

A HOPEFUL PEOPLE
1 Peter 1:3-5
September 14, 2008 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

The word *hope* has taken on somewhat of a superficial meaning in our culture. When one uses the word in speech today, it often takes the form of wishful thinking. For instance, we might use it in connection with a sporting event. We might say something like, “I hope Alabama beats Auburn this year,” or, I will begrudgingly offer, the other way around. Or we might say concerning a meal, “I sure hope this tastes OK.” Students frequently find themselves thinking, “I hope I do well on this test today.” How frequently do we catch ourselves saying, “I hope the weather is nice today”? And on and on we could go.

It is often with this note of uncertainty or wishful thinking that we use the word *hope* today. There is no firm conviction concerning the future. We just “hope” everything turns out all right, often “all right” being determined by our opinions or tastes. But as we approach our text this morning, we would do well to put that sort of usage out of our minds. When Peter speaks of “**hope**,” he is describing a confident expectation with a joyful anticipation. He has in mind not a hope that is dependent upon any number of unknown variables somehow in the future, but a settled attitude of hope, one that is settled already, even from before the foundation of the world.

When we approach hope in this way, then the events and circumstances of this world lose their hold on our lives. We do not base our hope on things that are uncertain, but upon that which is certain. The believers hope is steady, not one filled with peaks and valleys. We are not inordinately affected when things are going well or when things are going bad because our hope is not in temporal things but in eternal things. This hope allowed the Apostle Paul to proclaim,¹³ “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead,¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” And it is those eternal things that Peter sets forth for us in this great burst of praise. Here we see that *the believer has hope at all times and in all circumstances because of the inheritance secured by God through salvation in Christ.*

I. The Ground for Our Hope – Our salvation (1:3)

As we noted last week, Peter wrote this letter as an encouragement for those who were already experiencing persecution for their faith with a suggestion that things were only going to get worse. In this section (vv. 3-12), Peter’s encouragement involves the entire Godhead. In our verses this morning, Peter sets forth God the Father as the central figure. In verses 6-9, God the Son is the focal point, with verses 10-12 setting forth Holy Spirit.

In our verses this morning we see the work of the Father as the basis for our hope. We can face the future with certainty first by recognizing that the ground of our hope is our salvation by God through Christ. There are five things that Peter gives pertaining to this ground for our hope in v. 3.

1. The source of our salvation

Peter’s doxology begins, “**Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**” Peter rightly assumes that the believer would rightly understand the person of whom he spoke and the significance of His love for His covenant people. In speaking to our great salvation, he

attributes it all to God the Father and he addresses the Father in a distinctively Christian way. The Jews had long blessed God as their Creator and Redeemer and looked at Him as their Father. But here Peter further qualifies God's name, "**Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" Against the teachings of Judaism, Peter asserts that Jesus Christ is the same nature as God the Father, emphasizing His deity. "**Lord**" is a title of divinity, identifying Christ as a sovereign ruler; "**Jesus**" denotes the incarnate second person of the Godhead in His humanity; "**Christ**" refers to His office as the Anointed One. This is Peter's way of emphasizing the truth that Paul stated in Colossians 1:19, "For it was the *Father's* good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him."

Therefore, when one looks at Christ, He sees the Father. Jesus Himself taught this very truth. In every instance of addressing God save His cry of dereliction on the Cross, Jesus called God "**Father.**" The Jews often called God Father, but not in a personal sense. It was always in a collective way, "Our Father," which certainly is proper when we consider how Jesus taught His disciple to pray, "Our Father." But Peter reminds his readers of the personal character of God as their Father that comes through Jesus Christ, who called Him Father. Simon Kistemaker noted, "Because of Jesus Christ, we call his Father our Father and his God our God."¹ Both Paul and John allude to the same truth in their doxologies, showing the love that the Father has for His people in the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom His love is demonstrated. To look at Christ in any other way as the express image of God the Father is to deny God's way of salvation. It is in Christ alone, the God-man, that God is both just and justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

So Peter attributes our salvation from beginning to end as a work of God the Father in the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is the source of our salvation, and He has set apart a people for Himself to be their Father according to His good pleasure. If it pleased God to save a people for Himself, then He alone deserves to be praised for His great love!

2. The motive for our salvation

Our salvation was "**according to His great mercy.**" Here we see the motive for our salvation, the mercy of God the Father. We see almost the same words from Paul in Ephesians 2:4-5, "⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)."² "**Mercy**" has been defined as God's holy love for a miserable people, a people with no hope. There is often a distinction made between God's grace and God's mercy. *Grace* refers to God giving us what we don't deserve, while *mercy* is God not giving us what we do deserve. By God's *grace* we receive eternal life; in His *mercy* we do not receive eternal damnation and death.

