

LIVING WITH HOPE

1 Peter 1:1-12

Several years ago there was a popular song that had the lyrics, “Just wishin’, and hopin’, and ...” I really can't remember much more of the song than that. For a lot of people “wishing” and “hoping” sort of go together and, to them, hope is more or less wishful thinking. Every four years we witness seven to ten fairly reasonable people run for their political party's nomination for a presidential candidate. Realistically, most of these people have a hope that is little more than wishful thinking. They are pretty much “just wishin’ and hopin’” but do not really “anticipate” that they will be president.

The Bible speaks of three lasting qualities: faith, hope and love. Hope, as used in the Bible, means to have eager expectation or to anticipate a coming event. The expectation and anticipation are important. Consider Roman 8:23 and 24: “. . . we groan in eager anticipation of our adoption as sons . . . in this hope we were (and are being) saved . . .”

Paul tells us that we are saved in this “hope” and hope is “eager anticipation.” Also, we are familiar with Hebrews 11:1 where we find “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” It seems that one of the failures of the modern-day church is that we are easily discouraged. We believe for something that we would like to have and perhaps even expect to receive (something we hope for). It could be salvation for a lost friend or healing and health for a loved one. If we do not immediately get the thing for which we hope, we often quit anticipating and expecting it to happen. We, in effect, let hope die. If hope dies then faith has become the substance of something that no longer has any life in it. We then get what we anticipate – nothing!

To further illustrate how important hope is, consider the verse recorded in Hebrews 10:23. The KJV says

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering: for He is faithful that promised."

This is a very beautiful verse and we've all learned it that way; however, that is not what the verse says in the Greek text. The Greek manuscripts say,

"Let us hold fast the confession of our HOPE without wavering . . ."

The Apostle Peter wrote a general letter to Christians who were scattered about the region and included such places as Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. One of his purposes was to encourage them during the times of persecution and to help them keep focused on the promises of God.

Hope: Recognize Its Basis – 1:1-5

¹Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen ²according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure. ³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 1 Peter 1:1-5 (NASB95)

Peter began his letter, as was the custom of his time, by saying who he was and with what authority he wrote. He stated his name as Peter which was given to him by Jesus some 30 years earlier. This identified the person or individual by whom the letter was written. We get letters and emails from various people and we will either read them or ignore them and the basis for making this decision has to do with the position or office or authority of the person sending the letter or email. We are essentially asking the question “Why should care what this person has to

say?"

Peter was an apostle or one who was sent. As such he was an emissary of the one who had sent him. He had no authority of his own but had the delegated authority of the person he represented. The "office" of an apostle was and is thought by some to be the most important and highest ranking position in the church. This idea comes from the statement Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 12:28 where we see "God has set (appointed) these in the church, first apostles, second prophets, and third teachers, etc." It may be that this ordering is simply related to the time sequence in which each of these ministries were set in the church. On the other hand, it could be that Paul was making a list and these are listed in the order which he thought about them while composing the letter. (Sometimes we tend to over analyze the scriptures.) There is nothing in the scriptures to support the claim (by some) that Peter was the leader of all the other apostles and, consequently, was the only representative (vicar) of Christ. As Matthew Henry pointed out, "Christ never gave him any preeminence of this kind, but positively forbade it, and gave precepts to the contrary. The other apostles never consented to any such claim. Paul declares himself 'not a whit behind the very chief apostles'" (presumably those who had been with Jesus during His earthly ministry).

He then named those to whom he was writing. These were the Jewish Christians then scattered throughout the Roman provinces of Asia Minor. The text literally says to the "pilgrims of the dispersion." Some commentators think that the dispersion referenced here was related to the persecution following the death of Stephen in which many of the Christians left Jerusalem for their own physical safety. Others have suggested that these were the descendants of the Jews who were dispersed from Babylon to various cities in Asia Minor some 200 years before by Antiochus king of Syria. They believe that Peter had visited these Jews and many had become believers under his ministry. At the time Peter wrote this letter, he was likely residing in Rome (which he referred to as "Babylon" in chapter 5) and was writing to them as a followup and encouragement to these new Christians.

Peter used this letter of encouragement to teach them how each expression (person) of the Triune God had a part in their salvation. The Father had *chosen* or elected them in accordance or in agreement with His foreknowledge. If you are given an offer to receive by God's grace, what Christ did to secure your salvation, then the fact that God knows whether you will accept it or reject it does not deny your ability to choose. The work of the Holy Spirit is to sanctify or to set apart those who have been justified by accepting God free gift. The purpose of being set apart is to enable us to live a life of obedience to Jesus Christ (obeying whatsoever things He has commanded). In addition, we are sprinkled with His blood which makes us clean for living the life of obedience.

