

INTRODUCTION

People like to know what tomorrow may hold. If they can foresee the future they will make necessary adjustments in life today. If people know which stock will go up tomorrow they will borrow all the money they can to make the right investment. There are also people who day-dream that they can predict lottery numbers. It is easy to see why foretelling the future is a recurring theme in novels and movies. In 1985, the film “Back to the Future” was a big hit. The main character was Marty. Marty’s father George was frequently bullied by his boss. Marty’s mom, Lorraine, was an over-weight and depressed alcoholic. Marty had a friend Doc who was an inventor. One day Doc showed Marty his time-travel machine that was built from a car. When Doc was about to demonstrate his new toy, he was shot by some bad guys. While Marty fled in the car, he accidentally activated time travel. He went back to 30 years ago when his parents were high school students. Marty was able to track down the younger Doc who had to figure out a way to bring Marty back to the future. Meanwhile, Marty’s future mom Lorraine had a crush on Marty. But if Lorraine and George did not fall in love the future would be changed and Marty would be erased from existence. There was a series of scenes when Marty’s legs began to disappear. Finally, George saved Lorraine from a bad guy. The two became lovers. Doc successfully sent Marty back to 1985. When Marty woke up he found that George became a successful author and Lorraine was thin and happy. Doc survived the gun-shot because he remembered what Marty told him 30 years ago about the coming attack. Therefore, Doc wore a bullet-proof vest. Knowing the future changes what people do today. But our lives are not in the hands of the fortune tellers. God is in control of everything. In the Bible He shares with us about the future. Such knowledge should affect our lives today. The apostle Peter told us that since our future is secured in the Lord, we have strength to deal with our struggles in life today.

EXPLANATION

1. 將來的盼望 Our Hope for Future

In this passage Peter told us that we have a living hope for the future. In our everyday terminology we use “hope” to describe something we wish to happen. If you plan an outdoor activity then you “hope” that it will not rain. Nobody, not even the weather station, can predict with absolute certainty that it will stay dry. However, when we see the word “hope” in the Bible it refers to something God has ordained. It will surely happen. Unlike us, God does not need a Plan B. With that in mind let us ask a few “W” questions about the future hope God has prepared. First, this hope is for whom? **Verse 3** reads: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. This future hope is for those who are born again in Christ. In other words, it is for Christians. Next, we need to ask: where does this hope come from? Peter said that this hope is given out of the mercy of the Heavenly Father. It is all God’s grace. Also, this hope is achieved “through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Since Jesus conquered the power of death He guaranteed that one day we will all be resurrected. But what exactly is this hope? Continue to read **verse 4**: and into an inheritance that can never perish,

spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you. Peter illustrated this hope as an inheritance. It is like some wealth a deceased person passed down to the family members. The will assures that the beneficiaries will receive the fortune. Jesus had preserved an inheritance for His followers. Nothing will change that. That is why Peter used three negative descriptive words to depict it – it can never perish, spoil or fade. Peter went on to give us a glimpse of what this inheritance comprises. He said in **verse 5**: 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. Our salvation is part of the inheritance. This “salvation” can be understood as the glorification of our bodies. Theologians describe that Christians are in an “already but not yet” state. They are saved but they still live in a mortal body that will grow old, become weak and eventually perish. When God takes believers to heaven He will give them a new body that will last forever. This is the part of inheritance that every Christian will get. Then in **verse 7** Peter mentions that God will give “praise, glory and honor” to some believers. Sometimes we think that money and materials are the only prizes worth pursuing. In Jesus’ parable of the talents the two servants who diligently invested five and two talents received the same approval from the master. **Matthew 25:21** reads: “His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’” Now you tell me if there is any bigger reward than to receive an acknowledgment from our Lord for your hard work. “Well done, good and faithful servant!” I hope all of us will get the same compliment when we meet our Lord. In the Bible, a concept closely related to inheritance is reward. Matthew told us that one type of reward is a bigger responsibility in eternity. You may argue: haven’t we worked enough in this life already? This world tells us that work is a form of torture. Therefore, the smartest and most abled people are those who do not need to work much but are still wealthy. However, in God’s eyes the more the talents He blesses you with, the bigger the responsibilities He will entrust you. Therefore, please stop whining when you get up tomorrow morning. It is a privilege to work! In **1 Corinthians 3:12-14** Paul used construction as an analogy to describe how different Christians invest the opportunities God gives them: 12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. 14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. The way we live will lead to different outcomes. It is true that all who receive Jesus as Savior and Lord will be saved. But there will be various rewards depending on how faithful we are. The Bible does not specify what those rewards are. Though I do not have any Biblical support I personally think the rewards will be well-worth our effort. Finally, we will ask the question of when this future hope will come true. If you pay attention to the verses we have read then the answer is quite evident. We will receive this hope when Jesus comes again. The Bible never tells us when Jesus will return but for sure He will come back. We have a bright future waiting for us. It is like a gift that is reserved for you but it is not the proper time to unpack it yet. Those who are engaged cannot wait for the wedding day. They anticipate the once in lifetime moments – the bride walking down the aisle, the vow, banquet, dance and honeymoon. I told you before about the story behind the car I am driving now. It has a salvage title because a tree fell on it and crushed the roof. A mechanic bought the car for me in November. But it was not until April before he finally completed the repair. Waiting is not a pleasant experience in life. However, if you know with certainty that something exciting is going to happen then you will wait with patience. God has reserved a bright future for us. Do we expect it with joy? Do you long for Jesus’ return? Are we still holding onto the treasures of today as if this life would go on

indefinitely? We are in a transitional stage for eternity. Have you prepared yourself to spend your life with God forever? Do you faithfully invest the time and resources God entrusts you today? How will you give an account of your life to our Lord when He comes back?

