

Incalculable Salvation

1 Peter 3:13-22

What is your most valuable possession? Your house, your car, your retirement account? If its your retirement account, you might have reason to fear that the economy could collapse because of COVID-19. But God has a retirement plan that is, quite literally, out of this world. Our salvation in Jesus Christ is of incalculable value.

I've titled this message *Incalculable Salvation* because we need to know how incalculably valuable, how immeasurably precious, this salvation is that we have in Jesus.

Incalculable of course means that it is too great to be calculated or estimated. It is immeasurable; boundless; priceless.

Peter has already spoken of this incalculable salvation as an *imperishable, undefiled inheritance* that is *reserved in heaven for you* (1:4); which fills us with an *inexpressible joy* (1:8); which is priceless because it was bought *with the precious blood of Christ* (1:19). It is because of this salvation that we have *tasted that the Lord is good*; through which we have become God's *chosen, royal and holy* people.

The Apostle Peter focuses our attention on our incalculable salvation because this letter was written to Christians who were enduring suffering because of persecution. First Peter refers to suffering more than any other book in the Bible (over a dozen times in 5 chapters).

Peter reminds believers of the foundational truths of the Christian faith, including our incalculable salvation, so we can respond to suffering in two powerful ways: with hope and with holiness. More on that in a minute.

First, our salvation is incalculably valuable because:

- ❖ We are **blessed** even in suffering (verse 14; 1 Peter 3:9; Matthew 5:3-12)

¹³Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? ¹⁴But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.

1 Peter 3:9 tells us: *Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.* That's our incalculable salvation! (NIV)

Jesus began His great sermon on the mount by describing the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven and of His salvation.

Matthew 5:10-12 (NIV) *¹⁰Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹"Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. ¹²Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven . . .*

That *great reward in heaven* is our incalculable salvation by which we are blessed even in suffering.

Second, our salvation is incalculably valuable because . . .

- ❖ We can live without **fear** (verse 14; Isaiah 7:2, 4, 14; 8:12-13; 41:10)

¹⁴. . . "Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened."

Peter is quoting from Isaiah 8:12 (NRSV) *Do not call conspiracy all that this people calls conspiracy, and do not fear what it fears, or be in dread.*

What they were fearing were rumors of an impending invasion from the North:

Isaiah 7:2 fills us in: *When the house of David was told, "Syria is in league with Ephraim," the heart of*

Ahaz and the heart of his people shook as the trees of the forest shake before the wind. (ESV)

Then God told Isaiah to go meet King Ahaz,

Isaiah 7:4 (NIV) *Say to him, 'Be careful, keep calm and don't be afraid. Do not lose heart . . .*

And then Isaiah gave him the reason not to be afraid: Isaiah 7:14 *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel. (NIV)*

That's why in Chapter 41:10 Isaiah could say: *fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God;*

Of course, Jesus is our Immanuel—God with us. And because of our incalculable salvation we can live without fear of what others think about us or what they might do to us.

Peter is also quoting from Isaiah 8:13 (NRSV) *But the LORD of hosts, him you shall regard as holy; let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.*

The ancient Greek version of the Old Testament known as the Septuagint, translates the verse: "Sanctify the Lord himself." This is how the King James Version translates it: *Sanctify the LORD of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread.*

And that leads directly to our third truth, that our salvation is incalculably valuable because:

- ❖ We are called to **holiness** (verse 15-16; Isaiah 8:13)

Holy means to be set apart for God—to be fully consecrated or dedicated to Him.

¹⁵*But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.*

Peter and Silas (his scribe) are undoubtedly using the Greek translation of the Bible when writing this letter, so this verse would better be translated:

¹⁵*but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. . . . [NRSV] ¹⁶ keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

The late Lutheran Bible expositor Richard Lenski clarifies for us what this means: "To sanctify Christ in our hearts is ever to keep him in our hearts as 'the Holy One.' In order to do this . . . we ourselves must be 'holy,' sanctified. . . . This sanctifying of Jesus means that we keep ourselves from sin and give the world no cause for slandering either him or ourselves. It . . . means that we fear [Jesus] alone lest we sin against Him by fearing men instead . . . and letting their threats prevent us from bowing to Jesus alone."

We are called to holiness. That is what it means to *sanctify Christ as Lord* and what is involved in *keeping a clear conscience*.

