

## **New Life, New Inheritance**

June 1, 2025

### **1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:3-7**

*<sup>3</sup> May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be blessed! On account of his vast mercy, he has given us new birth. You have been born anew into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. <sup>4</sup> You have a pure and enduring inheritance that cannot perish — an inheritance that is presently kept safe in heaven for you. <sup>5</sup> Through his faithfulness, you are guarded by God's power so that you can receive the salvation he is ready to reveal in the last time.*

*<sup>6</sup> You now rejoice in this hope, even if it's necessary for you to be distressed for a short time by various trials. <sup>7</sup> This is necessary so that your faith may be found genuine. (Your faith is more valuable than gold, which will be destroyed even though it is itself tested by fire.) Your genuine faith will result in praise, glory, and honor for you when Jesus Christ is revealed.*



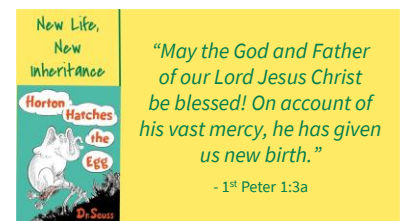
In the forward to his book *The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss* author James Kemp states, “When I was in seminary, I was asked in a survey about my favorite theologian. Most people answered Karl Barth or Soren Kierkegaard or John Wesley. My favorite theologian was Theodor S. Giesel, also known as Dr. Seuss” (page XI.) As I thought about this statement, I thought, yes, Barth, Kierkegaard, Wesley – definitely spiritual heavyweights. And as I read on, I began to see why Kemp’s favorite was Dr. Seuss. Through Dr. Seuss’ stories, we come to understand what really matters in life and we are invited to think about ourselves, our prejudices, our preconceived notions, and other flaws in new ways. Themes such as faithfulness, fairness, friendship, greed, pride, and hope are concepts that Dr. Seuss addresses and explores in his children’s books. As we prepare to begin this summer worship series, let us pray...

Please turn with me to 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1 as we begin. The apostle Peter is writing in roughly 64 A.D. to a church that was suffering great persecution and trials during Emperor Nero's reign in Rome. In his letter he reminds them that they are living in a world dominated by anti-Christian values and ways of life. Peter encourages the church to stay faithful to Jesus despite the very difficult circumstances that they are currently facing. In our reading today, 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:3-7, Peter describes a believer's state of being as defined by God's "*vast mercy*." It is God's great mercy then that leads believers to be "*born anew into a living hope*," and to hold fast to a faith that is ultimately "*for salvation*."

Today we will be connecting the themes and lessons of *Horton Hatches the Egg* to the themes and lessons that we find in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1. In the children's book, we hear the story of a kind-hearted elephant who keeps his promise to warm the nest of Mayzie, the lazy bird. There is nothing – persecution, trial, or suffering – that can keep Horton from being faithful to this little egg. Horton bears it all, remaining faithful "one hundred percent." 1<sup>st</sup> Peter was written to what we could call the Hortons of Peter's day: faithful people who were living in the face of persecution, trial, and suffering. The persecution was widespread and brutal. It was aimed at a small minority who refused to conform to the moral and ethical and religious norms and standards of the Roman empire.

Turning to the first part of verse 3 we read, "*May the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ be blessed! On account of his vast mercy, he has given us new birth.*" Peter identifies the reason for

new life that the believers find in Christ: God's vast mercy. This is where our faith begins. Without God's mercy, we would be forever lost in our sin. Of this, theologian Charles Spurgeon writes, "No other attribute could have helped us had mercy been refused.

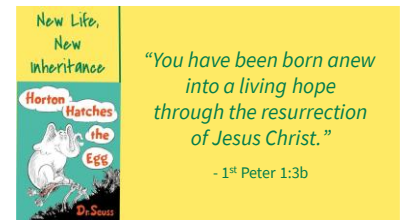


As we are by nature, justice condemns us, holiness frowns upon us, power crushes us, truth confirms the threatening of the law, and wrath fulfils it. It is from the mercy of our God that all our hopes begin.” Without mercy we would be condemned and crushed. Without mercy, we would remain forever separated from God’s holiness. But because of God’s vast mercy, we have been born anew through our faith in Jesus Christ.

