

First Peter: A Living Hope

1 Peter 1:3-12

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Previously, we saw that the apostle opened with a word for the elect exiles, who have come, through the electing God, to obey Jesus Christ, being sprinkled with his blood. In the text now before us, 1 Peter 1, verses 3 through 12, we will make four points: Inheritance in vv. 3-4, Trials in vv. 5-7, and Joy in vv. 8 and 9, and The Prophets in vv. 10-12.

I. Inheritance

First, then inheritance. Peter begins: Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. The whole passage is an act of praise, a blessing of the name of God, for his great mercy. We are reborn by this mercy, born into a living hope – not a dead hope, or a hope which will disappoint - but a hope which is our life. And we are born into this hope: Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. His resurrection is the decisive action in your new birth.

We were, (covenantally), in and with Christ, when he died, and when he was raised. We died WITH him, and we are raised WITH him. And his resurrection has conducted us into the new birth and into the living, indestructible hope. In what, more specifically, does this hope consist? It consists of being born into an inheritance. Peter's mind works like this: birth confers inheritance rights. Children become heirs. And we are born anew, and thus we shall inherit.

Now, this is not an earthly inheritance. We saw this last time: Israel's inheritance in Canaan is the typological expression of our inheritance in heaven. That is made utterly clear here. This is an inheritance, Peter says, kept in heaven for us. Put simply: because our inheritance is in heaven, we shall, when the veil between heaven and earth is torn, when Jesus descends, inherit the earth.

Now, by the Spirit, we have a pledge, a seal, a down payment, of our inheritance, a promise of inheriting. But the full inheritance, is reserved, or kept IN HEAVEN for us. This is the best possible news for exiles in the earth. And thus, unlike the land of Israel, unlike any created thing, this inheritance can never perish, spoil, or fade. Peter says its imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Let's look at imperishable first:

The heavens and the earth will perish. They will – depending on the biblical metaphor in view – be rolled up like a scroll or consumed by fire. The bodies that are sown into the earth at death, are called perishable. This inheritance not only WON'T perish – it CANNOT perish. It is of a different quality from every created thing. It is imperishable.

It is also, Peter says, undefiled. It cannot spoil – that is, unlike the land, which was defiled by idolatry, this inheritance is beyond the possibility of defilement.

And, finally, it cannot fade – it can neither increase nor decrease, it cannot ebb or flow. It is utterly full and replete in its radiance. Imperishable, undefiled, unfading – where might such an inheritance be? In heaven. It is kept where our Lord Jesus is. Where the immediate, full, visible glory of the Triune God is.

This, then, is the object, the content of the living hope, into which you were born again. As Paul puts it in Colossians 1: in the gospel, the word of truth, you heard of a hope LAID up in heaven for you. From the instant of one's conversion, which occurs THROUGH the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are oriented to the coming resurrection of the dead, and the full possession of the inheritance, of which we have, in the Spirit, a down payment now.

II. Trials

Our second point, then, is trials. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who, verse 5 says, through faith, are shielded by God's power. It would do us little good, to know we have an inheritance that's being kept for us, if we were not being kept for it. The inheritance is kept in heaven, and you are, BY FAITH, shielded by God's power until you get there. These Christians are shielded – not from, but in -- their suffering, by the power of God. The idea is akin to being under arrest. We are kept in the protective custody of God. How long is the church shielded by God's power? Until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. This is just another way of saying: until the inheritance is possessed.

Salvation is almost always spoken of in the future tense in 1 Peter. It is basically a synonym for inheritance. Notice: this salvation is READY to be revealed. In chapter 4 Peter will say Jesus is READY to judge the living and the dead. Ready. For the end of all things is at hand. The word *revealed* also points to the second coming of Jesus. He has been revealed, and he shall be revealed, in the last time, bringing our salvation in fulness.

When he is REVEALED, John says, we shall be like him, for we shall SEE him like he is. When Jesus is revealed in this sense, it means when he is unveiled and seen visibly by the human eye, in all his resplendent glory. And you are kept

for THAT unveiling, that revealing. In all of this, Peter says, in v.8, you GREATLY rejoice. The heavenly vision, the living hope, and the power of God which keeps you for it – is a cause of deep, great joy. In this you greatly rejoice (exult), though now. The eschatological vision of the church is the fountain, the source of all her joy. We draw joy down from the future into the present. But notice: in this, you greatly rejoice, BUT NOW.

This NOW, this little while, is the time of this age. What Paul calls momentary, light affliction, which produces an eternal weight of glory. Here the church suffers grief in all kinds of trials. In this, she is simply imitating her Lord, whose glory did not come in this age, but in the resurrection.

Notice the paradox. It's bracing. We rejoice (exult) in the coming inheritance, in the salvation READY to be revealed, AND, strangely, we suffer all kinds of trials and grief. This is life in Christ. And this whole conjunction of suffering and hope, is at the heart of Peter's concern in this letter. Calvin puts it this way. Peter writes, he says: "so that we may not think it hard to give up the world in order to enjoy the priceless treasure of future life.

And also, so that we may not be broken by our present troubles, but patiently endure them, being satisfied with eternal happiness." No eternal, heavenly, eschatological vision, no earthly resilience.

Often, we are tempted to offer some other (false) consolation. "The trials will go away, they will show fruit soon, they will all make sense in this life, they will lead to great earthly advantage or gain." Peter speaks otherwise. These trials have come, he says, so that the proven (tested) genuineness of your faith – faith, which is of greater worth than all gold, all earthly security. Greater than gold which, though it can be refined by fire, nevertheless is a perishable item.