The reference to being sprinkled with His blood would be meaningful for the Jews who could relate that act as part of the rituals of the Old Testament. When the Mosaic covenant was initiated, all the people were sprinkled with the blood of the covenant. We see reference to the cleansing power of the blood of Christ in 1 John 1:7 where we read "but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin."

An alternate rendering of this passage is that God has chosen us for salvation through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and the obedience of Christ (in going to the Cross) and the sprinkling of His blood on the heavenly "mercy seat" which was accepted as payment for our sin debt.

The benefits that flow from what God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit

have done for us are that we have full measures of grace and peace. This twofold blessing brings together the new and the old. The New Covenant is characterized by God's grace which in the Greek is *charis*. The usual Greek greeting was *chaire* (from which we get the English word cheers.) So Peter (in a play on words) has substituted the Christian word "grace" for the secular word "cheers" and then added the typical Hebrew greeting word "shalom" or "peace." This was likely done to show that in Christ we inherit the blessings promised under both the old and new covenants.

Peter was a spontaneous person. In the introduction of this letter he praised God for the hope that being born again gives to each Christian. Indeed, we should praise God for the fact of salvation and that it is a gift from God that we cannot earn. When Peter spoke of God's abundant mercy, he was referring to the reality of the grace of God. Because of His grace we have the "new birth" as a spiritual reality that gives us hope that is alive and emerges from the reality of the resurrection of Jesus from death.

Because of this new life in Christ we have much to expect and anticipate - we have hope. The first expectation is our inheritance. We are joint heirs with Christ and we will reign with Him and we will share in His glory. Earthly inheritances are subject to loss and decay, but the inheritance that we have in Christ is everlasting. It will not fade away like the spring flowers that last only a couple of weeks and this inheritance is pure and good and will not cause us any harm. We also see that this inheritance is waiting in heaven for those of us who are "saved." We use the term "saved" which means that we are being protected and preserved by the power of God. This is a cause for great joy.

Hope: Rejoice in Response – 1:6-9

⁶In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ⁸and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:6-9 (NASB95)

There are many trials and temptations in life that tests our faith. The picture that Peter paints for us is that of a metallurgist purifying gold. He melts it and removes the impurities. The next step is to check the purity of the gold. If gold is pure then it can be pressed out into a very thin foil without breaking. If the gold is pure then it is used to decorate or can be used in practical applications. If it is not pure, then the metallurgist melts the gold again to remove more impurities. The gold is so valuable that the metallurgist does not just throw it away because of the impurity but he keeps working with it to get it pure. Peter tells us that our faith is more precious than gold and that God uses the things of life as His testing ground and refining furnace. If we can remember that this is what is happening, then we can, indeed, greatly rejoice in the trials and tribulations that we go through. The testing and refining are continuing processes and will happen until we become as Jesus is.

Just from a practical point of view, the knowledge that the trials we have in life are useful in that they help us discover imperfections that we might have so they can be removed is not a lot of comfort when we are in the midst of difficulties. We can better appreciate such "refinement" some time later when we can view it with 20/20 hindsight. You can probably think of situations in which people have experienced suffering or loss and they discovered things about themselves they did not know was there. Our reaction to what we learn about ourselves during such ordeals will determine whether or not suffering and persecution will make us bitter or make

us better.

The ultimate outcome of the testing and trials of the life of the Christian is what we call salvation. In this process we are transformed into the image of Christ. God uses all things (good and bad) to bring about this transformation. We sometimes forget that the victory that we will have is worth more than all the testing and trials that we have to endure.

The promises upon which our hope is based were made centuries before the time in which Peter lived.

Hope: Recall God's Grace – 1:10-12

¹⁰ As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful searches and inquiries, ¹¹ seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look. 1 Peter 1:10-12 (NASB95)

The saints to whom Peter wrote were surrounded by the manifestation of the initial fulfillment of the promises that were seen in the incarnation and passion of Christ. They were experiencing what the prophets of old had written about. As you know, when we are in the middle of an event, it is difficult to have a clear picture of what is happening and many times the full impact of everything is seen only in retrospect. That is where we are. We can see the fulfillment of the promises in looking back on the historical account of the lives and events of the believers in the early church and that should strengthen our hope and faith and we should be about the business of the Kingdom of God with enthusiasm.

Though we can see (in retrospect) what God was doing in and through the first century saints, we have difficulty in seeing what is happening to us in our present day fulfillment of the promises of God in our lives. Therefore, this message of a *living hope* is for all the saints where you and I live.