As we continue in verse 3, we come to first understand what we have been born anew into. In the second half of verse 3 we read,

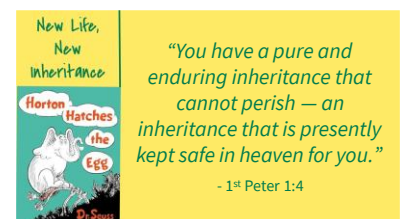
*“You have been born anew into a living hope through the*

*resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* This living hope is a hope which draws us into the true spiritual life, which revives the heart, which makes the soul lively and vigorous. This is truly a blessing beyond all comparison or imagination.



Our first birth, our human birth, brought us into sin and sorrow. But our second birth, our spiritual rebirth, brings us into purity and joy. We were born to die; now we are born anew never to die again. Through our faith in Christ, we begin a new life that will be ours forever. This new life is a life which one day yields for us victory over these mortal bodies, making them immortal, as we read, *“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.”* We know that because Jesus lives, we too shall live. Because he was resurrected, we too will experience resurrection. We find this promise in John 14.

Continuing into verse 4 we read about another promise: *“You have a pure and enduring inheritance that cannot perish — an inheritance that is presently kept safe in heaven for you.”*



Our inheritance comes through our relationship with Jesus. When we commit our lives to following Jesus' teachings and example, we become a part of the family. As part of the family of God, we become sons and daughters. Therefore we are also heirs. As such we are promised an inheritance, a place in heaven. This inheritance is first of all pure and enduring. This is not like earthly treasures or promises that fade or rust or time out. This inheritance cannot be defiled or diluted in any way.

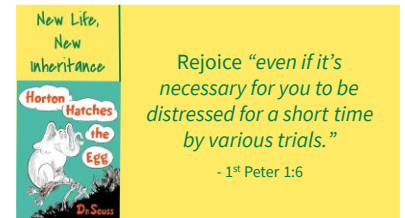
This inheritance is part of our 'living hope,' because it is imperishable. Other hopes fade like withering flowers. The hopes of the rich, the boasts of the proud, all these will die out as a candle when it flickers and goes dark. The only imperishable hope is that which fixes itself upon the throne of God and the person of Jesus Christ. Christ is the source of our living hope. Our inheritance is kept safe for us because it is guarded by God's power. Because it is guarded by God's power, it is unstained, uncorrupted, perfectly pure, and therefore will last forever. Just like God, our inheritance will be without end.

While the promise and our inheritance are kept by the power of God, it is through faith – our faith – that we live in an abiding and continuing relationship with God. It is indeed faith that activates the preserving and sustaining power of God in the life of the Christian. Through this two-way relationship, we know that heaven is kept for us, and we are kept for heaven. Put another way, through our relationship with God, heaven is prepared for us, and we are prepared for heaven. In Peter's words, we can *"rejoice in this hope."*

Like the church to whom Peter was writing, we too live in violent, divided, and uncertain time. We can often question if God is truly in control of all things.

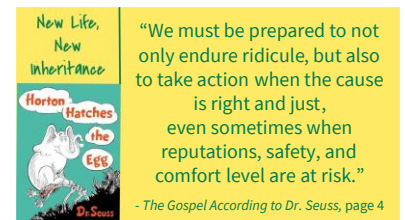
On one extreme, our increasingly secular society routinely ridicules and ignores our faith. On the other extreme, true faith in Christ is often misrepresented by people who marginalize the least among us simply because they hold power over those who are helpless and hopeless. In our divided and polarized world today, it can be challenging to stay true to our faith and to live out our commitment to the teachings and example of Christ. Like Horton perched on the egg, we can find that the tests we face, though they might refine our faith, can also wear us down at times.

