

“Reasons to Rejoice”

1 Peter 1:3-5

The Thirty Years' War was a war fought in Central Europe between 1618 and 1648. It was one of the longest and most destructive conflicts in human history. It started as a conflict between the various Protestant and Catholic factions throughout what remained of the Holy Roman Empire. It eventually drew in all the major powers of the day, and became the deadliest European religious war in history. By the time it was over, the war resulted in more than eight million fatalities. During the war, there was a German pastor named Paul Gerhardt who, along with his family, was forced to flee from their home. One night as they stayed in a small village inn, homeless and afraid of what might become of them, his wife broke down and cried in despair. To comfort her, Gerhardt reminded her of Scriptural promises about God's provision and keeping. Then, going outside to be alone, he too broke down and wept. He felt he had come to his darkest hour.

Soon afterward, Gerhardt felt the burden lifted and sensed anew the Lord's presence. Taking a pen and some paper, he wrote a hymn that has brought comfort to many.

Give to the winds thy fears,

hope, and be undismayed;

God hears thy sighs and counts thy tears;

God shall lift up thy head.

Through waves and clouds and storms,

He gently clears the way;

wait thou His time, so shall this night

soon end in joyous day.

How true it is that often in our darkest times, God makes His presence known most clearly. He uses our hurts to show us that He is our only source of hope and strength.

What a person places his ultimate hope in reveals who or what that person worships. We attach our hope to those things that bring us the most satisfaction. Your hope is a good indicator of what you look to for security, identity, and satisfaction. In what or whom do you place your hope?

Peter reminds some struggling Christians that those who hope in Christ always have reason to rejoice.

The verses that we come to in our study of 1 Peter contain some very rich promises that you and I can cling to in the midst of life's crises. Here within these verses, we are given some wonderful truths about God that provoke worship and glad surrender in our hearts. Because no matter what we experience in this life, as those who trust in Christ, our hope says that we have reason to rejoice.

John MacArthur — *“The passage is a hymn of worship designed to encourage Christians living in a hostile world to look past their temporal troubles and rejoice in their eternal inheritance.”*

Looking past our temporal troubles is often a very difficult thing to do, isn't it? That is why we need something greater to look forward to that is out ahead of us. Ask any person what they are looking forward to, and you will get a number of answers. For instance, according to one online article, here are a few things to look forward to in 2018:

- the Winter Olympics
- a royal wedding (Prince Harry and Meghan Markle)

- really good movies

My concern is that far too many professing believers within the church have misplaced hopes, the result of which is so much inconsistency in their lives. Misplaced hope is the reason for much of the confusion in their minds as to the nature of the Christian life, the nature of the church, and the purpose of the Bible. Somewhere along the way, we have bought into the postmodern idea that unless my circumstances are just right, I can't be happy. Postmodern thought has given rise to secular humanism, a philosophy of life that puts you at the center of the universe.

The way Peter begins his letter blows that theory to pieces:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”

“Blessed” —to speak a good word about; same Greek we get ‘eulogy’ from

Peter says that God alone is worthy of praise and worship for all that He is and all that He has done. We speak good words about Him when we consider the work of Christ on our behalf.

“Our Lord Jesus Christ” —an expression used some 35 times in 11 different books of the New Testament

It is a concise, concentrated confession that encapsulates everything Scripture teaches about Christ. If you work backwards, it is a confession that He is the Christ, the Anointed One of God, the One whose coming was foretold by the law and prophets. He is Jesus, the one who is the salvation of His people. He is Lord, meaning that He is the One before whom we bow and pledge our ultimate allegiance. And then note that He is ‘ours’ and we are His.

Following this doxology, Peter gives us some reasons we have to rejoice as those who hope in Jesus Christ. There are three in particular that I want to mention:

1. We are GIVEN new birth (1:3)

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,”

Peter says that we have reason to rejoice because we have been born again to a living hope, and this is by His great mercy.

I have recently found myself intrigued by these ancestor search databases that you can find online—you have ancestry.com or familysearch.org or findmypast.com. There are even agencies now that will send you a DNA kit through the mail. You send a sample back, and within weeks they send you the results. People all across the country are doing this sort of thing. The reason is that we truly want to know who we are and where we come from.

Our birth identifies us.

Peter speaks of a ‘new birth,’ one that is spiritual in nature, one that brings with it a new identity and a new citizenship. In the new birth, God is our Father and heaven is our home. Or, as Paul says it in Colossians 3, our life is now ‘hidden’ with Christ in God. We have new identity as sons and daughters of God.

