*Living Hope*

1 Peter 1:3-5

10/9/22

We began our verse-by-verse exposition of 1st Peter last week by examining how Peter defines his readers as elect exiles. Now we step into the main body of the letter. I mentioned in the introduction that ever paragraph from 1:13-5:11 is built around a command or group of commands. Peter is clearly concerned that our belief in Christ transform our behavior. Yet before we can focus on life transformation, we must establish why that takes place. So in 1:3-12 Peter explains the role of the gospel in this process. Before our behavior can change, we must be transformed spiritually. Obedience is the ongoing practice of our faith, but it is rooted in the new birth that God accomplished through Jesus Christ.

Vs. 3-12 are the grid through which we must understand the entire letter. This block of verses breaks into three sections. In vs. 3-5, Peter calls us to worship God for providing a full-orbed salvation. Then in vs. 6-9 he talks about how his readers rejoice in the gospel even though they are being distressed by various trials. Finally, in vs. 9-12, we are told how God moved throughout the OT to bring about present salvation through Jesus We will look at each section in turn; today we examine Peter’s praise in vs. 3-5.

For you who are note takers, today’s sermon has one main point and three sub-points. The text is one long sentence. When you are dealing with a complex passage like this, you must break it down into its parts. At its most basic level, what is the kernel of this statement? To answer this, you separate the clause that can stand on its own from all the clauses that are descriptive. When you do that here, we are left with the call to worship God*.*

The term *blessed be* is a call to praise God. This praise is to be directed toward the *God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.* One of the commentaries I was reading this week observed something I had never considered. In the OT, God is defined primarily as the God of Abraham, because people’s relationship with God was defined by his promises to Abraham. Yet in the NT, God is primarily defined as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because our relationship is defined, not by God’s promise to send a Savior from Abraham’s descendants, but because God has sent His Son to be that Savior. This is an important shift. We are to bless God the Father who sent His only begotten Son into the world to save sinners (cf. Jn. 3:16; 1 Tim. 1:15).

So Peter is calling us to bless the name of the Lord. But what is the reason for this praise? We find that by putting the pieces of our text together. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who caused us to be born again.* We worship God for our salvation. This is the main point of the text. We are to worship God because He caused us to be born again.

Of all the ways Peter could describe salvation, he chose the term *born again*. We learn what this means most clearly in John 3, where Nicodemus visited Jesus because he recognized Jesus had come from God as a teacher, for no one could to the signs that He did unless God was with Him (3:2). Jesus’ reply to this overture was that no one can see the kingdom of heaven unless he is born again. The concept of a second birth confused Nicodemus because he thought he was right with God. He thought that by keeping the Law and living a moral life, he was acceptable to God. He did not realize the extent to which sin alienated him from God and that there was nothing he could do to overcome that alienation. Colossians 2:13 tells us that before salvation, we are dead in our transgressions and sins. That speaks to our spiritual condition. We are spiritually dead, alienated from God, and entirely hostile to Him. Romans 3:10-12 says *there is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God; all have turned aide, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one.* Romans 8:7 says that those in this condition are *hostile toward God.* They *do not subject themselves to the Law of God; for they are unable to do so. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.* This is the condition of all men…alienated from God, spiritually dead, unwilling to move themselves towards God, and unable to do so even if they were inclined. It is a complete and utter death sin brings.

Yet Jesus tells Nicodemus that there is a solution to this problem. But it is not found in anything man can do. It must be done to him. In the same way a baby cannot deliver itself from its mother’s womb, we need a spiritual rebirth acted on us. John 1:13 tells us that this birth comes *not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.* Jesus explained to Nicodemus that He would make it possible through His sacrificial death, and that it is applied to individuals by the Holy Spirit. Jesus said *that which is born of flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be amazed that I said to you, “You must be born again.” The wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but not know where it comes from and where it is going; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.* The Spirit enacts the Father’s plan of salvation by making the redeeming work of Christ effective in individuals. The moment we believe, we pass from death into life. We are born again as our dead souls are infused with the life of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

Peter calls us to worship the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for causing us to be born again. This new life enables us to live for God. Sadly, many try to overcome the problem of sin by making themselves acceptable to God. But as the passage I quoted earlier from Romans 8 says, it is impossible to do anything pleasing to God while we are still in the condition of our sin. But that text goes on to say:

However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, He does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brethren, we are under obligation, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh – for if you live according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

Obedience to God must be preceded by God transforming us. Our hearts of stone that are dead towards God must be removed. In its place God must give us a heart inclined towards Him. This heart transplant is synonymous with the new birth. Salvation is a work of God for which we should praise Him for the glories of His grace extended to us through Jesus Christ.

So the main point of this sentence is that we are to worship God for providing us with so great of a salvation. Everything else describes what God has done in this act. There are three descriptive clauses that further illuminate the nature of God’s saving work in the sentence.

