*PARACHUTE PEOPLE*

I Peter 1:17-23

May 10, 2020

 On a clear spring day, near an airport north of Madison, WI, Alan Klapmeier almost met his Maker. He was taking an advanced flying lesson, with an instructor sitting right next to him, when his plane suddenly collided with another one. Klapmeier’s wing sliced through the strut that supported the other plane’s wing, and that aircraft quickly spun into the ground, killing the pilot.

 Alan Klapmeier had to ram the control yoke hard to the left to keep his plane—now missing part of its right wing—on course back toward the runway. As he neared a landing, he realized that he had pushed the yoke as far left as it would go. In moments, he was going to begin rolling over to the right. Then his disabled wing would strike the ground, sending the plane into a cart-wheeling crash.

 But death took a holiday. With a second to spare, Klapmeieer felt the wheels touch the runway. He was “born anew.”

 Now, you might think that Alan Klapmeieer would walk away from such a harrowing experience determined never to fly again. But you’d be wrong. Realizing that existing small planes were too risky, he committed himself to making them safer.

 He decided to start building planes with parachutes. And so he has. Alan and his brother Dale have developed the Cirrus SR20 – a four person aircraft that contains, as standard equipment, a parachute for the whole plane, not just for

 Individuals who might be wearing one. This strong Kevlar parachute enables a plane to drift safely down to Earth, saving the lives of everyone on board.

 Like the Klapmeiers, we, too, are parachute people. The apostle Peter reminds us that we “were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from our ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold . . .” (v. 18).

 He’s not talking about a Kevlar parachute, of course, but a Christ provision to save us from ourselves and our sin. Ransomed, restored and spared, we have been saved by “the precious blood of Christ” (vv. 18,19). The blood of Christ, shed on the cross, is our parachute of salvation. With it, our wheels touch down on solid ground, and we are “born anew” (v. 23).

 The important thing about parachutes is that you have to trust them. You can’t always see them, packed and strapped to your back. You can’t fuss over them or fiddle with them when they’re lodged deep within a Cirrus SR20. You can’t test them in the safety of your home. You can’t control them as they deploy in a mighty rush of wind. You simply have to trust them, rely on them, and have complete faith in them, as they blossom above you in the sky, and save your neck.

 Peter’s point is clear. God has provided a parachute, but it requires an element of trust. God destined Jesus to save us “before the foundation of the world” (v. 20). God’s divine research and development plan put Jesus in place long before we began to spin sinfully out of control and plummet headfirst toward destruction. Just before impact, Jesus “was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake,” announces Peter; he popped suddenly into view and slowed—if not stopped altogether—our descent into a life of “quiet desperation,” sin, fear, malaise, anxiety, rebellion, disobedience, or all of the above.

 Peter calls his church to “reverent fear,” reminding them that even God “the Father” is still magnificently holy, and unfathomably, wholly (fully, completely) *other.* And it is this carefully cultivated sense of awe and wonder at God’s power that makes it possible for Peter to offer his most comforting words to this exiled, persecuted, put-upon, and beaten-down band of believers.

Because of God’s strength, we are able to experience a sense of calm and confidence, trust and reliance, in this powerful, uncontrollable mystery that is God. I’ll point you to verse 21:

 Because of this, “You have come to trust in God,” says the apostle, “who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God” (v. 21). The point of Christ’s sacrifice is not to give us a pleasant little parachute ride, but is, instead, **to save us** so that we will live a new and more abundant life: a life in which we trust in God and set our faith and hope in Him.

 In other words, the point of Christ’s parachute is to send us soaring again. It’s to get us back in the air and flying right—maybe for the first time.

 God’s past, present, and promised future redemptive activity is the cause for Christian trust in God” that we referenced. Believing in Christ’s resurrection both grows out of this trust, AND MAGNIFIES IT. Christian “faith” and “hope” spring from the trust we have in this redeeming, loving, empowering God.

 So what does the life of a parachute person look like? According to Peter, it involves the purification of our souls by obedience to the truth. There’s nothing hip or ironic or clever or conceptual about this obedience; it’s simply a deep and heartfelt connection to the one person who was sent by God to to gather us in, and in His life to really live, and to save us from despair, and death. When we are obedient to Jesus, we are tied tightly to the parachute that can hold us when be begin to plummet; and deliver us to safety. If you want to get pretty trite, (but still, it’s a good visual,) picture Mary Poppins and her umbrella, right?

 Peter wraps it up by saying that the purpose of all this is so that we might have “genuine mutual love.” And as if that were not clear enough, he adds, “love one another deeply from the heart” (v. 22). It’s what catching the breeze of the Spirit is about, right?

 Now Peter continues to specify some particular demands made upon Christians who hold this faith and hope. These demands involve not just our behavior and attitude toward God, but extend into the community of faith, encompassing all Christian brothers and sisters. He calls those who would be ‘Christ’s ones’ to “love one another deeply from the heart” in v. 22. This love flows from the depths of believers’ own deliverance through their conversion and living holiness. The only legitimate response from [those so redeemed and delivered] is boundless love.

 Barbara Brown Taylor tells the story of her nephew Will’s first birthday party. The little boy was the center of everyone’s attention, and so he happily did a little dance – until a jealous 7-year-old named Jason charged over, put both of his hands on Will’s chest and shoved. Will fell hard. His rear end hit first, then his head, with a crack.

 At first, Will looked utterly surprised. No one had ever hurt him before, and he did not know what to make of it. Then he opened up his mouth and howled, but not for long. His mother hugged him and helped him to his feet, and the first thing Will did was to totter over to Jason. He knew Jason was at the bottom of this thing, but since such meanness was new to him, he didn’t know what to do. So he did what he had always done. He put his arms around Jason and laid his head against that mean little boy’s body.

 “What Will did to Jason put an end to the meanness in that room,” observes Taylor. “That is what love is . . . not a warm feeling between like-minded friends, but plain old imitation of Christ, who took all the meanness of the world, and ran it through the filter of His own body, repaying evil with good, blame with pardon, death with life. Call it divine reverse psychology. It worked once, and it can work again, whenever God can find someone else willing to give it a try.”

 So, are you and I willing to give it a try? To show genuine mutual affection, loving one another deeply from the heart? To purify your soul by your obedience to the truth? To set your faith and hope on God, the One who raised Jesus from the dead and gave Him glory?

 If so, you’ll be born anew. You’ll find yourself saved from destruction, and sailing , indeed, maybe soaring, triumphantly delightedly, awesomely, abundantly on the wind of God’s Spirit.

 How come?

Because Jesus Christ packed your parachute. He IS the parachute. And now, you and I are parachute persons.

Amen.