

The Undying Faith of Christians Facing Death

Luke 21:18-19

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We come now to the Word of God and this is the high point in our worship as we hear from God. Luke 21 is the text we're looking at. For those of you who are visiting with us, just a brief word. We are going through the gospel of Luke, word by word, verse by verse, and having a wonderful time in doing that. It is Luke's record of the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We find ourselves in Luke 21 in the last week of His life before His crucifixion. It is actually Wednesday of that week. He will be crucified on Friday. Wednesday He spent teaching in the Temple and then in the evening He left the Temple ground, took His disciples, went to the Mount of Olives, sat down with them and instructed them about His Second Coming.

On Thursday they make the preparations and celebrate the Passover. On Friday He is crucified. On Sunday, He rises from the dead. This is Wednesday, two days before His death. He has told them He will die. He has told them He is leaving. He is here telling them He will come back. There will be a long time interval between His leaving and His returning, illustrated in the parable of the man who went on a long journey, which our Lord told earlier.

He is describing what the world will be like in the time between His first coming and His Second Coming. It will be a world filled with trouble. The disciples, expecting that the Messiah would only come one time, and that He would come and fulfill all Old Testament promises of the golden age, that He would come and the world would be filled with peace and there would be war no more, and men would beat their swords into plows and their spears into pruning hooks. There would be a time when death was mitigated and if someone died at the age of 100, they would die as an infant. There would be a time when even the animal kingdom natural enemies would no longer be a threat to one another. The desert would blossom like a rose. All the glories of the prophetic promises they expected when the Messiah came the first time. So, they're having to deal with something brand new in their understanding, and that is the Messiah coming, coming to pay the penalty for sin to provide salvation. and then going away and returning at a future time.

They're also having to deal with the fact that during that period in between, it's going to be far from a golden age, far from millennial glory. The world is going to be a place of real suffering. These are the words of our Lord starting in verse 8. "See to it that you be not misled, for many will come in My name saying, 'I am He and the time is at hand.' Do not go after them. And when you hear of wars and disturbances, do not be terrified for these things must take place first. But the end does not follow immediately." The end, meaning His return.

Then He continued by saying, "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be great earthquakes and in various places plagues and famines. There will be terrors and great signs from heaven. But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will

persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake. It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony. So make up your minds not to prepare beforehand to defend yourselves, for I will give you utterance and wisdom which none of your opponents will be able to resist or refute. But you will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends and they will put some of you to death and you'll be hated by all on account of My name."

This is not the world they expected. When the Messiah came, they expected the golden age. They had no idea of a coming and a leaving, and a long period of time, and a return. And they're now looking at this with shock and wonder. And what has to come into their minds is pretty obvious. It's what would come into my mind. The world is going to get worse. He starts out in verse 8 by talking about religious deception. There are going to be many who come along saying, "I am He, the time is at hand." They're going to call you to follow them, the proliferation of false forms of Christianity. And by the way, these things are described in Matthew 24 as parallel to birth pangs, birth pangs which grow ever more intense until they are at their extreme intensity, just before birth.

The picture is clear. The event is the coming of Christ. Prior to the event, the pains will increase until they become the worst at the very end just before Christ returns. So whatever Jesus says is going to happen is going to escalate and increase and it's going to increase exponentially and become the very worst right before He returns in the time the Bible calls The Great Tribulation. As I said, this is not exactly what they expected.

Now they're well aware of their own weakness. They have had that demonstrated over and over and over even in the time with Jesus. They have failed to understand what He said. They have failed to believe what He said. They have displayed weak faith, so much so that Jesus called them, "Oh you of little faith." They understand the fragile grip with which they hold the things that they now believe about Him. And they're well aware of their own sinfulness and their own frailty.

So the compelling question that comes into their minds as they hear this is one that we would all understand. If the golden age comes when everything is peace and everything is joy and everything is tranquility and there are no more wars and the earth is rejuvenated and restored and there are no earthquakes and plagues and famines, Christ reigns all glorious in Jerusalem over the whole world and there are no terrors and nothing to fear, we can survive in that environment. But the environment you just described to us of deception, we could fall to that deception; of disaster, we could be crushed under the agonies and the suffering of human life and the disappointment and the disillusionment and the pain; and then persecution. How will our faith and those who follow us until Jesus comes survive persecution and execution?

