

Born Again to a Living Hope

Thursday, December 13, 2012
8:47 AM

Title: Born Again to a Living Hope

Scripture: 1 Pe. 4:12-13; 1 Pe. 1:3-4; misc. Scriptures

Key Words: Fear, worry, anxiety, physical affliction, fiery trial

Sermon Audio Blurb: Our lives can change in the blink of an eye. In 1 Peter, Peter seeks to give ultimate comfort to people who are experiencing a fiery trial. In this sermon P. Bruce seeks to draw out the reasons for the comfort and to give hope to others when they face their own fiery trials.

Introduction

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"—yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. (James 4:13-15)

A. God likes to change our plans

1. P. Matt down with pancreatitis again
2. Liz and I lives interrupted with a diagnosis of cancer
3. A horrible massacre of children and adults in CT. Life can change in a heart beat.

B. There are things we'd rather preach on

1. At this time of year many pastors like to preach Christmas themes,
 - a. there is nothing wrong with that if the purpose is to prepare for Christmas.
 - b. Cristemas, Christ's festival
 - c. "Christ" is not Jesus's last name; it is his title and it means "Messiah" or Savior.
---Messiah's or the Savior's Festival
2. All that to say a proper advent sermon would be to prepare God's people
 - a. not for a birthday party and presents for one another
 - b. but really for the eventual death and resurrection of the baby Messiah
 - c. whose birth we chose to celebrate on December 25th.
3. why so many want to eliminate Merry Christmas and go with Happy Holidays.
 - a. It is Christ and the Cross they find offensive and we should not be surprised by this

- b. It's cloaked in political correctness, not wanting to "offend anyone"
 - c. but it is Herod-like hatred of Christ that drives it whether or not they know it or not.
- 4. Suffice it to say that many churches do not preach Christ at Christmas
 - a. opting instead for a more people oriented message
 - b. that capitalizes on a more emotional connection to Christmas time.
 - c. That at best mentions Jesus and reduces him to "the reason for the season"
 - 1) not a knock on that idea, for he is the reason for the reason
 - 2) but is he not so much more than that
 - 3) the baby in the manger is our Messiah, and Messiah ought be the point of emphasis in any Christmas sermon
- C. P. Matt usually sticks to whatever text he is working through,
 - 1. Because his sermons do revolve around Messiah...
 - a. called gospel-centered preaching or Christ-centered
 - b. understanding that the gospel is of first importance (1 Cor. 15:3)
 - c. and applicable to all of life at all times regardless of the season.
 - 2. But, P. Matt is Pastor of Realville and I'm his associate
 - a. Meaning we have to deal with reality
 - b. And sometimes situations arise that have to be dealt with in a real way.
 - c. Even if we are in the mood to hear something different.

D. Readings

Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. (1 Peter 4:12-13 ESV)

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. (1 Peter 1:3-7 ESV)

I. Surprise and a Fiery Trial

A. Context

1. Peter writes in the context of the persecution of Christians.
 - a. Scholars give the date of the writing as A.D. 64-65
 - 1) Significant for a couple of reasons
 - a) Persecution of Nero and the great fire in Rome
 - b) Martyrdom of Peter (traditional)
 - b. Christian scapegoats
 - 1) Rome-center of the known world
 - a) Roman culture takes a hit
 - b) Roman religion takes a hit (gods, helpless and hopeless)
 - c) People homeless and helpless, many dead
 - d) And the living are angry and resentful of the government (Nero)
 - c. 200 -300 years of persecution
 - 1) Christians identified with Jews, seen as culturally hostile to Rome
 - a) Easy to redirect anger at (Christians more unpopular than Nero)
 - b) Some persecutions more widespread than others
 - c) This one affected the Roman east, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia
 - 2) Christians as exiles
 - a) Two kingdoms
 - b) Babylon, code for Rome (so as to not further endanger)
 - c) Peter preaches submission to the very government that is persecuting them (1 Pe. 2:13-14)

B. Suffering

1. Imagine the degree of suffering
 - a. On the low end you lose your possessions, home
 - b. On the high end you lose your life, lives of your family
 - c. All of that is added to an already difficult life (life expectancy in 1st century Rome was 40 years,

with many dying before the age of 20. today mortality rates are around 75-80)