But your faith – because you are kept by God's power – shall survive the fire of these trails. And it will thus RESULT in praise, glory and honor, when Jesus Christ is revealed, unveiled in all his visible glory. This is praise, glory and honor rendered to Christ at his appearing. But it also likely includes praise, glory and honor for the saints, in the sense of open commendation. This is added, Calvin says: so that the faithful will learn to hold on courageously to the last day, for our life is now hidden in Christ, and will remain hidden, as if it were buried, until Christ shall appear from heaven.

None of this means that our trials are not heartbreaking. They often are. Or that we don't sorrow long before comfort comes, or that we are not battered and bruised and barely hanging on many times. All this must be tended to with great patience and love. Yet Peter is convinced that joy is to be had in the midst of grievous trials, not in their absence. Trials, he insists, produce a glory to be revealed at Christ's appearing.

III. Joy

Third, then, joy. If we needed anymore confirmation that Peter is speaking of the second coming, just after speaking of JC being revealed (at the end of v.7), he says: Though you have not seen him. Notice: Jesus being revealed, means SEEING him face to face, the way these early Christians have NOT seen him. Though you have not seen him, you love him.

You know what this living hope of an inheritance kept in heaven, and thus till unseen, creates? Love for him. Love for Jesus without a yearning for his appearance is fraudulent. Even though you do not see him *now*, he says – the same *now* in which, for a little while, you suffer trials (entire church age).

You do not see him *now*, but you believe in him (faith is our mode of seeing Christ in this age) and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

Already now, by faith, we lay hold of this coming glory – and are filled with it, and this eschatological vision is the source of the church's current joy. And in believing now, we are, Peter concludes, receiving. We are now, through faith, beginning to receive the end result of our faith, namely, the future salvation of our souls.

IV. Prophets

Fourth, and finally, the prophets. Verse 10 says: Concerning THIS salvation. We might ask: Which salvation? The salvation which we just unpacked in vv. 3-9. The prophets did not speak of any sub-eschatological, earthly glory in this age. They spoke of the salvation which Peter is unpacking for his culturally marginalized, exiles. And they prophesied of the GRACE that was to come to you, to us. From beginning to end, in the OT, as in the NT, salvation is by grace, not works. Free, sovereign, glorious grace.

And this gracious salvation, predicted by the prophets, comes through, the text says, the sufferings of the Messiah, and the glories that follow. Suffering, then glory. Something that Peter resisted deeply at first, as we often do. But the order remains. First for Christ, then for us. Suffering characterizes this age; glory characterizes the age to come. (e.g. Romans 8:17 ff)

They spoke of the Messiah's sufferings when they spoke of the bruising of his heel by the serpent, and of the Lamb to be provided, in the mysterious story of Abraham's binding of Isaac for sacrifice. In the anguished sufferings of the Psalmist who cries out: my God, my God, why have you forsaken me. In the whole of the sacrificial system, with its rivers of blood.

The prophets spoke of the subsequent glories, when they spoke of the serpent's head being crushed, and the nations being enveloped in peace and glory... of the end of wars, of the destruction of death, and of a renewed creation, and of a final judgment.

It is of these sufferings, and these unspeakable glories, that the prophets spoke. The prophets who spoke thus, also, we are told, searched diligently, intently, and with the greatest care, trying to figure out the time and circumstances to which...the Spirit of Christ within them was pointing – when he predicted the suffering and glories of Christ. We should not think of the prophets as mere conduits that the word simply flowed through. They were active under the Word. They engaged and wrestled, they searched intently, they questioned and puzzled.

And notice what the text says: they were trying to find the time and circumstance to which the Spirit of CHRIST in them was pointing. The prophets spoke by the Spirit of Christ. The pre-existent Son, the eternal second person of the holy Trinity, it is his Spirit that spoke by the prophets. The prophets testify TO Christ for sure. But this text says: that Christ testifies THROUGH the prophets. Christ himself proleptically SPEAKS in the OT.

Under the promises, prophecies, types, institutions, sacrifices, etc. of the OT, Jesus Christ is present (to save). And himself speaks, in the OT texts, through the Spirit. Yet, there is a movement from one testament to the other, from the old to the new. Because in this intense searching, this questioning about time and circumstance. It was revealed to them, the text says, that they were not serving themselves, but you, when they spoke of these things.

The Word they spoke, was of course for their contemporaries, but it was also, ultimately, for us. The prophets are ministers of the Word to both the OT and the NT saints. In serving us this way, the text says: “they spoke of the things that have now been told you, by those who have preached the gospel to you, by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.”

The prophets spoke by the Spirit of CHRIST. And the apostles spoke by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. The point here seems to be this: the Spirit that spoke through the prophets, is the same Spirit sent by the risen and ascended Christ. And by which the apostles' preached.

Finally, the text refers to angels peering, straining to see into the things, that, having been predicted by the prophets, have now been preached by the apostles. Paul speaks of the manifold wisdom of God, now revealed in the church, as a thing displayed for the angels, prompting one scholar to call the church: the graduate school for the angels. What an enormous privilege it is, to be living NOW in the New Covenant, in the time about which, the prophets searched intently, with the greatest care.

The time when the Messiah has come, suffered, and entered into his glory. And thus, what is our time of suffering as a prelude to glory. This is Peter's deep theological medicine, his prescription for a suffering people.

In closing, lest we forget, all of this dense and practical theology is set here, first, in the frame of praise and wonder. The text (in vv.3-9) is a blessing of the Triune God. Followed, in vv. 10-12, by a glorying in our R-H situation as the envy of angels. Thus, we have and exercise by a pastor summoning his troubled people, and summoning us exiles, to rejoice greatly in abundant mercy, and eschatological hope, To declare: Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has caused us to be born again in to this living hope. Amen.

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