

First Peter: The Holiness of Hope

1 Peter 1:13-21

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Thus far the apostle Peter has spoken of our salvation, our living hope, our heavenly imperishable inheritance, and our being kept for this salvation, this future glory, in the midst of suffering, by the power of God. And all of this, makes us the privileged people, the people to whom things have come, into which even angels long to look.

Peter now turns to his first piece of ethical exhortation. That is, based on the indicative – what God has done in Christ – he now gives us the imperative – what we are to do in response. Having been birthed into this eschatological hope, having been made heirs of glory, how shall we then live? We will make two points: hope and holiness.

I. Hope

First, then, hope. Hope brackets the text. It opens with a reference to hope in v.13, and it closes with one in v.21. Let's take the final reference to hope first. In v.20 Peter refers to Christ, as the one who was foreknown before the foundation of the world.

You'll recall, that in opening verses of this letter, Peter says that YOU are elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. And foreknowledge, we said at that point, is not merely seeing in advance, it is not God's bare knowledge of the future. To be known by God, is to be loved by God. To be foreknown, is to be loved from all eternity. It is virtually identical with the idea of election. Jesus was foreknown from eternity, that is, chosen, elected to be the Messiah. But he was revealed, made manifest in the last times for us. Peter loves this word "revealed." He who was revealed, is ready to be revealed again. He who has wrought salvation is READY to reveal that salvation. He whose appearance ushered in the last times is ready to consummate the last times.

So, Christ has been revealed for you, for our sake, who, through him, are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory. Glory is an eschatological word. It refers – the majority of the time – to the world to come. To the resurrection of the dead, to the glory of the new creation. Christ was RAISED

from the dead and given GLORY. The Sabbath glory Adam would have attained to had he been obedient.

The glory we seek then, is embodied, resurrected, immortal, indestructible glory, in conformity with Christ's risen glory. And because we believe in this risen glorified Christ, our faith and our HOPE are in God. Or as Paul puts it: Christ in us (through faith), is the HOPE of glory. (Partaking of) Christ, in his glory, is our hope.

Now, let's look now at Peter's first imperative in v.13: Therefore, because you have this living hope, this salvation ready to be revealed, this heavenly inheritance, therefore: Prepare your minds for action. Or more literally, gird up the loins of your mind. The image of "girding" refers to a garment that would need to be pulled up, or tucked in, to allow free and vigorous movement of one's limbs. It evokes an alert-expectancy. A thing vivid on the pages of the NT. And almost completely lacking in us modern Christians. This girding up of the mind – the whole inner person – is a metaphor of preparedness for the Lord's coming.

Jesus uses identical language in Luke 12: *Let you loins stay girded and keep your lamps burning, ³⁶ and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.*

And Peter continues: being sober-minded. This is the opposite of being scattered. Going through life dabbling in this thing, flitting to that thing. This is a kind of intellectual and moral self-control. Sobriety here means focus and clarity of mind. Like glory, the word sober has the smell, the coloring of the eschaton. Peter will say in 4:7: The end of all things is at hand, therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded.

Speaking of the day of the Lord coming like a thief in the night, Paul, in 1 Thess. 5:6 says: So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. The end, the eschaton, sobers one's mind, focuses and fixes it – causing much else to vanish like the vapor that it is.

Having this kind of sober, girded, focused mind Peter says: SET your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. There's the revelation word again. Jesus who was revealed is about to be revealed again. We saw previously: His salvation is READY to be *revealed*. And your faith is going to result in glory at the *revelation* of Jesus Christ. Notice it's THE revelation of Jesus Christ – a singular event is in view. Later, in chapter 4 Peter will say this: But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. That is, when that which is hidden, becomes open, and universal, and manifest.

Paul says (in 1 Cor. 1) that we are eagerly waiting the revelation of our Lord Jesus, who will sustain us until the Day of the Lord Jesus Christ. In 2 Thessalonians 1 Paul says eternal judgment is ushered in at the *revelation* of Jesus Christ from heaven.

So, there is no doubt what Peter is speaking of when he says: the grace (or the blessing) to be brought to you at the *revelation* of Jesus Christ. He is speaking of the second coming and the full unveiling of the new creation. In the language of the book of Hebrews: Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will *appear a second time*, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him. This salvation is what Peter means when he speaks of the grace to be brought to you at Jesus' coming. As the Didache – a very early Christian teaching manual from just after the apostles' time puts it – when this grace comes, the present world passes away.

Now, I have labored this point, so that you can see how absolutely radical, how otherworldly, how heavenly-minded, the apostle is: To a suffering and harassed people, he says that, with girded and sober minds, we are to SET our hope FULLY on this coming of Christ. The word set is urgent. This is a command. It means FIX, rivet, fasten your hope. And fully means unreservedly, absolutely, totally. Fix your hope totally on the coming revelation/unveiling of Christ. Not partially, not primarily. Totally. The total hope of the Church is the coming of the Christ in resurrected glory. No earthly consolations, no political victories, no cultural advances, can repair the sufferings we endure in this life, they cannot give us back our dead, and they cannot restore and undo the ravages of the past. And no earthly consolations can satisfy the church's thirst for her Lord and his face. From beginning to end, the Christian life is hope (fully set hope) in the resurrected order where Christ will be revealed in glory.