First, Peter says that God’s actions in causing us to be born again were motivated by His great mercy. Grace and mercy are two words the Bible regularly uses to describe God’s actions in salvation. They work in concert with one another. Grace speaks of God giving us something we do not deserve…forgiveness and eternal life. Mercy speaks of God not giving us what we do deserve…punishment and eternal separation from Him. Mercy is the expression of God’s compassion for our pitiable state. In a particularly graphic passage in Ez. 16, God describes his people as a baby abandoned by its mother at birth. God says that He saw His people as a baby writhing in its blood, destined to die. Yet He rescued it and set His favor upon it. That is the picture of God’s mercy…He sees us in our self-inflected death. Rather than leaving us to perish, He saves us. Salvation is according to His great mercy. It is an immense, immeasurable mercy. That is why we sing, *my sins they are many, His mercy is more.*

The first descriptor points to why God has saved us. The next two describe what God has saved us into. First, God caused us to be born again to a living hope. God has moved us from the hopeless condition of spiritual death into the reality of possessing a living hope. We go from futility and certain destruction to possessing a genuine hope.

Hope in the bible is not wishful thinking that you might possibly receive an intended benefit. I hope this sermon is beneficial to you; but I say that with the realization that it might not be for any number of reasons. Yet that is not how hope works in the bible. Biblical hope is attached to the surety of God. Because God is the one who does the saving, our hope is fixed, not in a future possibility, but in an absolute certainty.

This hope comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The wages of sin is death Ro. 6:23 says. Death in this life, death to our relationship with God, and death in the life to come. Yet at the cross, Jesus took this death on Himself. Then, three days later, He rose from the dead, conquering the death of sin. Our hope is that through His resurrection power we also will overcome the death of sin and receive eternal life. So as the hymn says, my hope is built on nothing less that Jesus’ blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name. Our hope is on the sure and certain work of Jesus proven effective when He rose from the grave.

But there is another important element of this hope. Yes, hope is attached to the future enjoyment of all God’s salvation promises; but it is not a future hope. It is a living hope. That means it is dynamic in our lives. It is an active hope, a present hope, a hope that animates our actions now. Enduring victory over sin cannot be sustained by a sense of duty. A sense of duty can produce seasons of victory and faithfulness, but unless we move past doing the right thing because we must, we will never experience sustained victory. At some point, obedience must be fueled by the joyful realization that we have overcome sin through Jesus’ death and resurrection. Because our future is secure and salvation complete, we can live in hope now. We do not have to obey; we get to obey. The new birth brings new spiritual life. That life forms a living, dynamic hope that is seen in our attitudes and behaviors.

So our first phrase describes why God caused us to be born again. He did it because of His great mercy. Our second phrase tells us the immediate result of the new birth. God caused us to be born again to a living, present hope. Our final phrase tells us final outcome of the new birth. God caused us to be born again *to an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.*  This describes the future God has for His people.

One of the most mind-boggling aspects of salvation to me is that God makes us co-heirs with Christ. We will reign and rule with Him in His coming kingdom. We are debtors to His grace. We have an inheritance…eternal life and all that it includes, reserved in heaven for us. Yes, we enjoy a renewed relationship with God now; but the full experience of it comes when we enter His presence either through death or when Christ takes His people home, whichever is first.

This inheritance is described as imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away. Imperishable means that it cannot expire or come to an end. It is the gift of an eternal God. Because He has no end, the gifts He gives to His people have no end. It is also undefiled, or free from any corruption. Salvation is the gift of a perfect God; therefore, it cannot be tainted or diminished by anything we do or an enemy does to us. Finally, it will not fade away. Our salvation will never loose its luster, nor will the results of it fade with time. In eternity, the glory of our salvation will never cease to expand in our minds as we realize more and more what it is that God has done for us. We will never grow weary of singing the glory of His grace.

The text closes by reminding us that this inheritance is not universal. The joys and benefits of being born again are limited to *those who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.* That phrase draws my mind to John 10, where Jesus said, *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they shall never perish; no one shall snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”* God’s people are held secure in the clasped hands of God the Father and Son. The Getty’s put this to words when they wrote *no power of hell, no scheme of man can ever pluck me from His hand. Till He returns or calls me home, here in the love of Christ I stand.* God protects His people with the fullness of His power. If God set His love on you clear back in eternity past, accomplished your salvation through the death and resurrection of His Son, and has brought it to fruition in your life through the efficacy of His Spirit, then He is not going to let go of you. He will protect you by His power, completing the good work He started in you.

If the benefits of the new birth are not universal, then we must ask the question: *how can I be born again?* The answer is in the text. It is *through faith.* Faith in Jesus is the agent God uses to work salvation in us. If you are not one of Jesus’ sheep, you can be by believing in Him. If you hear His voice calling you, do not turn away from it. Today is the day of salvation. Do not harden your heart. Rather, hear the call of God to turn from your sin to trust in Christ alone for salvation. Do that, and you will live. You will have a living hope and a certain future. But you must be born again.

There is a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In the same way Jesus went back to heaven after He rose from the dead, He will one day return. When He does, He will judge the living and the dead. Every knee will bow before Him, and every tongue will confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. For those who bend the knee to Him in this life, this will be a joyful triumph. But for those who refused to bend the knee to Him now, it will be the shameful admission of defeat for neglecting such a glorious salvation. Which will be true of you? If you are not a follower of Christ, I am holding before you the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus. Hear the call of God. Turn from your sin to Christ. Be born again to a living hope.

And to all you who have that hope, the invitation is to *come Magnify the Lord with me and let us exalt His name together* for the wonders of the salvation He has accomplished through His Son. May our hope be evident as we serve Christ this week.

*May the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, perfect, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*