2. 今天的信心 Our Faith for Today

God has given us a living hope for the future. Some people may think: “That’s good. But what does that have to do with my life today?” Indeed, we will continue to struggle in many ways. We have work to do, bills to pay and kids to raise. Some so-called Christian teachers tell people that since God loves us so much we will have a trouble-free life. There are three major problems with that statement: one it is false, two it is unbiblical and three it is a lie. Let us do a little survey. Who among us have never fallen sick, never had inter-personal conflict or never felt anxious about your finance or family members? Please show us your hand if you have not dealt with any problem after you became a believer. Christians and non-Christians alike, they will continue to suffer in this life. Peter was not shy to talk about it. Here is a major difference: God gives believers faith for today to go through difficulties. Just like what we did before let us ask a series of “W” questions about suffering based on this passage. First, how long will we suffer? Look at **verse 6**: ... though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. Both the NIV and Chinese Union Version render the phrase “for a little while” to indicate the duration. The Greek word can also refer to quantity and intensity. Peter also added that the trials we may face come in “all kinds.” The difficulties you face can be very different from what the person next to you is enduring now. God knows how much we can bear. Let us find comfort in **1 Corinthians 10:13** - No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it. The word “temptation” and its verb form “tempted” here are the same Greek word that is translated as “trials” in the 1 Peter passage. Isn’t it encouraging to know that God only allows the kind of trials that He knows we can bear to come to us? Once there was a brother about my age in my former church. He was diagnosed with brain tumor. The whole church prayed for God’s healing but eventually the brother passed away. I tried to make sense of why it was him but not me who was suffering from the terminal disease. My conclusion was because God gave this patient enough strength to go through the process so that he could bear a beautiful witness of God’s grace. If the same situation happened to me I might have stumbled in my faith. Besides the “what” questions about suffering, now we come to the most important question about the “why.” Why does God allow us to suffer? Peter gave us an answer in **verse 7**: These have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. God intends to use trials as a way to examine our faith. Peter described that just like a fire burns up impurities in gold refining, suffering will make our faith purer. The Greek word translated as “proved genuine” carries the idea of validation. God does not want us to fail in the test. Rather, He wants us to triumph over it so that our faith will become stronger. In the industrial world the process is called quality control. How can a manufacturer know that a product has all the functions? Workers have to test it before it leaves the factory to make sure that it performs properly. Your cellphone should be able to withstand certain degree of shock impact. How would you know? There is only one way to find out! What if a product fails the test? The factory has to go back to the drawing board to improve it. What if God sees us fail a test of faith? If it is because of sin then God will discipline us and bring us to

repentance. If it is because we are spiritually weak then God will give us an extra dose of grace. If God's purpose is to help us but not harm us then how should we react when trials come? Peter continued to say in **verse 8**: 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. Peter told us that we should respond in love, not anger. We should react with faith, not doubt; and with joy, not sadness. Eventually, we will bear good fruit if we endure suffering with the faith God gives us. Peter concluded this section in **verse 9** by saying: for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls. When we see the Lord, we will be received into eternity. But for now, God increases our faith bit by bit as we are going through trials of all kind. It is like when we exercise our muscles often enough we can lift heavier, jump higher and run faster. We do not live only for this life. Our present is preparing for the eternity. Paul encouraged us in **2 Corinthians 4:16-18** this way: 16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17 For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. In Christ, we should shift our focus from what is external to what is eternal. No one likes to suffer. We feel despair when we feel that we face difficulties in vain. Those who do not know Christ call it fate or karma, thinking that they had done something really bad in their so-called former lives. They accept it with helplessness. But Peter told us that God allows us to suffer so that our faith can grow. Therefore, besides asking "why me" and "why this" we should also ask "Lord, what do You want me to learn from this experience?" The Bible never promises us that suffering is easy to endure. But God is our ever-present help. He will give us faith. When we are weak we know that we can lean on Him.

CONCLUSION

In this passage, Peter told us that since our future is secured in the Lord, we have strength to deal with our struggles in life today. The cross of Jesus Christ does not only save us from the bondage and penalty of sin. Our Lord also saves us into an intimate relationship with Him. We walk each day with faith. In all circumstances we experience God's goodness. Thirdly, our Lord also saves us for a bright future. The further we walk with Him, the closer we are approaching eternity.