Now remember, they're not theologians, they're simple working men. They're not theologians. They don't even have a New Testament to lean on. And their question in their minds and the Lord knows it is: Can we survive until Jesus gets back? They don't know how long it's going to be. They think it's probably weeks or months. Turns out 2,000 years later He still hasn't returned, but then a day with the Lord is as 1,000 years, and 1,000 years is a day. They don't know how they're going to hang on.

And so, Jesus adds verses 18 and 19, so important. "Yet not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives." Not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives. Do you know what He's saying in those words? You're going to survive, you and all who follow you, in trusting Me will survive. That's the big picture.

Now this introduces us to a very important subject and a very, very hotly debated subject. It is really one of the oldest debates in all biblical doctrine. It is the debate over the issue of the permanence of salvation. Some of you have come from churches where you were told that you could lose your salvation, right? You have it now, be careful, you could lose it. That's been a popular view for a long, long time, not only in America but in other parts of the world as well. That's what this is intended to deal with. You know, there are some pastors who say, "Oh, we don't want to get into debates like that." Really. You just want to let people go on thinking they could lose their salvation? Is that helpful? Is that a good thing? I don't think so.

You know, there's a lightness in all false prophets, there's a lightness. You remember in the Old Testament when...when God said of the false prophets, "They heal My people lightly." There's a superficiality. We're not interested in that. I'm not interested in being light, or superficial. We don't deal with things lightly. These are very, very important issues. It does matter if you can lose your salvation or you cannot. That's not a minor detail.

And by the way, Jesus was concerned about this as well. And that's why He said this, "Not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives." To leave out what the Bible says about these great truths is to impoverish people. It's not a kind thing to do that. It's very unkind.

But the question is this, can a true believer — genuinely forgiven, granted salvation by God, salvation from sin and death and hell — then behave in such a way as to have that gift of salvation taken away by God? That's the question. Or to put it in another sense, can I do something that would cause me to forfeit the eternal life that God has already given me so that having been on the way to heaven I am now thrown into reverse and I'm on the way to hell?

To put it another way, having once been forgiven by grace apart from any good works of my own, can I by some bad works of my own have my forgiveness cancelled? No small issue, folks, no small issue. And the answer to the question is one of the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith. It cannot be avoided. It need not be avoided. It's unmistakably clear what the Bible teaches.

Now this generation is not the first one, by any means, to have dealt with this question. It was being dealt with at the time of the Reformation by those who came together to write the Westminster Confession, 1649. And in the Westminster Confession, probably the most important historic statement of biblical doctrine, this is what they wrote, "They whom God has accepted in His beloved Son, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit can neither totally nor finally fall away from a state of grace but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved."

Their answer to the question, "Can you lose your salvation?" is a resounding, absolutely not. No. Is this in accord with Scripture? Is this what the Bible teaches? Is Jesus consistent with this? Let's look at the gospel of John and find out. I want to show you a few passages. John chapter 3, they are to some degree familiar to us all. In this context they take on some very fresh meaning. John chapter 3, the familiar 16th through the 18th verses, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." What kind of life? Eternal life. What is it that distinguishes this kind of life? It is eternal. "God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged. He who does not believe has been judged already because he has not believed in

the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Simple enough: You believe; you have eternal life. Eternal life is eternal. If you believe, you do not perish because the life you have been given is eternal. It cannot die. John 4:13: Jesus, speaking to the woman at the well, says, "Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again," that's the water in the well, just the regular physical water. "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life." Once you drink this water, you never thirst again. It is permanently satisfying. It is the water of eternal life. You drink it, you never again thirst.

Chapter 5, our Lord speaking again in verse 24, "Truly, truly I say to you, he who hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life and does not come into judgment but has passed out of death into life." And you don't go out of life back into death, to go out of death back into life again, hopefully. It is eternal.

Again, the words of our Lord are unambiguous and crystal clear. You have eternal life. You do not come into judgment. You have passed out of death, which is the category in which people are judged, into life. In John 6 our Lord speaking with regard to the same reality, verse 35, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall not hunger. He who believes in Me shall never thirst." Once you come to Christ and believe, you never hunger again, you never thirst again, you never die, and you are never under judgment, you never perish because you have been given eternal life.

