

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

09.08.2024 | God's Faithfulness to Preserve His People | 1 Peter 1:3-9 | Dr. Ben Day, Senior Pastor

If you have a Bible this morning, I want to invite you to turn with me to 1 Peter, chapter one. If you didn't bring a Bible, there should be one in the pew or the chair in front of you. If you want to use that Bible, I can tell you it's on page 1014. 1 Peter, chapter one, we're in the middle of a really short series in this month of September on God's faithfulness to His people. We are, in just a couple of weeks, going to celebrate our church's 175th anniversary. And as we think about that milestone, we really wanted to spend some time reflecting on God's faithfulness to His people. Some of the reasons that we chose to do this during this time is, one, we want to celebrate this significant milestone. I mean, the fact that our church is 175 years old means we are probably the oldest Baptist church in California, probably maybe by a couple of months, the second oldest Protestant church in California.

The milestone that we're reaching is one that is pretty unique for our part of the world and our part of the country. And we wanna be careful that as we celebrate that significant milestone, we're not patting ourselves on the back, but we're just pointing to God. We don't think that we've made it this long as a church because we're great or awesome, but because God is faithful. And so we wanna reflect on God's faithfulness to His people. And we also wanna remind ourselves that it's not just His faithfulness to one particular church. While we get to see that and reflect on that in such a kind of long history our church has, and there's kind of specific stories we can look at to see God's faithfulness, the reality is that God is faithful to His church, His church that exists across kind of time and space that He's been building for the last 2,000 years and He's going to continue to build until He comes again. We want to reflect on the fact that God is faithful to His people. So last week, Pastor Clark did a great job of helping us begin thinking about this topic by having us consider God's faithfulness to pursue His people.

We recognize the fact that none of us would be a part of God's people. None of us would be a part of God's church if He did not pursue us. But He did pursue us. Jesus came and He said His whole mission was to seek and to save the lost, to go after the most unlikely candidates. That's good news for us because each one of us were unlikely candidates to be a part of God's people in His church. But now God has pursued us and brought us into His people, but the work does not stop there. So today we're almost taking kind of a step forward in this consideration and now we are seeing that God is not only faithful to pursue His people, but He's also faithful to preserve His people. God is faithful to not only bring us in, but He's also faithful to bring us to the end, if you will.

So I want to read 1 Peter chapter one verses three through nine to help us consider this important truth. Peter writes, "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, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 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. 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, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls."

Have you ever started something that you didn't finish? This summer, my son Ezekiel started to take some drum lessons. Actually, shout out to Grayson. This is, I didn't know this was his last Sunday playing for us. Grayson was giving Ezekiel some drum lessons this summer. And it brought back a memory for me that when I was in middle school, actually someone who was just graduating from our youth group, he said, "Hey, we need another drummer for the youth group. Why don't I teach you to play the drums?" I said, "Okay, that sounds great." And so we got this old drum set from our church and we brought it to my house. And it wasn't an electric drum set, like thankfully Ezekiel has at our house. It was one of those like real drum sets that just made a lot of terrible noise for a whole house. But he came over a couple of times and just started teaching me some of the basics about the different parts of the kit and how to keep a rhythm. And all of a sudden he had to move off to college and no longer did he come over to give me drum lessons. And I still had the set at my house so I could practice, but about a month or two later, the church needed that old drum set for a particular reason and I lost the drum set and I never learned to play the drums. And that's just one example of many of how I've, a lot of times started something and not finished it. I mean, I can't tell you how many books I've read about half of it and

didn't ever finish it. How many projects I've left, incomplete. Maybe you can relate. What I found is that many of us often start things that we don't finish.

And another common experience that a lot of us probably have if you've been around the church at all is that you've probably have people in your life that you knew at one point they were, or they claim to be a follower of Jesus. And at some point they seem to walk away from the faith. You used to see them at church quite often and now you never see them at church anymore. And those different experiences can start to shake us sometimes. When we look at the fact that quite often we're not able to finish things that we begin and we look at other people's lives that quite often they seem to begin to follow Jesus, but at some point fall away, oftentimes it might raise the question in our lives, how do I know that I'm going to make it to the end? I mean, how do I know at some point this won't just be another thing that I started but didn't finish? How do I know I'm going to keep following Jesus every day of my life?

You know, one thing that's kind of interesting is that in our culture, we're so individualistic, I think we often think about these on very individualistic terms. I mean, even just the way I'm talking about it now, we so often think about things of salvation and following Jesus as just individual matters, but the reality is while each person is important to God, while each person has to have a personal relationship with God, meaning they have to place their faith in Jesus, somebody else can't do that for you, in the Bible, it so often refers to the fact that God is not just saving individuals but he is saving a people and that he is not just preserving certain individuals but he is preserving his church.