2. Narrow and broad application of suffering
 - a. Suffering for Christ (1 Pe. 4:13)
 - 1) Much suffering because of identification with Messiah
 - 2) Much suffering due to life in a fallen world
 - 3) Much suffering due to our personal sin
 - 4) Much suffering due to evil spirits/Satan
 - 5) Suffering for the purpose of discipline (perseverance of the saints)
 - b. Do not be surprised
 - 1) Suffering is "normal"
 - a) Americans do not like that (neither do I)
 - b) Should not be astonished by a fiery trial
 - 2) Suffering for the purpose of:
 - a) Not losing hope
 - b) Without becoming bitter
 - c) Trusting in our Lord
 - d) Looking to His return when all will be made right
- C. Affliction, trial, synonymous with suffering (KJV)
 1. 65 uses of the word affliction in the ESV.
 - a. The most frequent occurrence of the word, not surprisingly
 - 1) Psalms 12 times
 - 2) It is right for God's people to cry out in their afflictions
 - 3) Crying out is a tempered, controlled response to affliction
 - b. Afflictions that are not petty
 - 1) Tendency to equate suffering with anything that does not go our way
 - a) Car breaking down
 - b) Co-workers annoying

- c) Anything mildly frustrating
 - 2) Resist the temptation to equate fiery trial with any kind of emotional or physical upset
 - a) A real fiery trial tends to put all other trials in perspective
- 2. Dealing with an incurable disease
 - a. Surprised at how many diseases are not curable
 - 1) Cancer, HIV/Aids, Ebola, Creuzfeldt-Jakob (dementia) auto-immune, diabetes
 - 2) Influenza, common cold
 - b. All of us living under the shadow of death, no exceptions
 - 1) More evident when we've just been told that what you have has no cure
 - 2) Managing that which cannot be cured
- 3. An anxious response to affliction
 - a. Peter is writing to the anxious
 - 1) His goal is to give hope in an anxious situation
 - 2) Uncontrolled or controlled response to anxiety
 - a) One biblical counselor friend of ours upon hearing the news of Liz's cancer said accurately--that they would be a controlled wreck if it happened to them or someone close--it made me smile a little since putting those two terms together seems contradictory--but, it was truth because there is a difference between a controlled emotional wreck---and an uncontrolled emotional wreck
 - b. Fear, worry, anxiety not always sin
 - 1) But anxiety can have "associates"
 - a) Worry about money can give rise to coveting, hoarding, selfishness
 - b) Worry about a job can make you irritable, short-tempered, surly
 - c) Worry about relationships can make you withdraw from people and worse uncaring about people
 - d) Worry about how you appear to others may make you lie
 - e) Worry about your health may make you bitter with God, others
 - 2) The heart issue of control
 - a) When an affliction (esp one not curable) strikes either ourselves or someone

close...our immediate response is a desire to fix it, control it, make it go away

- b) this is true whether or not the person is a follower of Christ---wanting control of this or that is not the same as demanding control
 - c) the person simply desiring control will have their meltdowns---but the meltdown is tempered (for the Christian by truth)
 - d) ---for the person demanding control---the meltdown is far more uncontrolled and nothing seems to temper it
- 3) Peter seeks to encourage believers to be "controlled emotional wrecks)
- a) Tears, sadness, grief, normal responses to things that hurt
 - b) Peter wants the people to look to eternity so that they do not sin in their suffering, thus making everything worse.

c. Interpreting Affliction Theologically

- 1) In biblical counseling we often say we do not give counsel from our psychology but from our theology.
 - a) What that means in a cultural sense, we do not counsel from the standpoint of making a person "feel better" but to help them "believe better."
 - b) It is not that we are unconcerned with emotions.
- 2) there is such a thing as emotional suffering, we are human and emotions are God given, neither good nor bad in and of themselves.
 - a) but the Bible's goal in a fiery trial is not to make a person feel better...
 - b) the Bible's goal in a fiery trial is to give hope
- 3) since giving hope is the only sure way...
 - a) To be a controlled wreck in the midst of a fiery trial
 - a) And this is why P. Matt counseled us with 1 Peter 1:3-7:

d. Interpreting the "heat"

- 1) How we interpret situations, circumstances, fiery trials makes a difference in how we respond to the "heat" of life
- 2) In other words, a Christian's theology ought be the lens of interpretation
- 3) Why Peter says suffering is normal
 - a) Theology tempers a response or not
 - b) Even true of an unbeliever who seems to know how to take life one day at a time.

c) For example: Two men go on a one day ski trip. That night a blizzard strikes.