Verse 37, "All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not reject. For I have come down from heaven not to do My will but the will of Him who sent Me and this is the will of Him who sent Me," the Father, "that of all He has given Me, I lose none but raise him up on the last day." Of all that the Father gives Him, all believers who come to faith are brought to faith by the work of the Father, they are given to the Son as gifts of love, the Son receives them, the Son does not reject them, the Son holds them, the Son keeps them.

In verse 40, "This is the will of My Father that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him may have eternal life and I Myself will raise Him up on the last day." The Father gives them, the Son receives them, the Son keeps them, and the Son loses none and the Son raises all to eternal glory. Nobody falls through the cracks.

In the 10th chapter of John, Jesus gives this wonderful confidence again and again and again. Verse 27, "My sheep hear My voice, I know them, they follow Me, I give eternal life to them and they shall never perish." How clear is that? They have been given eternal life and they shall never perish. "And no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand and I and the Father are one." You are secure in the power of the Trinity.

In the 17th chapter, our Lord is praying to the Father. In verse 11, "And I am no more in the world." He's sensing, of course, His impending death, "and yet these. . .these disciples, these who believe in Me are in the world and I come to Thee, holy Father, keep them in Thy name, the name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as we are." Father, keep them. Believe me, the Father will keep them. "No one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand." This is the testimony of our Lord Jesus. Salvation is forever. Once given, you never thirst, you never hunger, you never perish,

you never die. You are never lost.

First Corinthians chapter 1, look what Paul adds to this. And you would agree with me that the Corinthian church was not a model of church virtue. They had all kinds of problems. Listen, a true believer sins, a true believer sins seriously. And a true believer sins repeatedly. And we will until we are glorified in heaven. It's not an unbroken pattern of sin because we are now the servants of righteousness, but sin is there, it's serious, and it's relentless. And the Corinthians were a good illustration of the fact that you had a church that was still struggling with the sins of the past that they dragged, of course, in...into their new life.

But look what he says in verse 4, 1 Corinthians 1, "I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus." It's always grace because we never deserve it and it has to cover our sin. "That in everything you were enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge, even as the testimony concerning Christ was confirmed in you so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ."

You understand what he just said? He said, look, my God gave you grace in Christ Jesus, verse 4. In that grace, you were enriched in everything in Him, verse 5. The testimony that you have concerning the work of Christ was confirmed in you, verse 6, so that you lack nothing and are awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ. And then verse 8, "Who shall also confirm you to the end, blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Whatever God begins, He finishes. "He who begun a good work in you will perform it till the day of Jesus Christ." You can eagerly await the day of Jesus Christ because what God began He will finish. And in spite of your sin, grace covers your sin. In spite of your sin you will be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ because your sin has all been paid for in Christ. "God is faithful," verse 9 says, through whom you were called into the fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord." The one who called you into the fellowship is faithful to bring you to glory. That's the point. The one who called you into the fellowship is faithful to bring you into eternal glory at the day of Jesus Christ.

I love 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and 24, "The God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely. May your spirit, soul and body be preserved complete without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you. He also will bring it to pass." The one who called you to salvation is the one who will preserve you complete without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. What God begins, God brings to completeness.

And that wonderful testimony at the end of the epistle of Jude: "To Him who is able to keep you from stumbling to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless with great joy." He is able to get you all the way to the end. This is all telling us one thing: Saving faith can't fail. Grab that, will you? That's the whole point. Saving faith can't fail. By its nature and by its essence it is an unailing faith.

Listen, it is a gift. Ephesians 2:8 and 9: "For by grace are you saved through faith that not of yourselves, it is a gift of God not of works lest any man should boast." We're not talking about some human faith that you mustered up. Saving faith is a gift from God, like all other elements of salvation. Saving faith is a gift from God and the kind of faith God gives is an unailing faith, an undying faith.

I'm not talking about human faith. Human faith is a very different thing. We all live by faith. Every time

you fill your glass at the sink and drink the water and have no idea what's playing in your pipes, you exercise human faith. Every time you go to the pharmacy and you take a bottle of pills and you ingest those pills, for all you know, they're cyanide. You have absolutely no idea what's in those pills and you act on faith. That's human faith. You get in your car, you turn on your engine, you start a whole bunch of explosions a foot away from you, and you don't expect the engine to blow up in your face. You get on an airplane, you assume somebody's flying it and they're flying it to where you want to go. You have no idea whether that's true or not but you trust that that is what's going on. Worst of all, you go to the hospital, they put you out and then some guy that you've never met starts cutting you up and you think it's for your benefit and you have no idea what they're doing or why they're doing it. You trust what they told you. Now this is human faith. And the reason you do those kinds of things because there's a track record of reliability. There's a track record of reliability. You learn to trust those kinds of things so you do that. We're not talking about that because that faith can die real easy, all you have to do is go to another country where you can't trust the water and go to another place where you...the last thing you want to do is go to the hospital and go the doctor because they're not trustworthy. So your faith is based upon something you know by past experience.