It is precisely because our hope is SAFE, because it is not subject to the swings, the ebbs and flows, the vicissitudes of time, and culture and politics, that we can bank on it. Our inheritance is KEPT for us in heaven. Imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Therefore, SET your hope on it . Totally. This is the hope that does not, indeed cannot, disappoint. And this hope is not just OUT THERE – something we affirm, some box we check about the future – this hope invades a Christian soul, it pervades, it infuses the heart and soul. In short, it produces holiness.

II. Holiness

And that brings us to our second point, holiness. Hope produces holiness. The Christian life works from the future, back into the present. From heaven to earth. From the glorified Christ, to us, who are aspiring for that glory. Peter calls us to holiness in v.14: As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of

your former ignorance. We have been born again into a living hope, and this demands a lifelong reordering of our desires.

Put negatively: we are NOT to be conformed to our former passions. Positively, this means that: as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. We are not to be CONFORMED to the world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds. Holiness means separated, other, radically pure, reflecting the beauty and glory of God himself. And notice: It is God himself who is the standard of our holiness. *Since it is written: you shall be holy, for I am holy (Citation from Leviticus 11:44).*

There is a simplicity to holiness. It's conformity to the being of God. It's love the Lord your God, with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and your neighbor as yourself. And listen, this is beautiful, not only is God the standard, he is the source and the guarantee of your holiness. It's a certainty. You SHALL BE holy. You shall possess the holiness, without which, no one shall see the Lord. And you shall be holy, for, because I AM holy. I am the source and the guarantee of your holiness. That is gospel, not law. When Christ appears, you shall be like him, for you shall see him like he is. Since you shall be (in the end) perfected in holiness, then, Peter says: be holy now in all your conduct. The hope creates the holiness.

He gives us a further motive to holiness in verse 17. If you call on him as Father, who judges impartially according to each one's deeds...Notice – there's the coming judgment again – it's never far away. There's a lovely balance here: The one you call Father, is also the One who judges impartially each one's deeds. Intimacy can never become casual or nonchalant or irreverent because God our Father is judge. And our sense of fear can never become soul-destroying terror, because the God the judge is our Father. Thus, Peter says: conduct yourselves in fear. That is, with awe, with healthy dread. This fear is the beginning of wisdom, it is the wellspring of life.

But notice, the connection to our hope. Conduct yourself in fear during the time of your exile. We saw what this being exiles meant in our first sermon in this series. The word here means one who is on a temporary stay, a resident alien. Someone without citizenship rights. Someone who knows they have no lasting city and are looking for the city to come. All Christian ethics are exile ethics. Because all Christian ethics are eschatological ethics, ethics driven by, and from, the hoped for future.

How long does the church have to be holy? How long does she have to fear God? Until he comes to judge according to each one's deeds. That then, is the period of the church's exile. Namely, her whole history. The church in this age never become non-exilic rulers of the realm. To the end we are people whose hopes are fixed completely on the grace to be brought to them at the revelation of JC are exiles. And this provides us with the deepest springs, the deepest

motives to holy fear of God. Listen to Paul connect the coming judgement with walking in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor). For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil. ¹¹ Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others.

Again, from the coming judgment BACK into our current living. And in v.18 we get perhaps the deepest motive of all to holiness. We live this way: knowing that we were ransomed from the futile ways, inherited from our forefathers. We have experienced a great deliverance, a ransom offered, not with perishable things but with the precious blood of Christ, the spotless lamb of God. You have been bought with a price, therefore, glorify God in your body. Christ, who is our hope, is also our sanctification, our holiness.

Let us conclude.

It is the contention of this text that we cannot be holy, that we cannot live in reverent fear, without being fastened, completely fastened, to the hope of Christ's coming again in glory to judge the living dead. Hope here, does not merely move from us to God – that is, we hope in God – but more decisively, the vision, the glory of Christ's coming appearance flows from God into us, creating hope and focusing it. Our hope creates our holiness. It causes holiness. The deeper the hope, the deeper the holiness.

This hope is not a joyless gloom. This is a glad, buoyant hope. Nor is this a useless other worldliness. This hope produces holiness, and the life of good works which flow from holiness now. All the themes in our text are found in a remarkable passage in Titus chapter 2.

The grace of God has appeared, Paul says, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age. There's holiness. And this is the holiness of a people, Paul continues, who are ¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. And the text continues: Christ redeemed us from our lawlessness, to create a people zealous for good deeds.

It is precisely because we are waiting for the coming of Christ, for the time when, Paul says in 1 Corinthians, we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. When the dead will be raised imperishable, And the saying shall come to pass: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" It is because our hope is fully set on, fixed on that Day, that Peter can say "be holy in all your conduct," and Paul can say: Therefore, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. Amen.

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