So often in scripture, I think we miss this because what will happen is when you read the Bible, you read the word you and we'll often miss the fact that that is a plural you. Bible translators keep ignoring my letters to them that we should start translating these as y'all so that we would know that this is a plural you. But so many times we read this and we think about that this is just about God doing this for an individual. But it's actually God doing this for a community, his people. In fact, we see this when it's in the first person like it is in verse three. If you go to first Peter one, verse three, Peter writes, "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." Do you see the communal nature of what Peter is saying there? He says, "We have one Lord and Savior." That means we have one Father in heaven. That means we all who have trusted in Jesus have been born again. He says, "All this happened by God's mercy." In other words, this verse is referring to what Pastor Clark was talking about last week. That God is faithful to pursue sinners. He is faithful to pursue his people because he is merciful. And he has pursued us through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And when Jesus rose from the dead to eternal life, he gave us the chance to be born again. To be born into this spiritual life. And Peter says, "This has happened to us who are believers. "God has pursued us, he has brought us into his people, "but then Peter doesn't stop there." You'll notice that he speaks of the fact that we are born again to a living hope. That there seems to be something still awaiting us, something in the future.

And that is what he's going to speak to in the next two verses. And so what I want to do this morning is I want to first look at verses four and five. And I want to unpack two realities that we see in those verses. Kind of already having looked at the reality of verse three last week, I want us to see what are the two realities that we see in verses four and five. And then what are the responses? What do we do in light of these realities? So first to read verse four, he's just said, "God by his mercy has caused us "to be born again to a living hope "to the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Verse four, "To an inheritance that is imperishable, "undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you." So the first reality that Peter wants us to see is that we have an inheritance that is being guarded. Peter says we have an inheritance that is being guarded. So again, he just said in verse three that there is a living hope. And again, I think hope implies something still in the future.

Now we have this hope because of what has already happened. Jesus has come, he has died for our sins, he has risen from the dead. That gives us the ability by the power of the Spirit to be born again. He says that's already happened, but yet there is something we still hope for. There's something we still long for, something still awaits us. And he says it is this inheritance. Now the word inheritance I think is significant because it lets us know that when we were born again, we were not just born as spiritual orphans, as if we were just born of the Spirit just kind of out there on our own, but we were born into a family. We were born into the family of God. That is why we have this inheritance. I mean, nobody has an inheritance because of anything they do. They have an inheritance because of the family they are a part of, who they

belong to. And what he says is when you are born again, you are born into the family of God, therefore there is something that awaits you.

You know, in the Old Testament, this word for inheritance is used quite often, often used in reference to the Promised Land. That God would often talk to his people and he would tell them because you are part of the people of Israel, not because of who you are or what you've done, but simply because of who you belong to, there is this inheritance, there is this Promised Land. But notice that Peter says that our inheritance is not here on this earth, it is in heaven. He says this inheritance is being kept in heaven for you, meaning it's not just a temporary thing, it's not a certain place here on earth, but rather it is something eternal that awaits us. Now I think what he's referring to, as you continue to read the passage, is he is saying that this inheritance that awaits us is the consummation of our salvation.

It is the completion of God's redemptive work in our lives. That yes, when we trust in Jesus, we are forgiven of our sins. We are born again to this new life that we have. But yet we still live in this broken world. We still are people in the flesh. God is still doing a work in us, but one day we will be with God forever. One day we will have no more sin. In our world, in our lives, we will be with Him perfect and forever. He says this is what awaits us. Not something you have to do, but something that is given to you because you've been born into the family of God. And one thing that Peter really wants us to get here is the fact that this inheritance is safe.

You know, not every inheritance is safe. Sometimes certain people will spend all that they have while they're here and they don't leave much, maybe for the future generations. Or sometimes people might gather together to wait and see how was the will divided up? How was the inheritance divided up? And you've ever seen like a movie where a rich person has died and here comes the family, all gathering together to hear the will read so that they could see which portion of the pie do I get? Peter is saying you do not have to worry about that with this inheritance. He says that it is imperishable, undefiled and unfading.

I love what Pastor H.B. Charles said about this. He said our inheritance in Christ is imperishable, meaning it is deathproof. It is also undefiled, meaning it is sinproof. And it is unfading, meaning it is timeproof. In other words, death, sin, time cannot wear this inheritance down. It is being guarded for you, much like Jesus says that there are these treasures in heaven that you can lay up, that neither moth nor rust will destroy and thieves won't break in and steal. And Peter says nobody's going to steal this inheritance because it is being kept in heaven for you. The implication here, I think, is that it is being guarded by God himself. Your inheritance is not just put into a safe, it's not put into an offshore account, it is being guarded by the eye of God. He is watching over this outcome of our salvation, this completion of our salvation. Peter wants his readers to know that all that awaits you, all that your hope is in is being protected by God. It is being guarded by God.