Trusting in God is not like that. You have to trust at a supernatural level without ever having any experience with God whatsoever because you've been spiritually dead your whole life. We're talking about a supernatural kind of faith. This is a faith that cannot wane, that cannot die. This is a gift that comes from God.

You see, that's Satan's big issue. When Satan came before God in the book of Job, you remember he said to God, "You know, Job worships You and he serves You because You bless him. Look at him, he's got all these kids, he's got this great family, crops, animals, he's got wealth, he's got everything, You've blessed him. That's why he trusts You. If You take all that away, he'll stop trusting You, he'll stop believing in You, he'll turn on You."

God said, "I'm going to make a point. Have at it. I turn Job over to you, you can do anything to him except kill him because that would be pointless. You can do anything you want to him to see if his faith will fail." That's really what happened in the story of Job and Satan goes and God gives power to divest him of his fortune, take away his crops, take away his animals, death of all of his children. All he's got left is a cantankerous, complaining wife and Job says this, destitute, down to nothing, boils all over his body, he's scratching the boils with a broken piece of pottery, sitting in a heap of ashes and he says, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him." That's the whole point of the book, saving faith is a gift from God and the nature of that gift is it doesn't ever fail because it's divine as to its origin. His faith endured.

And Jesus is looking at these disciples and essentially saying the same thing. You have nothing to fear, and those who come after you have nothing to fear. The real thing will survive. It will survive all of the deception of false religion. It knows the truth. "My sheep hear My voice." It will survive the disasters, whether they are global wars, natural disasters, diseases, plagues, famines, terrors, whatever they might be. And we went through all of that. It will survive because it's the nature of that saving faith. It's its essence that it endures. It is a lasting, permanent kind of faith. And even persecution, the worst of all scenarios that you the best, the people of God who might assume a level of protection beyond those who are not the people of God. Well it's not going to be that way, the world is going to hate you, the world is going to persecute you, the world is going to kill you and for the most part the world takes care of its own. They're going to be more hostile toward you than they are toward those who are a part of that system. So you're going to get it worse.

And as I told you last week, maybe the number is in excess of seventy million Christians who have been martyred since the time of Christ.

But your faith will not die. Let it come. The Christian will not wholly abandon his faith in God. He will not abandon himself to sin. He will not deny Christ. He will not shun holiness. He will not stop loving the Lord. He will not cease desiring to glorify Him through righteous living. His faith will survive.

This then — and you can go back to Luke 21 — is the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. It would be better titled, the perseverance of faith, the perseverance of faith. The doctrine of the perseverance of faith says that the faith that saves is a gift of God. And since God created this faith, God can define the faith that He creates and has determined to create a faith that cannot fail. It is permanent. And as I said, this is a matter of absolutely critical importance. Just two little sentences there in chapter 21 verses 18 and 19 seem like something you could easily pass by but sometimes the smallest amount of words in a given text carry the greatest amount of weight. Notwithstanding all that's been said from verse 8 down to verse 17, that long description of all the horrors of the world, here's what we really want to get to. How are we going to be able to make it through that kind of world? Critically important; this is not something light: deception, disaster, the distress of persecution and all like birth pains, getting worse and worse and worse and worse, harder and harder, and harder, and harder and harder till the very end. How will we survive?

That's why I say, if it was up to me and I could fail, I would fail. But it's not up to me because the faith that God has given me is a faith that cannot fail. So here they stand opposite all their expectations, opposite all their hopes in a state of confusion and chaos because Jesus isn't bringing the kingdom, the golden age is not coming. He's going away and it's going to be a while before He comes back. And not only that, it's not going to be some kind of neutral period. The world that they know already is a world full of war and distress and difficulty and natural disaster, etc., etc. They already know that. Persecution has already begun. They've experienced that when they went from village to village with Jesus and were rejected so very frequently. They know the hatred of the Pharisees and scribes, the Sadducees, the Herodians. It just didn't seem right that it would all come down on their heads, that after the Messiah came they would invent a new kind of persecution directly at those people who belong to the Messiah. But that's what Jesus says. And when the persecution comes, those with the true faith will endure. That's His promise to them.