- One man is filled with anxiety because "he has to get back to work"
- so he frets, and paces and swears and in general is rather annoying to be around.
- his interpretation of a blizzard prompts an untempered response...
- That produces some rather bad fruit, anger, over the top anxiety, swearing,

The other man sees the blizzard differently

- his interpretation is an opportunity to have another day of skiing
- so he spends the day happy with some hot chocolate and or heated wine
- Waiting for it to pass so he can ski on new snow
- his fruit is joy, peace, patience and probably a bit mellow from the wine

Transition

In the passage Peter is giving hope...

- ...the people have little to no control over the heat-persecution...
- it is entirely possible that the persecution will lead to death...
- something that Christians had to live with until Constantine...
 - made Christianity the Roman State religion

Peter's counsel revolves around the idea of how to interpret a "worse case" scenario

- He is saying this is how you must fight to interpret what may be coming.
- he is saying you must see your afflictions through God's eyes, not your own
- and so his counsel is focused on God's character...
 - Through the promises that God has made to those who have embraced the gospel, Jesus Christ.

II. Born Again to a Living Hope (1 Peter 1:3)

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,(1 Peter 1:3 ESV)

A. Our Lord Jesus Christ

1. we ought not pass over this important phrase in our fiery trial
 - a. because it emphasizes the personal and corporate relationship that believer's have with Jesus (our Lord Jesus Christ)
 - b. a personal (and corporate) relationship with the Creator and sustainer of the universe
2. creation is flawed, deeply flawed (Rom. 8:21-23)

...that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:21-23 ESV)

- a. All affliction can be traced back to the fall of Adam and Eve-ALL.

- 1) A single act of disobedience meant that God subjected his creation to futility, meaning that

everything breaks down.

- 2) When I spoke to you some weeks ago I mentioned just how many professions are dedicated to reversing the futility, at least temporarily, -especially obvious when we speak of the medical field
- 3) Paul says the whole creation groans and no where do we see this more clearly when Peter talks about fiery trails and trials of every sort that even God's children suffer.
 - a) means that sin is horrible.
 - b) If the consequence of sin is the futility of creation then think how horrible sin must be to God to rate that kind of consequence!

b. the depravity of man

- 1) Adam did not fall just a little bit, he crashed
- 2) We call this total depravity, the fall affected every aspect of man, sin distorts everything
- 3) It does not mean that each of us does all the evil we are capable of doing. It just means we are capable of every kind of evil and without God's restraining grace we will

c. Our Lord Jesus Christ

- 1) In the fall paradise was lost, we are sinners by nature and by choice
- 2) Paradise restored is the Bible's story, restored through the Lord Jesus Christ who will one day return and make all things right.

B. According to his great mercy

1. Why does God provide a glorious salvation to sinners who deserve justice?
 - a. We are not "little" sinners, we are great sinners
 - b. Great sinners require great mercy
 - 1) Our culture treats sin lightly
 - a) as do some churches that claim to be evangelical
 - b) Sin is bad decision making, mistakes, blamed on mental illness, etc
 - c) Since sin is not seen as great, either is God's mercy
2. Biblically, we are pitiful, wretched, desperate, ungrateful to God, by nature children of wrath. (See Romans 1:18-32)
 - a. But God is rich in mercy, great in mercy (Eph. 2:1-4)
 - 1) this is key to remember when afflicted by a fiery trial.

- a) Because thoughts can easily turn to "what did I do to deserve this?"
 - b) In a culture that thinks it deserves this or that it is an easy trap to fall into (entitlement culture)
 - c) Leads to bitterness, self-pity, self-righteousness (uncontrolled response)
- 2) Wrong question
- a) Peter points to God's mercy in salvation
 - b) Because that addresses our greatest need
 - c) Mercy is compassion and/or forgiveness towards one someone else has the power to punish (justice)
 - d) Yet, God gives mercy rather than punishment
- C. ...he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
1. God has caused us to be born again...
 - a. God is the first cause of all things, including salvation (Jn. 3:3-8)
 - 1) when handed a fiery trial
 - a) some Christians will attribute it to Satan
 - b) whole denominations spend their time rebuking the disease and Satan
 - 2) But as P. Matt accurately pointed out last week, Satan is God's dog.
 - a) Satan is like junk yard dog on a chain.
 - b) and although the chain may seem long (think Job here)
 - c) he is on a chain (for Satan has to ask God for permission)
 2. Without dealing in detail with these "apparent" causes and consequences
 - a. we have to at some point come to terms with that fact that God simply does not use afflictions.
 - 1) What he permits, he permits for a reason.
 - a) God can cure any and all physical afflictions. Or not.
 - b) If he choses not then we understand it has a purpose and a design.
 - 2) Doctrinally we call this the absolute sovereignty of God in how things work out.
 - a) But the comfort in the "or not" is to know that because of God's great mercy he has dealt with finality our greatest need.