What a comforting message this is to us as God's people, to know that what has happened to us as God's people is not just in the past, but there is something that awaits us, that God himself is guarding. But yet the question still remains, how do we know if we will get there? I mean, yes, we know that God's done something in our lives and we know that there's something awaiting us, but what about this in-between time? What about the many things that we start and don't finish? What about if we decide to leave the family? Do we still get the inheritance? And so Peter addresses this next, he says in verse five, speaking to people who have been born again, who have an inheritance, he says, "Who by God's power are being guarded through faith "for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."

And I think Peter's saying here is not only do we have an inheritance that is being guarded, but we ourselves are being guarded. This is the second reality that I want you to consider this morning. We ourselves, the people of God, are being guarded. God is not only faithful to pursue his people, God is not only faithful to guard our inheritance, but he is also faithful to preserve us as his people. That as we are on this journey of being changed by God, of growing to look more like Jesus, God is guarding us every step of the way. This is actually very much in line with what Jesus said. You might remember that Jesus told his disciples, including Peter, he says, "I am going to build my church "and nothing is going to stop me "from gathering and guarding my people. "Not even the gates of hell can stop me "from gathering and guarding my people." He says, "I am going to gather and preserve my church." Another place, he compares himself to a door or a gate to the sheepfold. And he says that, "My father is the good shepherd "and no one will be able to snatch anyone "out of my father's hand. "Those who have been brought into my father's fold "or born into his family will be with us "for all of

eternity." Peter is saying that there is a hope that we have, not just in the past and the future, but in the present, that God is guarding us. God is keeping his people, his church.

And of course, we've seen this in our own church's history. When you've been around for 175 years, you have many stories about how God preserves his people. One of the ones that first comes to my mind is in 1906 when most of the city of San Francisco was destroyed by the great earthquake and fires. Our church building was destroyed, one that we had actually just recently renovated from a previous destruction just a few years before. But the church was destroyed, and you have to think about how many members would have been affected as well. Not just the church building being destroyed, but virtually all the members lost something, many of them losing everything during this time. And many people wondered, was the church going to survive? For years, they met in a big tent outside, gathering as God's people. And then a few years later, 1909, they actually gathered here at the corner of Octavian Waller, and they put down the cornerstone that is still down there today. And when they did so, they had a guest preacher come in from the Pacific Northwest, and he was speaking, and he said, "Christ is always necessary, therefore the church, Christ's body, is always necessary." He said, "The church is not just some side issue, it is very vital in our lives and in the world."

I think that's true, not just of this church, but of the church. The church is not just some side thing that God is involving, it is the central way that God is redeeming people, bringing people into his family. So it is necessary and God will continue to preserve his church until he comes again. Another thing that comes to my mind is pandemics. You know, in 1918, the Spanish flu pandemic or epidemic was ravaging our country and our world, and the people of First SF still gathered for worship, but what they did is they actually went outside and went to Waller Street, and they worshiped with masks on. None of you have ever seen this picture before, hopefully you can see it. This is the people of First SF in 1918, out on Waller Street, worshiping with masks on. They weren't socially distanced, but they're doing pretty good.

You know, four years ago, it's actually right about to this day, four years ago, my family and I, we moved here, and it was the time of the COVID pandemic. And when we came here, we first were just doing online services, but soon thereafter, we were able to gather outside and worship with masks on. We have another picture of that. In 2021, we were outside worshiping with masks on, little bit more spread out in our upper parking lot. That one's a little harder to see, but I love considering these two pictures next to each other. Seeing the fact that a century apart, God was preserving his people, even through times of illness, and even through times of pandemic. God has been preserving this church, but again, it's not just about our church. It's about what God has been doing in his people. And the fact that God has preserved his church for these thousands of years, and he is continuing to build his church, is a testament to the fact that God keeps his people safe. He nourishes us, and he strengthens us by his power.