John MacArthur shows the distinction this way, "Mercy concerns an individual's miserable condition, whereas grace concerns his guilt, which caused that condition. Divine mercy takes the sinner from misery to glory (a change of condition), and divine grace takes him from guilt to acquittal (a change of position)."² In this we see the great love that God had for us! Because of our sin, we deserved nothing but death. When our hearts were satisfied with self and the things of this world, deceived by the flesh and believing that the world was our hope, God in His mercy showed us that the only hope that man has is found in Christ. We did not see ourselves as miserable and pitiful, nor did we see ourselves as guilty. But God intervened and saved us! He bestowed on us the riches that are found in Christ Jesus alone. And this great mercy is the prerogative of God alone, who said to Moses and was later interpreted by Paul, "I will have

¹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *NTC: 1 Peter*, 40.

² John MacArthur, Jr., *1 Peter*, 31-32.

mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.’ So then, it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy” (Ex. 33:19; Rom. 9:15-16). How did He accomplish this great feat? How did He turn our hearts and minds towards Him and His saving mercy?

3. The method of our salvation

When we were at enmity with God and deserving of His eternal wrath for our sin, God Himself **“caused us to be born again.”** This is what is known as the doctrine of regeneration or the new birth. In this God accomplishes His purpose for His people. What man could not do nor would even want to do, God in His great mercy accomplishes through the new birth.

“New birth” is a fitting term given man’s condition. Paul described man’s plight in Ephesians 2:1-3:

Ephesians 2:1-3 – ¹ And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.

While we did not recognize it, we were a hopeless people. Paul described us as “dead,” under the influence of the adversary, living according to our sinful desires and passions, and “children of wrath.” Our will was bent towards self and away from God. There was nothing in us that would incline us to turn towards Him and live for Him. But God intervened causing us to be born again, raised from the deadness of our trespasses and sins.

The need for regeneration was explained to a Jewish leader named Nicodemus in John 3. You remember that Jesus looked at Nicodemus and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (Jn. 3:5-6). Here we see both the need and the means of regeneration. The need because man is dead in trespasses and sins. He is totally incapable of doing anything to save himself. God must first grant life, and this takes place when one is born again, given new life. The means is through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, who invades a dead life and shatters a hard heart, deadened by sin, and effectively changes the will of a person. Their desires, devotions, passions, and affections, which once burned deeply for the things of the flesh, are turned towards God and Christ in faith and repentance.

4. The result of our salvation

Peter then shares what the person who has been born again gains. He is born again **“to a living hope.”** This is not some passive hope, a hope that sits back and expects nothing. It is not a fatalistic hope that some have who have a warped view of God’s sovereignty. Peter says it is **“a living hope.”** That describes a hope that is active, just as the author of Hebrews describes the Word of God as “living and active” (4:12). This is a hope, unlike the empty hope that the world offers, that will never disappoint. Paul put it this way in Romans 5:1-5:

Romans 5:1-5 – ¹ Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. ³ And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; ⁵

and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

Both Peter and Paul set forth the truth, the promise that the tribulations and persecutions of this world cannot destroy the Christian's hope because, as Edmund Hiebert notes, "the living God inspires it and guarantees its fruition."³ The Christian hope is "**living**," having in itself the very life of the living God. That hope stands in contrast to the empty, frustrating, deceptive, false hopes of the world.

5. The way of our salvation

This hope is made possible "**through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**" Here Peter ties our hope to our eternal life, an eternal life that is secured in the resurrection of Christ. The wonder of this is seen again as we follow the reasoning of the Apostle Paul. In 1 Corinthians 15:13-17, Paul shows the hopelessness we have if Christ was not raised from the dead:

1 Corinthians 15:13-17 – ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁴ and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. ¹⁵ Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; ¹⁷ and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.

Paul here rebuked the futile way of thinking of some at Corinth who taught that there was no future resurrection of the dead. He argues that if the dead are not raised, then neither was Christ, and if Christ was not raised, then we are left in our sins and the penalty associated with them, that being death. The hopelessness is described by Paul as a faith that is worthless.

But that is not the thinking of one who has been born again. The believers hope is in the undeniable truth of Christ's resurrection. Paul put it this way in Romans 6:8-11:

Romans 6:8-11 – ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, ⁹ knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. ¹⁰ For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. ¹¹ Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

That was Peter's whole assertion in calling his readers to praise God. He sets forth the resurrection of Christ because he was reminding them of their new life in Christ Jesus, a life secured by the resurrection of Christ, whereby sin, the devil, death and the grave was defeated. That is the grounds for our hope – what God has accomplished through Christ for all those who believe in Christ's saving work!

II. The Goal of Our Hope – Our Inheritance (1:4-5)

Having given us the ground of our hope, Peter wants us to see that this salvation had a purpose, a goal for us. Peter wanted his readers to realize what was theirs as a result of their salvation. They have "**an inheritance**" which is theirs already that will be fully realized when they are with the Lord. This "**inheritance**" is referred to in different ways in the New

³ D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 Peter*, 59-60.