- b. Born again to a living hope
 - 1) the living hope is eternal life.
 - a) it's not "hope" like I hope to have eternal life.
 - b) it's a confident optimism in a situation that seems rather pessimistic and wrought with anxiety.
 - 2) Peter points past all that and says...
 - a) Acknowledges that which appears hopeless and stinks
 - b) But you have been born again into God's very own family and received God's special favor, undeserved grace
 - c) Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word. (2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 ESV)
- 3. An application for people helpers of how to serve others in prayer when others are stricken with a fiery affliction.
 - a. Note that Paul simply prays that God gives the comfort.
 - 1) It doesn't mean we don't say things to people we love to bring comfort.
 - 2) We should, but it should be measured, wise, helpful
 - a) Sometimes we do not know what to say, so we say something stupid like tossing out a verse or a cliché.
 - b) "Well, you need to just trust God." (unhelpful cliché)
 - i. that is true of course, but the implication, intended or not...
 - ii. sounds a lot like, if you were spiritual, you would not be a controlled wreck.
 - 3) John 11:35, Jesus wept.
 - a) if Jesus was spiritual he would have just trusted God and got on with the business of raising Lazarus from the dead.
 - b. Or the Scripture tossed out without thinking.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4 ESV)

- 1) To make it worse that passage is tossed out and limited to verse 2.
 - a) Again implying that if you were truly spiritual you'd be joyful
 - b) Seriously, you've just been told you have a fiery trial and if you were spiritual you'd be

joyful

- c) No wonder non-Christians sometimes think we're nuts
- 2) Putting out a verse thoughtlessly or incorrectly does more harm than good
 - a) Simply makes the person angry with you at best
 - b) Or heaps guilt upon them because they think they cannot measure up
- 3) As P. Matt has pointed out time and time again the "it" in verse 2 is a faith that leads to completeness, consider that joy
 - a) here is a reality
 - i. fiery trials accomplish one of two things
 - ii. they either drive us from God
 - iii. or drive us to God
 - iv. they either weaken faith (Satan's intent)
 - v. or strengthen faith (God's intent)

D. Belaboring the Point

J.C. Ryle: Health is a good thing, but sickness is far better, if it leads to God.

C.H. Spurgeon: I venture to say that the greatest earthly blessing that God can give to any of us is health, with the exception of sickness. Sickness has frequently been more of a use to the saints of God than health has.

John Piper: We waste our afflictions (he was diagnosed with cancer) if we believe it is a curse and not a gift.

- 1. We do not want to be Job's counselors with our good intentions.
 - a. so, we that would be helpful need to grasp that an affliction for a believer..
 - 1) is not some kind of punishment from a wrathful God.
 - a) there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. Period.
 - b) he does not love us anymore than he does right now
 - 2) the affliction is according to James is a purifying pathway to heaven
 - a) and our prayer for the afflicted ought to be that God comforts them with that thought and truth
 - b. through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead
 - 1) The living hope is secured through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead who conquered death and sin.
- 2. Consider the promises (John 11:25-26)

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26 ESV)

- a. I would be hard-pressed to find a more helpful passage in all of Scripture to share with someone with a life-threatening affliction
- b. It does mean you are giving up on managing the affliction either.
 - 1) In the case of my dad..
 - 2) We know what we want, we just don't know what God wants.
- c. Consider Paul's experience:

For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. (2 Cor. 1:8-9)