In fact, this is one of the reasons I think we come to the table regularly. We come to the table and we observe the Lord's Supper. We do so on a regular basis, I think as a reminder, that it is Christ who continues to sustain us. There's other denominations of Christians that believe that the bread and the cup actually becomes the body and blood of Jesus in this moment. Other denominations believe that maybe there is some type of grace being imparted to the individual who takes the bread and the cup. We don't necessarily hold to those views, but I do think we believe that as we come to the table, we are being strengthened by God. We are being reminded the fact that God has pursued us, and he saved us by the fact that Jesus' body was broken and his blood was shed. This is how we were born again. This is how we were brought into the people of God. But we also remind us, we keep coming back to the table, that it's not just a one-time thing, that God did not just pursue us and then leave us, but rather he has pursued us and now is preserving us. Just as food continues to nourish us and strengthen us, so God, as we continue to come to him, is strengthening us by his power, preserving us as his people.

It reminds me of that modern hymn we often sing, that God will hold us fast. That when we think our faith would fail, he holds us fast. That our hope is not in how tightly we can hold on to him, but how faithfully he is holding on to us. God is preserving his people. But you'll notice here, it says that God, by his power, through faith is guarding his people. And that is significant, because what Peter is saying here is God empowers us that we might have faith in him. God preserves us that we might persevere in our faith. In other words, while God is at work in all of this, God is the one who pursues us, God is the one who preserves us, we're not just passive in all this. We must respond in faith as God pursues us to come into his people. And the same way, we must continue in faith as he empowers us by his spirit.

And this is significant, because sometimes people will consider this doctrine of God preserving his people, and they'll come to me and say, well, does that mean that the person that I know and I love, they prayed a prayer and they got baptized, but they no longer walk with the Lord, they don't claim to believe in Jesus, but they're still saved, right? Because they really professed faith in Jesus back then. What I'll often say is, I don't presume to know anybody's salvation. I'm not in God's place to know where someone's heart is, what they truly believe. But I do believe what the Bible is saying is that there will be a testament to God's preservation in his people through the perseverance of their faith. Where there is no evidence of faith, I think there is reason for concern in someone's life. What God is saying here through Peter is that he empowers us, but it is revealed through our faith. We are not just passive, we are active in this process, empowered by his power and by his spirit. This is the reality that God is guarding our future, and he is guarding us in the present.

So then what do we do? I recognize that this is kind of a theological lesson at this point. But the question is, how do we actually respond? How do we actually apply this to our lives? This is exactly where Peter goes in verse six. He says, "In this," meaning what he has just described, he says, "In this you rejoice. "Though now for a little while, if necessary, "you have been grieved by various trials, "so that the test of 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." In other words, Peter is saying, in light of this reality, that I've just, these two realities that I've just unpacked for you, here is how you respond. You rejoice even in the midst of trials.

So we rejoice even in the midst of trials. What Peter is saying here is this new reality, it has to change our perspective on life. You have to begin to see life differently. If God is really always working to preserve his people, and the way that he works to preserve his people is to empower their faith to persevere, then that means even the difficult things of life, even the trials that we face, are things that we can rejoice in, because we see that God is at work. I mean, it's very similar to the story of Joseph that we were just considering as we looked into Joseph's life in the last couple of months. That Joseph was able to look back and see that while his brothers and others meant things for evil, God meant it for good. God was working in all that time to not only save Joseph, but to save many people, to bring healing and forgiveness in his family.

Peter is saying, when you have that mindset of Joseph, that God is always at work in every situation, then you can rejoice even when you're facing really difficult circumstances. And by the way, that the people of Peter's day were facing really difficult circumstances. The trials that the people that Peter is writing to, maybe were somewhat similar to the trials that Joseph faced. Many of them may have been forced out of their homes. Many of them may be separated from their family because of their faith. Maybe some of them persecuted and even imprisoned because of their faith in Jesus. He says you're facing these various trials, but you can rejoice because God is doing something in that. Like gold that is going into the fire.

While that is a hard process, it is purifying the gold that is in the fire. He says the same thing is happening to you. When you have this new mindset of the reality that God is always at work to preserve his people, then you view these trials, not as things to remove you from the faith, but opportunities for your faith to be refined. And so he says you rejoice. And you think about the way God did preserve that early church. I mean, starting with just 100 or so of Jesus's disciples and then expands to thousands at Pentecost. And even in times of persecution, God has sustained his church for these last 2,000 years. And even today, where the church may be as most persecuted is where we see the church thriving, where people are being imprisoned for their faith and they're told that they cannot be Christians. We see the church growing. Why? Because God is doing something in all that that we could rejoice in the midst of our trials.

And friends, that means us as well. You'll notice he says there, even if you're grieved by various trials. I think he means that word various to incorporate kind of all the trials we face in life. Some are big, some are small, but in each one of them, we rejoice. Some trials are individual. Maybe you are facing physical health challenges. Maybe you're struggling with your emotional or mental health. Peter's saying you can rejoice even during this difficult time. perhaps there is tension in relationships. There is pain that you've experienced. Peter's saying you can rejoice even during this time. Not just individual trials, but trials for a church, whether that be a pandemic, whether that be that the finances aren't coming in as much as you thought, whether that be persecution from the outside, whether that be internal conflicts from within the church.