Testament: eternal life (Mk. 10:17); glory with Christ (Rom. 8:17, 18); the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50); and of Christ (Eph. 5:5); salvation (Heb. 1:14); the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2-7), and so forth. From this we see that **“inheritance”** is a term for the blessedness and glory of heaven, of which, according to Paul in Ephesians 1:13-14 that we read earlier, the Holy Spirit is the foretaste and the pledge.⁴

1. The nature of our inheritance (1:4a)

Peter uses four phrases to describe this inheritance. The first three depict its nature, a nature that Curtis Vaughan rightly described as “excellent.”⁵ First, it is **“imperishable.”** It is not subject to decay or able to be worn out with the passage of time. The New Testament uses this word only of eternal realities, such as God himself, God’s word, and our resurrection bodies. Conversely, all earthly possessions are perishable and tied to the effects of sin on this earth. Not so with our inheritance which belongs to the heavenly realm “where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal” (Mt. 6:20). The root word carries the idea of “incorruptible, indestructible.” Therefore this **“inheritance”** shares the nature of the One who is incorruptible (Rom. 1:23). So Peter draws our attention to the eternity of the believers **“inheritance.”** Death itself cannot destroy it.

Second, this **“inheritance”** is **“undefiled.”** The idea is that it is unpolluted, unstained, without the marks of sin. It is beyond the reach of evil and cannot be contaminated by it. This speaks to its moral purity and perfection.

Third, it **“will not fade away.”** It is not subject to the wasting effects of time. Our physical bodies ravaged as they are by sin are moment by moment fading away. The things of this earth are compared to a flower that withers. But those who have this new life in Christ will never fade away. This **“inheritance”** is unchanging because it is bound in the character and nature of God who never changes and of Christ who is “the same yesterday, today, and forever.”

That is the nature of our inheritance: imperishable, undefiled, and never fading. Hiebert draws a wondrous conclusion, “The three negative terms indicate that in seeking to describe the heavenly inheritance, Peter could only tell us what it is not like in terms of our present life.”⁶ In other words, Peter had to use negative terms because it is a stark contrast to that which we are familiar. Perishable, defiled, fading we understand because it is part of this life. But the glory of imperishable, undefiled, never fading, that is of another realm, one that has as its goal the fulfillment of our hope.

The certainty that this inheritance will succeed in its goal is further seen by...

2. The place of our inheritance (1:4b)

Peter states that this **“inheritance”** is **“reserved in heaven for you”** – the inheritance is safe. The Greek carries the idea of being guarded or watched over and then preserved. Vaughan notes that this is more than simply being stored away, but secured under God’s careful watch.

As if this were not enough, its preservation **“in heaven”** adds to this assurance of safety. It is safely beyond anybody or anything that could destroy it or defile it. Jesus also offered the promise of heaven as a comfort to His disciples in the midst of their turmoil:

John 14:1-4 – ¹ “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. ² “In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. ³ “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come

⁴ Curtis Vaughan and Thomas D. Lea, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, 20.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Hiebert, 61.

again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, *there* you may be also. ⁴ “And you know the way where I am going.”

And all of this, Peter says, is “**for you.**” Their trials and tribulations did not catch God unawares. Their inheritance was intended from the very beginning – and nothing or no one could undermine or thwart God’s promises.

3. The assurance of our inheritance (1:5)

But not only is the inheritance itself safe, but those for whom the inheritance is intended are also safe. Peter gives both the supreme cause of our assurance and the subordinate cause of our assurance.⁷ “**By the power of God**” expresses the supreme cause. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 1:4), the same power that is the gospel of God to salvation (Rom. 1:16), is the same power that preserves, protects, and keeps us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:30).

“**Faith**” is the subordinate cause of our assurance. Hiebert notes, “From the human side, faith is the means that activates God’s preserving powering the life of a Christian... The proper human response is to recognize our own inadequacy and in every circumstance, by faith, ask Him to shield us by providing a way of escape.”⁸ I agree with Hiebert’s assessment. However, I would add “His way of escape.” Paul exhorted the Corinthians, “No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it” (1 Cor. 10:13). However, the context of his exhortation is found in the verse that precedes, “Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Paul told the Corinthians the same thing that Peter stresses here – TRUST IN GOD!

Peter’s closing statement provides further assurance. “**Salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**” indicates that this salvation has already been accomplished. It provides a fitting conclusion to the salvation that began with God and is kept by God. That is how Paul could write, “*For I am* confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 1:6). The salvation that God began does not and can not be improved upon. It is finished in Christ Jesus!

Conclusion

1. Which do you treasure most – the things of this world with a value that is fading away? Or the invaluable treasures of eternity in that will never fade away?
2. When calamity strikes, do you find your satisfaction in the promise of eternal happiness?
3. Does your hope lead to a joy that is everlasting?

⁷ Vaughan, 22.

⁸ Hiebert, 63.