tamper with what He Himself has put in safekeeping.

Remember, the Christians that Peter first addressed in this letter were poor, marginalized people. They needed to be reassured that Nero's persecution would have no effect on this inheritance---which it could not---and did not. Our salvation is just as safe---secure.

Peter describes this in verse 4 with 4 words and none of them are VAULT, TANKS, or SOLDIERS. First, he says our salvation is safe because:

a. It never PERISHES.

My dad was raised on a farm in Mississippi. From the porch of his home---our grandparent's home---we could see our great-grandparents' house. It was just fifty yards away. I never met them---and no one had lived in that house for a long time. It stood neglected---falling apart. There was no yard---for weeds and trees had grown up all around it. Without a machete you couldn't get to the front door. I don't know why it was left that way but that sad old house perished more every year we visited.

Like my great grandparents' home all things in this world perish---including you and me. I'll turn 69 in a few months and I can tell you my eyes are perishing---my ears are perishing. As you know, my hair perished a long time ago. When I look in the mirror every morning, I see more wrinkles and jowls---so my once handsome face is perishing.

And it's not just me---as I said last week, in this fallen world everyone and everything suffers from sin's bondage to decay. We all perish. Our things---us---we are not safe. We're falling apart.

But not so with our eternal inheritance. Nothing can take away the eternal life we receive when we put our faith in Jesus.

It is SAFE.

Here's another word picture Peter gives.

b. It---our salvation---will not SPOIL.

When Sue and I go grocery shopping and we come to the fruit section---we always look for the greenest bananas we can find. But we also carefully calculate how many to purchase---because each of those green bananas will spoil---it will go

bad---at the same time. So, unless we know a bunch of grandkids are coming---we only buy three or four---knowing that we can consume that many before they turn from green to brown. Our salvation is nothing like bananas for, as Peter puts it, God, the ultimate PRESERVER, keeps it from "spoiling."

It is SAFE.

Here's a third word picture the Big Fisherman gives us.

c. It never FADES AWAY.

When Peter used that word, he knew his readers would be familiar with the winners of the Olympic games who were given the laurel wreath. It was neatly placed on the head of the victor, who ran up the steps next to the king, and the king held up the hand of the winner. But that laurel wreath was even more short-lived than bananas. Before the day was over those leaves would start withering. They would dry out and turn brown and then start falling away. What the victor won faded away---and fast.

But Peter says---not so with your salvation. It never wilts or dries out. It never fades away. It is SAFE.

Finally he tells his readers and us:

d. Our salvation is KEPT by GOD.

And He is THE Protector that we can absolutely trust. The word "**kept**" in verse 4 is in the perfect passive tense---which implies that what God did in Jesus Christ back then has a positive effect right now. The power that resurrected Christ in the past is the same power that preserves your inheritance right now. Our salvation is kept by our almighty, all-knowing, always present---Heavenly Father Who never sleeps.

Do you remember how Jesus put it in John 10:28? "***I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of My hand.***" It's not like a will that can be contested---no---our salvation cannot be lost or taken from God's almighty hand.

It is SAFE.

In the mid '90's I took Redland's teens on a World Changer project in Catawba, South Carolina. This was back when Matt and Christy Horton had pimples and different last names. But to be clear we went to the newly-established Catawba Indian Reservation. That summer those World-Changing teens were the first Christians welcomed onto the new reservation. Before then only Mormons were permitted.

To give you some background, the Catawba Native Americans had lived on their ancestral lands along the banks of the Catawba River dating back at least 6000 years. Before contact with the Europeans it is believed that the nation inhabited most of the Piedmont area of South Carolina, North Carolina and parts of Virginia. Early colonials estimated of the Catawba population was between 15,000-25,000. Of the 573 federally recognized tribes in the United States, the Catawba Indian Nation is the only one located in the state of South Carolina---on their traditional land---which is in York County. There are currently over 3300 enrolled members of the Nation.

Understand, they had lost their land to colonization---but in 1973, the Catawbas filed their petition with Congress for federal recognition. It took 20 years, but on November 20, 1993, the land claim settlement with the state of South Carolina and the federal government finally came to an end. In other words, these Native Americans weren't forcibly moved to some desert---no, they got their original land back---at least SOME of it.

Well, Peter is telling us that as Christians we don't have to worry about having to get our inheritance back. It's never been taken from us---God has kept it and is keeping it.

Here's a second thing Peter tells us about our salvation---our eternal inheritance.

2.) It was set in place LONG AGO.

Look at verses 10-12 - *“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care---trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when He predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you when they spoke of the things that have now been told you---by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from Heaven.”*

I loved that phrase, *“Spirit of Christ.”* Jesus is Who was inspiring the prophets of the Old Testament when they, *“predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the Glories that would follow.”* (vs 11)

Saving us from our sins---giving us eternal abundant life---has ALWAYS been God’s Plan. Jesus was---is: *“the lamb sacrificed before the foundation of the world.”* (Revelation 13:8) God has always loved EVERYONE and has always wanted EVERYONE to put their faith in Jesus---but of course as Peter says in verse 2 He knew ahead of time who would respond. The point is this wasn’t a last-minute plan. Our salvation---our inheritance was laid aside LONG AGO---before time began.