I mean, one thing we've seen is we've looked throughout church history and even our own church is that we are far from perfect people. So often the church is sinful people, making bad decisions, but yet God is preserving them the whole time. That means we can rejoice even when things are difficult. Are you facing a trial right now? Maybe it's big, maybe it's small. Maybe it brings much grief to your life. Peter is saying you can rejoice when you have this reality brought to your mind that God is at work, even during those times. That way you can rejoice, but also you can respond in love towards him. He says that we can praise and love God even though we can't see him. This is the second response that I wanna just draw out for us this morning as we wrap up our time. He says we can rejoice in the midst of our trials and we can praise and love God even when we can't see him.

This whole passage begins with Peter praising God. He says, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." That word blessed means praise be to God our Father. He is saying that all that I'm about to tell you should lead you to praise God. This is why we study our Bible. This is why sometimes we talk about theological issues. It's not just that we could be smarter so we could always have the right doctrine even though that might be important, but it's actually that the fact the more we know about God, the more we know how to praise him. I mean, the more we know God and have a relationship with him and see how he's worked, the more we are able to respond and praise. And God has done all this so that he alone gets the praise. If God pursued you before you ever thought about coming to him, only he gets the praise for that. If God preserves you even when you would have walked away, only he gets the praise for that. God is working in such a way that he would get the praise but also that we would know him and that we would love him.

Peter speaks to this and starting in verse eight, he says, "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, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls." I think Peter recognizes that he's in a pretty unique position. That Peter got to see Jesus. He got to walk with Jesus. And for three years, he was almost everywhere that Jesus was. He was in the boat with Jesus. He saw Jesus do miracles and he's writing to people who have not seen Jesus. And they will not see Jesus until he comes again. But yet he says, "Even though you did not see him, you love him." That's not a command telling them to love him. He is saying, "This is what is true of you as the people of God."

Didn't Jesus speak to this himself? When he talked to Thomas, Thomas said, "I really want to see the scars. I got to put my hand in his side. I need to know that it's really him." Jesus graciously comes to him and reveals himself. But he says, "You believe because you've seen me but blessed are those who never see me and yet believe." Peter's saying, "This is true of my readers now and the readers today. We've not seen Jesus, but yet we love him. We praise him. We rejoice in him." And sometimes I don't even think it's just about the fact that we haven't physically seen God or Jesus. But sometimes in the midst of those trials, it can really feel like you really can't see him. Like you wonder in the midst of a really painful and difficult time, where is God in all of this? In those moments, it really feels like you can't see him. You wish God would just give you a sign to let you know he's still real.

You wish that he would just show up in your life. But Peter is saying here that even when you can't see him, again, he's not commanding them. He's telling them you love him. And I think part of the reason that they love him is because they know what he's done for them. That's why Peter's unpacking these great theological realities of God guarding your inheritance and guarding you so that you might continue in your love for God. Again, it's not just about knowing the right answers on the Bible test, it's about growing in your relationship with him, growing in your love for him.

You know, I've found that so often, children grow to love their parents and respect their parents more as they get older, because that's when they start to realize all that their parents did for them. You know, when you're young, you love your parents, but you're just kind of often oblivious to all that your parents do. And all that they sacrifice. And so many times we get older and maybe we have kids of our own, we start to realize all that our parents might have done for us. And there grows to be this deeper love and care for those who gave to us. And so what I think it is with walking with our heavenly Father, so often, the more we learn about what he has done to pursue us, what he is doing to preserve us, the more we will love him, the more we will be able to praise him, the more we will be able to share his love with others.

I love hearing testimonies of how God has pursued people, brought them to himself, but I also love hearing testimonies of God has preserved people. So many times we'll hear stories here in the church of people saying, "You know what, I

had walked away from the Lord for a long time, but he brought me back." Even though for years I was not interested in him, he never gave up on me. I love considering those stories of how God has preserved his people. How has he done that in your life? Would you just now, even as we prepare ourselves to take the Lord separate, just reflect on how God has preserved you? Are there times when you would have walked away, but God kept you close? And there are times that your faith would have failed, but his faithfulness kept you going. This is what he's done in our lives. This is what he is doing in his church, that we might know him, that we might love him, that we might share this with others so that they might know him, they might praise him, they might have this joy and this hope. How much our world needs this? What an opportunity we have as we could tell about the story of our church and the story of our lives to share this with others.