Go back to Matthew 24. I want to show you a parallel. I've told you all along, Matthew 24 is Matthew's account of this same message Jesus gave on the Mount of Olives. Matthew gives us the complete account. Mark gives us part of it and Luke gives us part of what He said. Matthew has the most complete account of it.

But notice in verse 9 of Matthew 24, these are the words that Jesus said. Now remember, that evening He probably said things two or three times, two or three ways, interacting with them and so that's why you have this composite of three gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all giving us a record, each of them accurate and inspired. But listen to how Matthew helps us. Verse 9, "When the birth pangs begin," verse 8, "they will deliver you to tribulation, kill you, you'll be hated by all nations on account of My name," just what we read in Luke. But then notice this. Luke doesn't tell us this. "At that time, many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another and many false prophets will arise and will mislead many and because lawlessness is increased," that's sin, iniquity, "most people's love will grow cold."

There are false Christians today in the world, there were in the past, there will be in the future. The world is always full of false Christians. There are more false Christians than true ones. I'm afraid to say there may be more false prophets than true prophets. There're certainly more false representatives of Jesus Christ than true representatives of Christ. But as things get worse, as persecution escalates, the false are going to fall away. They're going to fall away for reasons that He gives us here. "False prophets will lead them astray," verse 12, "because of iniquity being increased, their love will grow cold." They'll hold on to their sin. The world as it moves is going to get worse and worse and worse. The world's evil is going to escalate and escalate. We're seeing it in our own culture today. And people love their sin and as their sin is legitimized, as their sin is normalized, as their sin is legalized they're going to cherish their sins more openly and more publicly and they're not going to be interested in the things of Christ and suffering for the cause of Christ.

So the way the world is going to go with all kinds of false religion, with an escalating openness to iniquity, the false people are going to fall away. And, of course, when the persecution comes on those that are genuine, verse 10, and people are hated and so forth, they're going to fall away. For these reasons, for persecution, for the love of sin, false religion, people are going to fall away. But, verse 13, "The one who endures to the end, he is the one who will be saved." Saved in the final sense of glorification. Why? Because true faith endures. Bring the false prophets, make sin legal, bring persecution, and the false will fall away, but the true will endure. That's exactly what He's saying.

You say, "What about these people who fall away? Weren't they true believers?" Listen to 1 John 2:19, 1 John 2:19, "They went out from us but they were not really of us for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us but they went out in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us." Normalize iniquity, bring on persecution, proliferate false teachers in the name of Christ, and they, the false, will fall away from the truth. But the true will endure no matter how difficult. Those who are making a sham profession of Christ, those who have a false faith, they're going to fall away. But real believers will endure to the end because the faith they have been given is a permanent faith.

Now let's look at verses 18 and 19 more specifically. "Yet not a hair of your head will perish." Now you know that's metaphoric, right? It's not talking actually about hair. That is a proverb. And by the way, it's a very familiar proverb. In fact, by the time you get to the New Testament, this proverb has been around a long, long time. We even use it today. You even...you have people today who would say that, you know, you just made it by the hair of your head, or something like that. That's a familiar sort of metaphor, sort of proverb speaking of safety, protection. It first appears in the Old Testament, 1 Samuel 14:45, 2 Samuel 14:11, 1 Kings 1:52, so it's used several times in the Old Testament.

It also is used by the apostle Paul in Acts 27:34, Acts 27:34. So it hung around a long time from way back in the Old Testament time, clear into the New Testament time, they were still using this proverb, "Yet not a hair of your head will perish," just a metaphor for safety. And when you connect it with the prior verses that verse 16 says, "Some of you will be put to death because you're hated by all on account of My name," how can you then say, "Not a hair of your head will be hurt, or harmed, or perish?" Simply because this isn't talking about physical protection. He just said in verse 16, some of you are going to die, you're going to perish, you're going to die in that sense.

But what is not going to happen is you're not going to be lost, OK? That's what He's saying. You're not going to perish in the spiritual sense. A familiar proverb used to make a spiritual point. In

comparison to physical martyrdom, yes, there is the promise of death. But in terms of the spiritual, you will survive. You will survive.

