



Saint John United Methodist Church
12700 W. Hwy. 42, Prospect, KY 40059
stjohnky.com

Message for February 9, 2020
“Faith and Salvation”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: 1 Peter 1:3-9

Bruce Larson in his book, *Believe and Belong* makes a point about the futility of trying to carry around the weight of the world by calling attention to a couple of statues in New York City. Those two statues are no more than a block or two away from one another.

The first is the famous statue of Atlas in front of the Rockefeller Center. Atlas strains under the weight of the cosmos resting on his shoulders. According to Greek mythology, Atlas saw that more as a curse than an act of courage.

Carrying the weight of the world around is never easy.

Just down the street from the Rockefeller Center is St. Patrick’s Cathedral. Just behind the main altar there is a rather smallish statue of the boy Jesus holding the world in one of his hands. It seems that he does so rather effortlessly.

The old spiritual puts it this way, “*He’s got the whole world in his hands.*”

By faith, we know that Christ is present to strengthen and support us in every way.

Jesus said, “*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.*” (Matthew 11:28-30)

A Letter of Hope and Promise

This morning we read from the book of I Peter.

I Peter was written to Christians who were suffering during a time of intense persecution. You have thought they were carrying the weight of the world, but their faith in Jesus kept that from happening.

I Peter was written to give counsel and comfort. It was written to encourage people in their faith. From Peter’s point of view there was every reason for them to be confident in God’s good work, for this life and the next. Not surprisingly, I Peter is a letter brimming with hope and promise.

We have every reason to be faithful.

The great hymn, *How Firm a Foundation* puts things this way, “*When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie, my grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply; the flame shall not hurt thee; I only design thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.*”

Peter uses the image of gold as well in speaking about faith.

In referencing the trials his readers were facing, Peter writes, *“These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.”* (1 Peter 1:7)

Peter is essentially saying that faith is far more valuable than gold, particularly gold that has been refined to the place where it is pure in every way. With the dross skimmed off, the gold is left to shine all the more. It is even more pure, even more valuable.

It is interesting that every time there is some calamity in the world or some prediction of bad times ahead, the price of gold always goes up. In the same way the value of faith in troubled times goes way up as well.

So if faith was important in offering hope and promise to the early New Testament Church during its time of suffering, let's claim that faith is able to do the same thing today.

Those with faith never doubt that God is actively at work, watching over them, even when they can't see him.

Even though he's not seen, we love him and believe in him all the more.

Faith Makes the Difference

For those who first read 1 Peter, it was faith that kept them afloat. Their faith in Christ was the very thing that saw them through their trials and tribulations, and faith is the very thing that will see us through ours.

Faith is the big difference maker.

Those to whom Peter wrote were second generation believers. They were not among those who had walked with Jesus personally. They had received all their information about him secondhand.

They had heard about him from believers like Peter whose firsthand experience of Jesus was still fresh and alive.

For those second generation believers that was enough. It was enough to convince them to give their lives to Jesus, even though they had not seen him for themselves. With faith, they experienced Christ and their lives were never again the same.

Peter writes, *“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”* (1 Peter 1:8-9)

We quoted a couple of weeks ago in referencing Thomas' encounter with the risen Lord, *“Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.”* (John 20:29)

While our lot is not to see Jesus like Thomas did, ours is to experience him all the more. Faith has a way of opening us to the reality of Christ's love and his every desire to be a part of our lives.

Though we do not see him, we love him and believe in him. All of this is the result of faith, which opens the door to all Christ offers.

Faith is the big difference maker.

Faith and Salvation

For those to whom Peter wrote, faith was their salvation, literally and figuratively.

Their faith brought them into a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. They knew that on account of Jesus they were reconciled with God. Their sins were forgiven and their lives transformed.

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!” wrote Peter.

“In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the resurrection from the dead.” (I Peter 1:3)

“New birth” pretty well summed it up. Upon meeting Jesus their lives were made over. In Christ, they were simply different than they were before. And because of that they could live life triumphantly, regardless of what they faced.

All of this is ours as well. The salvation God offers in Jesus transforms us in every way. Old things pass away, while new things come to pass.

We are made new in Jesus and the hope he lends fits us not only for this life, but for the next.

As you know, Jesus also talked about *“new birth.”* In his conversation with Nicodemus in John 3, Jesus said, *“I tell you the truth no one can see the Kingdom of Heaven, unless that person is born again.”* (John 3:3)

Jesus goes on to talk about the work of the Spirit to help make that possible.

Paul talks about such things in terms of the grace that God offers every one of us. He sees salvation as being tied to the free gift of God’s love offered to all who respond with faith.

There is no clearer description of the tie between faith and salvation than when Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9.

“For it is by grace you have been saved through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Salvation Viewed Three Ways

Since the earliest days of the church, salvation has been viewed as encompassing three facets of the same jewel.

- The first facet is understood as what takes place when a person first offers their lives to Christ. Responding with faith is critical to that.

- The second is understood as the continued work of God to form and fashion us into a surer likeness of his Son.

Being “*in Christ*” leads us to being “*like Christ*.” Some call that sanctification. We Methodists call that “*going on to perfection*.”

- The third is wrapped up in the promise of Christ’s return, that time when salvation is once and for all complete.

Peter references this future salvation in I Peter 1:4-5 as “*an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.*” (I Peter 1:4-5)

How about You?

Hear the question that is asked by Methodists of those who profess their faith in Christ.

“Do you confess Jesus Christ as your savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?”

How do **you** respond?

The grand journey of salvation—past, present, and future—begins right here.

Are you ready to believe? Are you at the place of putting your faith in Christ? Do you feel his tug upon your heart? If so, I’d love to talk with you, right now or whenever.

The story is told of a little boy who was flying a kite. The kite was so high that it had disappeared into the clouds.

A man happened by and asked, “*Why are you holding onto that string?*” The boy said, “*I’ve got a kite up there.*”

The man looked up and said, “*I don’t see it.*” The boy replied, “*Well, I know it’s there because I can feel the tug.*”

There is no time like the present to respond with faith to the tug of God upon your heart. How you respond will have everything to do with how you live your life and how you face life, now and forevermore.