Tony Liciardello was baseball's greatest scout, having signed fifty-two youngsters (including two Hall of Famers)---who would rise through the minor league ranks and eventually play Major League Baseball. This number of signees making it to “the big leagues” ranks higher than any other scout. Amazingly, Lucadello’s success came even though he covered the territory of Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan---not exactly the baseball haven of California, Florida, or Texas where the weather allows for year-round play—making better players and more opportunities to observe them.

Lucadello's scouting exploits have been chronicled by Mark Winegardner in his book, *Prophet of the Sandlots*. Winegardner spent several summers observing Lucadello, whom he described as “...a loveable curmudgeon who not only spurned the typical tools of his trade, the radar gun and stopwatch---but also roamed the perimeter of baseball fields instead of sitting behind home plate like most other scouts.”

So how did he do it? According to Lucadello, there are four kinds of scouts:

- Five percent are poor scouts (who seldom plan)
- Five percent are pickers (who just spot weaknesses),
- Eighty-five percent are performance scouts (who look solely based on how players do—against amateur competition),
- Lucadello was part of that last five percent---that rare breed of PROJECTOR scout.

He looked for how coachable a kid was, how a hitch in a swing or a throwing quirk might be corrected. He saw years “down the road” to envision, under the tutelage of better coaching and against stiffer competition, how a player would play. He used rose-colored-glasses looking to see the potential in talent, rather than just the current-state talent.

Well before time began GOD looked down the “road” of the millennias and spotted you. He knew you would respond to His leading. Understand, God has always loved all people and as Peter tells us in his third chapter, *“He is not willing that any should perish.”* (1st Peter 3:15)

But as He looked from His eternal perspective He saw that You would respond to His great love---and all these years He has been working out His plan for your salvation.

Here’s a third thing Peter tells us about our absolutely SAFE eternal inheritance.

3.) It COMPELS us to TRUST GOD.

Look back at verses 5-7 where Peter says that we: *“...through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this we greatly rejoice, though now for a little while we may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of*

greater worth than [all the] gold [in Ft. Knox]---which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

God is saying that while our inheritance is kept for us---we are being kept for our inheritance. Yes---we will face suffering while we live on this fallen world. Yes---our earthsuits will wear out.

But these kind of trials are temporary. As Peter puts it, ***“they only last a little while.”*** These trials are actually part of our inheritance---because God uses them to refine us---making us more and more like Jesus---and less and less like our sinful selves. We must learn to look at tough times from this perspective.

In an article in *Christianity Today* back in 1995 the late Catherine Marshall tells about a friend named Marge. She writes:
“My friend had an experience aboard a plane bound for Cleveland, waiting for takeoff. As she settled into her seat, Marge noticed a strange phenomenon. On one side of the airplane a sunset suffused the entire sky with glorious color. But out of the window next to her seat, all Marge could see was a sky dark and threatening, with no sign of the sunset. As the plane's engines began to roar, a gentle Voice spoke within her beneath the roar and thrust of takeoff.

‘You have noticed the windows. Your life, too, will contain some happy, beautiful times, but also some dark shadows. Here’s a lesson I want to teach you to save you much heartache and allow you to “abide in Me” with continual peace and joy. You see, it doesn’t matter which window you look through; this plane is still going to Cleveland. So, it is in your life. You have a choice. You can dwell on the gloomy picture. Or you can focus on the bright things and leave the dark, ominous situations to Me. alone can handle them anyway. The final destination is not influenced by what you see and hear along the way. Learn this, act on it and you will be released, able to experience the “peace that passes understanding.”’”

Listen. If God can protect and keep our eternal inheritance in Heaven---He has no problem keeping and protecting us through the trials of life on this earth---working in and through the tough times of life for our eternal good---and His eternal glory. And in comparison to eternity---these trials do indeed only last a little while. Do you remember how Mother Teresa put it? She said, *“When we get to Heaven and look back at the most painful trials, they will seem no worse than a night in a bad motel.”* Let me put it this way. As Christians, difficult times enable to enable us to taste our eternal inheritance as God molds us more into His image.

I love how Ralph West puts it. He says:

“Go to work. Believe God and go about your business. Watch God work it out. Have faith in God. He is in control. You just need a little faith. Not big faith, not gargantuan faith, not Herculean faith, not titanic faith, just faith the size of a mustard seed---and you can say to your mountain, ‘Unemployment move. Sickness move. Marital problems move. Disobedience move.’ God is able to do the utmost. He is able to make a way out of no way. He is able to pick you up when you’re falling down.”

We are always SAFE in God’s almighty hand.

THE END.

Let us pray.