During this period of time before the Lord comes back and establishes His kingdom on earth, His people are under persecution. They may be killed and they have been in the millions and millions. But none has spiritually been lost. "All that the Father gives to the Son, the Son receives, the Son keeps, the Son raises, and loses none."

History is right on schedule, folks. Jesus knew exactly how it would be; deceivers abounding in His name, falsely disasters all over the world of every kind. Distress and persecution, conflict, chaos, Christians being hated and even killed, but they, spiritually speaking, endure to the end safely. "For He that began a good work will perform it." They will never perish. They will never hunger. They will never thirst. They will never be lost. These are the promises of our Lord.

And then in verse 19, He gives the principle. "By your endurance you will gain your lives," in the sense of the fullness of eternal glorification. By your endurance you will gain your lives. Some have interpreted this as meaning by your endurance you will survive physically. That would be a nonsense statement. That would not make any sense. That would be saying if you don't die, you won't die. That's nonsense. That's obvious. No, it's not that. It's by your enduring faith, it's by the fact that your faith endures whether deception comes or disaster comes or the distress of persecution comes, it's by the endurance that you manifest that you have the faith that lives. By your steadfastness; it marks your Christian authenticity. This is not something new. Jesus said it way back in Matthew 10:22, "You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who is the one being saved." True faith endures. The one who has the true faith endures and receives the final aspect of salvation which is glorification. This is basic gospel truth that the faith that God gives is the faith that saves. And the faith that saves is by nature a faith that cannot fail. Nothing can destroy it.

Now I want to show you a passage of Scripture that will leave this truth indelibly in your mind. And it comes from Peter, 1 Peter chapter 1. Peter is a great one to teach us about unfailing faith. Verse 3, 1 Peter 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." God gets all the glory and all the credit for our salvation, so Peter blesses Him. Blessing to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now follow this, "Who according to His great mercy," it's a matter of mercy, not a matter of anything we have done to earn it, "according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again." We were dead, we are now alive. And what kind of life do we now have? What kind of life? Eternal life. He has caused us out of His great mercy and deserves all the credit...He has caused us out of His great mercy to be given life so that now we have a living hope. Because Christ rose from the dead, we will rise from the dead. That's our hope and it's a hope that cannot die; that's why He calls it a living hope. We have a hope that lives, not a hope that has a potential to die. We have been given life and as a part of that life is a living hope. That is, we have a hope that can never die.

And what is that hope? That we too will one day be raised from the dead to enter into eternal glory. Verse 4: "To obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you." I don't know how you could take that concept and find better words for it. You have by God's mercy been caused to be born again into eternal life, you have a hope that cannot die, and to fulfill that hope, you already have reserved in heaven for you — not for anybody who happens to make it — but for you an inheritance which cannot perish, cannot be defiled, will not fade away.

You say, "Wow, I don't have the power in me to make it, I don't have the power to get there." No. That's why verse 5 says, "You," end of verse 4, "who are protected by" what? "the power of God." Of course you don't have the power. But you're protected by the power of God through what? Here's the key: "through faith." God protects you to the very end when you will receive that eternal inheritance. He protects you by His power. That's the source of protection. The means of protection is your faith. That's what He says: protected by the power of God through faith. Faith is the means by which God protects you all the way to eternal glory. That faith which He has given you is an unassailable, unfading, undying, unyielding faith. It is a permanent faith. It is in that gift of supernatural faith that God does His protecting so that one day you will receive the final salvation to be revealed in the last time.

Protected by faith. Protected by the power of God through the means of faith. You see the gift that God gave you when you came to Christ...You were dead in trespasses and sin, you were blind, you could not understand, you could not believe, you could not do anything to earn salvation. God gave it to you as a gift. He gave you faith to believe, a faith to save, and the faith that He gave you is a faith that cannot fail. And God keeps you by His power through means of the gift of that unyielding faith so that no matter what comes, you who are true believers endure it all. Not only do you endure it all, but you don't necessarily endure it all hanging on by your fingernails. It's quite the opposite.

Keep reading. Verse 6: "In this you greatly rejoice." In what? "Even though now for a little while if necessary that you have been distressed by various trials." What? Yes. You rejoice in your trials. You rejoice in the fact that the world is filled with all kinds of things that come into your life that provide trials for you, all kinds of issues. You rejoice in those. You rejoice that the world has so much pain and so much suffering, so much chaos, so much confusion. You rejoice. Why do you rejoice in that? Watch, because, verse 7, "The proof of your faith being more precious than gold," which is perishable, "even though tested by fire may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

What is He talking about? This is what He's saying. The difficulties of life, that troubles that come into life, whether it's deception or disaster or persecution, tests your faith so that the proof of your faith is more precious than gold.