Next, our salvation is incalculably valuable because

- ❖ We have a reason for **hope** (verse 15; Colossians 1:27; 1 Peter 1:3-4, 21)

¹⁵ . . . *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the **reason** for the **hope** that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect*

Because we have this salvation, our lives are filled with hope not despair! Because of the pandemic, many people have lost hope. They are focused on death instead of life. This is a wonderful opportunity to share our hope in Jesus Christ.

If people ask us about our hope . . . we don't have to say, "well, it's because Jesus and I are in this relationship, but it's complicated." No, it's not complicated. We have a reason for our hope—and a platform to share it with others.

That hope is the hope of salvation we have in Christ Jesus. Colossians 1:27 tells about that hope:

. . . God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Again, Richard Lenski wrote that our hope “comprises all that we expect from God on the basis of Christ”

It is a “*living hope*” based on “*the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*” (1 Peter 1:3)

It is our “*inheritance [through Christ] that can never perish, spoil or fade—reserved in heaven for you.*” (1 Peter 1:4)

It is our hope “*in God*” who has done all this for us in and through Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 1:21)

Next, the salvation we have in Jesus is incalculable because through it . . .

- ❖ We have been **reconciled** to God (verse 18; 2 Corinthians 5:18, 21)

Jesus Christ ¹⁸ . . . *died [suffered] for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.*

That is what salvation is all about; removing the barrier of sin which excludes us from the presence and fellowship of God. Jesus removed that barrier by suffering for us (the unrighteous) to bring us to God. Jesus took all our unrighteousness and gave us His righteousness.

2 Corinthians 5:18 says, *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ* (NIV)

Verse 21 tells how God did that . . .

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. (2 Corinthians 5:21 NIV)

The salvation we have in Jesus is also incalculable because:

- ❖ We share in Jesus’ **victory** over death and hell (verses 18-20; Philippians 2:9-11; 1 Corinthians 15:57)

¹⁸ . . . *He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison ²⁰who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built.*

Verse 19 speaks about Jesus preaching to disobedient *spirits in prison*. We don’t exactly know what that means. It is the basis of the little-understood statement in the Apostles’ Creed, “He descended into hell.”

Our catechism teaches that Jesus did so to proclaim His victory over death and the devil. It was the first step in His exaltation—that is, his elevation to a position of power and glory. Peter also speaks of his resurrection, ascension and taking His position at God the Father’s right hand. The final stage of Christ’s exaltation is His coming again (which Peter speaks about in 1:13; 4:13; 5:4 and to which much of 2 Peter is dedicated.)

The exaltation of Jesus is spoken of in

Philippians 2:9-11 (ESV) *Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

Having been united with Christ in His death, we now share in His victory!

1 Corinthians 15:57 (NIV) *But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Finally, the salvation we have in Jesus is incalculable because:

- ❖ We are united with Christ in baptism (verse 21; Romans 6:4-5; Hebrews 9:9, 13-14; Ephesians 2:6)

Peter speaks of the saving grace of baptism in verse ²¹*and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ*

Romans 6:4-5 gives us the promise of being united with Christ through our baptism: *We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. ⁵If we have been united with him like this in his death, we will certainly also be united with him in his resurrection.* (NIV)

So, because we united with Jesus Christ in our baptism, and therefore united in His death and resurrection, Jesus victory is our victory. And that is essential for us when we face persecution.

Verse 21 also speaks of baptism as *the pledge of a good conscience toward God*. What does that mean? Verse 16 instructs us of the importance of *keeping a clear conscience* in our witness for Jesus Christ. A conscience that is burdened down with despair over sins, or with regret that we haven't done enough, will result in an ineffective witness.

In speaking of the Old Testament rituals in Hebrews 9:9 and 13-14 we are told that . . . *the gifts and sacrifices being offered were not able to clear the conscience of the worshiper*. That is because, as it says in verse ¹³*The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit*

offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. (NIV)

We have an incalculable salvation through Jesus—who has triumphed over suffering and death and ²²*who has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand—with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him.*

Ephesians 2:6 tells us: *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus* (NIV)

And so, our salvation in Jesus Christ also seats us *with him in the heavenly realms in glory*. That is our position in Christ right now!

When so much has been taken from us because of the COVID-19 pandemic, our salvation in Jesus Christ is of immeasurable, incalculable value.

2 Corinthians 8:9 says, *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.* (NIV) Rich indeed!

Let us pray

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, 28