- 1) A normal reaction to receiving the news that you have an incurable disease or severe affliction
 - a) a sense of an unbearable burden that goes beyond our strength to manage
 - b) it results in a sense of despair because it feels like a death sentence or a kind of depression that is nearly suicidal
- 2) Fear is a remarkably powerful emotion. This can be seen from the synonyms we use for it:
 - a) abhorrence, agitation, angst, anxiety, aversion, cold sweat, concern, consternation, despair, discomposure, dismay, disquietude, distress, doubt, dread, faintheartedness, foreboding, misgiving, nightmare, panic, phobia, terror, trembling, tremor, trepidation, unease, worry
 - b) Paul, being quite human experienced all this as do we, esp, when the affliction is potentially fatal.
 - i. so, we try to subdue the fear by seeking comfort from our odds of survival.
 - ii. listen, it is not wrong to pray for the best in terms of survival.
 - iii. we ought to pray for healing.
- 3) However, finding comfort on the basis of odds is folly
 - a) Matt's problems, Liz's problems, appear manageable
 - b) but there are too many variables at this point to determine how treatable or manageable long term
 - c) Who controls "the odds" in an ultimate sense?
 - i. God removes our props. (2Cor.1:9)
 - ii. so that we depend more on him and less on the odds of a prognosis. God's goal

is to drive us toward Christ.

3. And so God gives us much more than a pill for an anxiety attack.

- a. The Father gives the Son (1 Pe. 1:3)
- b. And the Son gives eternal life

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"
(John 11:25-26 ESV)

Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. (John 14:19 ESV)

- c. It is a promise-Jesus is the living hope.

III. The Promise of a Better Inheritance (1 Pe. 1:4)

to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,
(1 Peter 1:4 ESV)

A. Why P. Matt speaks of Eternal Life so often

1. Matt is the Pastor of Realville

- a. He cares deeply for his flock
- b. Why we do not get ear tickling sermons, or fluff
- c. At times we'd rather not deal with reality and would instead prefer to walk in the fog of denial.
 - 1) P.Matt will not allow that and neither can I
 - 2) The Apostle Peter, inspired by God, dealt with reality and so must we.

2. So in verse 4 Peter goes on to describe future grace, a future reality.

- a. To help a severely afflicted church to look beyond the temporal
- b. To our inheritance, an inheritance that is:
 - 1) Eternal
 - 2) Righteous
 - 3) Joy (no tears)
 - 4) Peace (absence of conflict, peace with God)
 - 5) God's presence literally
 - 6) Jesus, face to face
 - 7) Heavenly rewards, crowns

B. An inheritance described in terms of what it is not.

1. Not perishable

- a. Means to not decay.
 - 1) Everything decays including our bodies
 - 2) Becomes more obvious as you age
 - 3) An inheritance that does not decay is hard to imagine but is a promise and therefore, a promise of comfort (majority of prayer requests have to do with physical problems)
- 2. undefiled
 - a. means simply not polluted
 - 1) Have you ever seen a very polluted stream, river or lake?
 - 2) So, bad it makes you want to barf just looking at it (reminder of the ugliness of sin)
 - 3) Compare to clear mountain stream, pristine lake where you can see 20-30 feet down, like an aquarium.
 - b. Our inheritance is unpolluted
 - 1) No crud what-so-ever staining creation with gunk
- 3. Unfading
 - a. I inherited some things from when my father passed away.
 - 1) They are fading, some cashed in and used
 - 2) Some gathering dust and rust and dents (my vehicle)
 - b. Liz received some beautiful flowers from friends and family
 - 1) when they heard of our affliction
 - 2) the flowers were beautiful, but withering--just as our bodies are
 - 3) but with our inheritance, nothing fades, or withers
- 4. An inheritance KEPT in heaven
 - a. Christ our treasure
 - 1) Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (Philippians 3:8 ESV)
 - 2) John Piper: We waste our physical affliction (in his case cancer) if we think about "beating" the physical affliction and that means staying alive rather than cherishing Christ.
 - 3) Point being if we spend too much time reading about our affliction and not enough time

reading about God

- a) Sure sign that spiritual warfare is not going well is isolation from God and others
 - b) Key: some are driven from God by affliction and others driven to Christ
 - c) How we interpret the heat matters in how we respond to the heat.
- b. Uncontrolled emotional wreck with bad fruit
 - c. Theologically controlled emotional wreck with good fruit
 - d. Peter seeks to encourage through the picture of ultimate reality.
 - e. Paul the same (Romans 8:31-39)

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:31-39 ESV)