While Peter's audience could certainly rejoice in the new and living hope that they have found in Jesus Christ, the present reality was that the persecution under Nero was great. Peter encourages them to rejoice *"even if it's necessary for you to be distressed for a short time by various trials."* Now maybe these early Christians thought like I think. I understand that at times we will suffer for our faith. At times there will be a cost to picking up and carrying our cross. But is this *"necessary"* for our faith? If those early Christians were anything like I am, I bet Peter's audience paused at the word 'necessary' too. Is it really necessary to suffer for our faith? And then to rejoice about it?



Our distress, our testing, our trials and suffering, they may come at times like they did to the early church living under Nero's threats and persecution. But, more often, the testing of our faith comes in smaller, most subtle, often unexpected ways. In chapter 1 of *The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss* James Kemp shares an experience with a type of "hidden testing." Towards the end of a semester while in seminary, while serving a local church, he received this 'compliment': "We have enjoyed having you with us, Jim. You fit in real well. We were afraid we might get some kind of radical or something" (page 4.)

This was spoken in the early 1960's. It was a time of unrest and division – civil rights, women's right, war protests. In that local church, Jim did not push his views on any of these sensitive issues. As he reflected on this 'compliment,' the words stung. He came to realize that in his efforts to "fit in" – to meet the faith community's expectations – he was no longer responding faithfully to the renewing mercy of God. Referring to a Martin Luther King, Jr., quote that spoke of "lukewarm acceptance" being "more bewildering than outright rejection," Kemp became convicted. He knew in his heart that his own lukewarm faithfulness was not faithfulness at all. Connecting to Horton's 100% commitment, Kemp writes, "If we, like Horton, are to remain faithful, we must be prepared to not only endure ridicule, but also to take action when the cause is right and just, even sometimes when reputations, safety, and comfort level are at risk" (page 4.)



Earlier in worship I asked when you recently kept your faith hidden. Like the "why" was to fit in, or put another way, maybe not to be singled out. And likely the situation or circumstance that put you at that decision point was around some injustice or oppression or prejudice or abuse of power or privilege that you saw or noticed. Your reputation, safety, or comfort level was at risk. You are not alone. I bite my tongue at times. I choose not to act at times. But oh how the Holy Spirit goes to work afterwards. Yes, my friends, at times our faith must be tested. If it is not tested, it will never grow or transform us. If we are not transformed, we will not experience the new life and the new inheritance that God offers to all who believe.



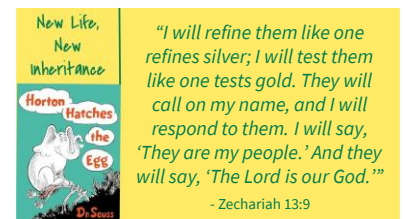
Now, before pushing on in today's passage, we must recognize that our faith is not tested because God doesn't know how much or because God questions what kind of faith we have.

It is tested because we are often ignorant or at least unaware of how much or what kind of faith we have. So sometimes God's purpose in testing our faith is to reveal or to display the enduring quality of our faith. I think that is what Peter is getting at when he tells these early Christians that trials are necessary so that *"your faith may be found genuine."*

As we continue in verse 7, we find a metaphor which illustrates his point beautifully. Peter describes a faith that is more precious than gold. Their faith could be better understood through the metaphor of gold. Faith, like gold, must be refined, tested, and purified. This is how our faith is made *"genuine."* This refining of faith and, therefore, the people themselves is a fairly common metaphor in the Bible. For example, in

Zechariah 13:9 the prophet writes, *"I will refine them like one refines silver; I will test them like one tests gold. They will call on my name, and I will respond to them. I will say, 'They are my people.'*

*And they will say, 'The Lord is our God.'"* It is the trials that often function as the thing that refines, tests, purifies, and ultimately strengthens our faith. It is in the trials that we can either turn towards and can rely on God or we can choose to go it on our own. When we turn to and rely upon God, God comes alongside us and claims us as his own.