You know what the most precious thing you have is? No question, the most precious thing you possess is the confidence that you're going to heaven, right? That is the most precious thing you have. There are some people who don't know that. They think maybe I'll make it, maybe I won't, if I can hang on I'll make it. You know what you want to know? You want to know that your faith is the real deal. You know how you can know that? The only way you can know that is to have it tested. Did it survive the disaster? Did it survive the test of cancer? Did it survive the rebellion? Did it survive the doubt when you were caught in a false religion? Did it survive this and that and the other thing? Does it survive the world in which you live with all of its struggles? Did it survive when you were disappointed by the person you loved the most, when you've cast out, rejected by your own children? Where is your faith when tested by fire? Because when it comes through and it's stronger, then that's more precious to you than gold because now you know that you have the real thing.

So, Peter says, look, you have a faith that will not die. And the way you know you have a faith that will not die is to have it set on fire, to throw it in the furnace. And if it survives, you greatly rejoice because you've been tested.

I look at that in my own life, tested again and again and again and again by every kind of deception. My faith never wavers. It stands the test of every theological view, every effort to tip over the Scriptures and the understanding of Scriptures that is faithful and accurate. My faith has survived all kinds of trauma, tests, disasters physical, emotional through all the years of my life, and even a measure of persecution that comes from most unexpected places. And my faith has never failed. And it's not a tribute to me, it's a tribute to the faith that God has given me. And I live now in absolute, rock-solid confidence that this is the real thing because it has survived and therefore I rejoice in the testing by fire because the testing by fire is the proof of your faith. The power of God is the source of our security. The faith that He gives is the means to that source to tap into that source. And the proving of it is the thing that produces our assurance, our assurance.

We're going to make it to the end. This is the real thing if it stands the test. So our Lord says to His beloved disciples, don't worry, don't worry, not a hair of your head is going to perish. Nothing's going to happen to you spiritually. You belong to Me. And in the end, you will enter into eternal life because you have a faith that will endure. It will endure.

Romans 8, that great passage, "What shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus?" What? Absolutely nothing. In fact, there is nothing left to say after you've read this. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Tribulation? Distress? Persecution? Famine? Nakedness? Peril? The sword?" That's all the stuff Jesus was talking about, isn't it, in Luke 21? That's not going to separate us. "Just as it is written, for Thy sake we are being put to death all day long. We were considered as sheep to the slaughter." Let them...let them kill us. That's not going to destroy our faith. Let them put us in prison. Let them torture us. That's not going to destroy our faith. Nothing will. Not tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, sword. "In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. I'm convinced," says Paul, "that neither death nor life nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present or things to come, or powers, nor height, nor depth, or any other created thing shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

That's exactly what Peter said: We're protected by the power of God through faith. And God gives us that enduring faith because He loves us. Nothing can ever change His love for us. No one can ever tear us out of the secure hold of the Father. Therefore, salvation is forever. And so whatever comes in this world, we are not terrified. We know what our glorious end will be.

Father, we thank You again for the great confidence that comes to us in Your Word. We thank You that we have been given this salvation sustained by a persevering faith that never fails, finally, never settles into unbelief or rejection or denial of Christ or the gospel. We thank You that we have this faith that when tested in the most severe ways by the encroaching subtleties of false doctrine, by disappointment, pain, suffering, loss in life, or even by direct persecution, survives and survives triumphantly. And that the more it's tested, the more triumphant it is. The more that it is tested, the stronger it is. Help us to know, Lord, that the heights of our assurance come from the depths of our suffering. Like Job, when we come through the darkest places, and our faith is made stronger, we know it's not ours, but it's yours given to us. Even our Lord Jesus, the Bible says, was perfected by trusting in You. And that's true for us, Lord. One day we will enter into that eternal perfection and we will be brought there by Your power through the means of this amazing gift of an enduring faith.

Father, we pray that You will bring to Yourself now some who have been in darkness and need the

light, been in death and need the life. And continue, Lord, to strengthen our faith that we might live triumphantly to Your glory, in Christ's name. Amen.

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