

WHY HEAVEN MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN THIS LIFE

1 Peter 1:3-9

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WATCH/LISTEN: <https://www.fbcjc.org/sermon/why-heaven-makes-a-difference-in-this-life/>

Ours is a death-denying culture. Until a time of war, terrorism or pandemic. Somehow, because of the pandemic, we are all thinking more about death than we usually do. This morning's scripture makes very clear the eternal dimension to Christ's resurrection. Peter makes clear that heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people. He calls it a "living hope" (v. 3). That's in contrast to a dead one or a sad one. In this living hope, death has been defeated.

Peter calls this resurrection promise an inheritance (v. 4). An inheritance always implies that the best is yet to come. It also granted based on relationship, not merit (a child, niece, loved one). In v. 4, Peter says this inheritance is **imperishable** It is also **undefiled** and **unfading**. That word imperishable means not subject to decay; unravaged by an invading army.

In the midst of never-ending updates on the spread of death, God's people need to spend some time on the protecting power of God, the keeping power of God. Resurrection!

But what about this life? Here and now? Followers of Christ must expect hard times. And yet, when they come, we question God, as if God is forsaking us. Or punishing us. Seventeen years ago, when I was diagnosed with cancer, I remember one of my first thoughts was: "Is God punishing me?" No. We need to learn about suffering through the lens of grace, not legalism.

Peter is very realistic about suffering. He says it's for "a little while" (v 6). Just a while, in contrast to eternity. One of my 20th-century pastor heroes is William Sangster, a Methodist pastor in London during WWII. In 1940 the bombing of London by the Nazis began. Sangster opened his church basement to those who had been blasted from their homes. Hundreds of people used it as their permanent dwelling. Sangster and his church fed these souls and ministered to them. And this went on for five years! [*20 Centuries of Great Preaching*, Fant and Pinson, ed., Vol. 11]. But that's just a little while compared to eternity.

The Risen Christ unites God's people in our time of suffering. Just this morning, I received a beautiful note from Igor, a pastor-friend in Ukraine. From Igor Reznick, a pastor friend of mine in Ukraine: "We know that your country is going through difficult times right now. We also have an epidemic in Ukraine. But God is good and faithful, we believe He will lead His children through these trials. We want to encourage you—God loves you and cares for you. To Him be glory!"

The phrase Peter uses for our trials is literally "multi-colored." They are varied. Later, in 4:10, he uses the phrase "multi-colored" in reference to God's grace. William Barclay points out for every trial in our lives there is a corresponding grace. And there is no trial without its grace [*The Daily Bible Study Series—The Letters of James and Peter*, p. 177]. How often I focus only on the many-colored trials and not the many-colored graces!

The trial of our faith is like gold going through the fire (v. 7). Does the fire destroy the gold? No. It just burns away the impurities. The gold is refined. Gold is fireproof. So are we! The resurrection is for this life, too. Ask yourself: What is the current crisis burning out of your life? And is this crisis bringing you to a recognition of the need for Christ in your life?

Remember that in the Risen Christ, we have a living hope. And remember that gold is fireproof and so are we!