Here in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter the metaphor leans primarily into the devotion of one's heart to God, as it is refined, tested, purified, and strengthened. But Peter also speaks of the joy this process produces. This is part of our faith. This is a byproduct of the life lived in Christ. In many ways, this is what 1<sup>st</sup> Peter is all about. In verse 7 he writes, *"Your genuine faith will result in praise, glory, and honor for you when Jesus Christ is revealed."* Let me say this again, emphasizing the most important word: "Your genuine faith will result in praise, glory, honor for **YOU** when Jesus Christ is revealed."

Our genuine faith will lead us to one day experience the joy of being praised and glorified and honored in Christ's presence in glory.

So, for Peter, this new birth, this living hope, they lead to two “outcomes,” one in the “now” and one in the “then.” In the present, in the now, this new birth and living hope leads to rejoicing “*with a glorious joy that is too much for words.*” Here and now, our new birth and living hope fills us with joy. Peter also speaks to the “then.” One day we will receive “*the goal of your faith: your salvation.*” For the believer, it is the promise of the “then” that brings hope and joy into the “now,” most importantly and especially into any “now” that is marked and marred by suffering, by trials, and by testing. That was Peter's audience. At times it is our truth too. In our moments of suffering, trial, and testing, may we stand upon the promises received when we were born into Christ, fulfilled when we experienced our “living hope.”

This whole process is a process of transformation. And, my friends, transformation is not often easy or simple. In *Horton Hatches the Egg*, we see that what begins as a bird, as shown on the left, emerges as a new creation, a mix of Mayzie and Horton, as shown on the right. We must ask: What caused that change, that transformation? I believe that for Dr. Seuss, the change agent was Horton's commitment to his promise, to his faithfulness that was “one hundred percent.”



In our Christian walk of life, it is our commitment to Christ that leads to transformation or change in our lives. As one decides to die to the world so that they can live for Christ, they begin a transformation process too.



One strives to leave the old self behind, yet we know we remain partly human, ever subject to temptation and sin. We are also subject to the sins of others. We strive, yes, but it can be difficult to remain 100% true to our faith. While *Horton Hatches the Egg* is just a fictional children's book about an elephant's faithfulness no matter what, the story of faith is filled with stories of people who remained faithful and who experienced God breaking through in their times of despair or persecution or suffering.



In his book, James Kemp calls these experiences God's "triumphal twists." These are moments when their encounter with God leads to new life that connects to a new inheritance. He invites us to remember Abraham and Sarah, that aging couple facing an heirless death. God's triumphant twist for them was Isaac, the child whose name translates "laughter." Kemp invites us to remember the Israelites, caught between the sea and Pharaoh's charging army. God's triumphant twist for them was the parting of the sea.

And in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter, the word to the faithful was to stay true to their faith, even in the face of persecution and suffering and even death. Peter reminds his readers that God's revelation in Jesus Christ did not end on the cross. No, here too was a triumphal twist. The grave was empty and through his resurrection, Christ has "*given us new birth... born anew into a living hope.*" Here, in these Biblical stories and more, Kemp writes that we find this good news: "Our God has acted, our God is acting, and our God will act again." Like Horton in our Dr. Seuss book, as we journey in faith, we find that God is faithful 100%.

As time goes by and as we walk faithfully, we will be transformed, being born again and again, becoming something new over and over. It is through this process that we find our living hope as we begin to live anew into the promise of our inheritance, the salvation of our souls. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.

### **GPS - Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. When have you experienced God's "triumphal twists" in your life? How did this lead to growth or to the strengthening of your faith?
- 2) *Pray*. Where in your life or in our world do you see injustice, prejudice, oppression, or the abuse of power over the marginalized? Pray around how God might be calling you to step forward in faith.
- 3) *Study*. Read 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:13-21. What encouragement, hope, or other positives do you get from these words of Peter?