Peter says that this new birth is according to God’s great ‘mercy.’ That is, it is not something that we have done for ourselves, because our condition is one of brokenness and helplessness. Rather, God in Christ stooped down to our level and lifted us up, doing for us what we could not do for ourselves. Mercy means

that He did not give us what our sins truly deserve. Rather than judging me and casting me out, He judged Christ in my place so that He could be merciful to me.

This is Paul's argument:

Ephesians 2:4-5—“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.”

In mercy and grace, God brought us forth from darkness into His marvelous light. He brought us from the realm of death and shadow and, by His own sovereign power, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope.

The 'hope' that Peter mentions here is not merely wishful thinking, such as, “I hope it snows tomorrow so we don't have to go to school.” The word in the New Testament is a word that speaks of confident expectation of a certain and future event. Peter then grounds this 'hope' with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which is why it is a living hope.

To be in possession of a living hope means that there is no circumstance in this life, no matter how awful it may be, no matter how difficult it may be, nothing can extinguish it. There is nothing you will ever face that will separate you from the hope you have in Christ.

Even in spite of all that he had suffered as a witness for Jesus Christ, this is why the apostle Paul could say:

Romans 8:38-39—“For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Nothing can separate me from my living hope—pain can't do it, heartache and sadness can't do it, a bad turn of events can't do it, even death itself can't do it.

If anything could adversely affect my hope, then it could not be rightly called a 'living' hope. This world at best can offer a person a faint and dying hope. Is your hope in:

- your bank account or the stock market?
- your physical health?
- your career or the success of your children?

All of these, no matter how encouraging they may be to us at times, are really nothing more than dying hopes. At some point, they will disappoint you and let you down. That is why you need a living hope, one that far outlasts the temporary and empty hopes and dreams of life in a fallen world. Peter says we have one in Christ.

The 'living' nature of our hope is inextricably linked to the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The resurrection is what brings us hope. At the cross, our sins were judged. They have been put away. The empty tomb of Jesus serves as the proof we need to know that the debt has indeed been paid.

We have adequate reason to rejoice because we have been given new birth.

Notice a second reason:

2. We are GUARANTEED an inheritance (1:4)

“to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you,”

Peter draws our attention to heaven and uses the word ‘inheritance’ to describe the future hope of believers in the sense that he describes what we have in store. It is the eschatological hope of all who trust in Christ.

Ephesians 1:11 — “In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory.”

Just a couple of verses later, Paul says that the Holy Spirit who lives within the Christian is the ‘guarantee’ or pledge of this inheritance until we acquire possession of it.

As sojourners and exiles who are plodding through life in this broken world, Christians have an expectant hope for the future, for we have been guaranteed an inheritance that is eternal and unfading. By definition, an inheritance is not something that is earned, rather it is received. It speaks of what we have to look forward to and can anticipate. And this is more than just golden streets and being reunited with our loved ones who have died in Christ. While this is certainly true, our inheritance is not so much about a package as much as it is about a Person—the Lord Jesus, upon whose face we will one day look. Our inheritance is to see Him in all of His glory, and to be made like Him when He one day appears.

Without the Person, there could be no package! Jesus describes this in detail in John 14 to reassure His disciples.

Peter speaks of this inheritance here in verse 4 through exquisite terms. He uses three words to describe it:

First, it is imperishable

The word that he uses here is a word that means undying or unending. It means that it cannot become spoiled, not subject to destruction or corrosion, not liable to death.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52—“Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.”

I am going to be given an imperishable body as part of my imperishable inheritance. Our bodies break down and wear out, no matter how many dietary supplements you take, no matter how many miles you run. It is perishable.

Have you ever lost something that was valuable to you? A diamond ring, or a watch, or a ticket to something special maybe. It is a terrible feeling. No matter how precious a thing like that might be, it is a ‘perishable’ thing.

Not our inheritance! It is a treasure that will never be lost.

Second, it is undefiled

That simply means that it cannot be tainted, stained, or otherwise polluted by outside agents. Everything else in creation that we know has been defiled by sin. Adam’s sin has had far reaching effects.

The trinkets we prize here on earth can’t be described as being undefiled, no matter what kind of lock and key or vault you place them under. No matter how much you prize a piece of real estate, you cannot keep it from becoming defiled. As beautiful as the blanket of snow was as I looked out from my breakfast nook early Thursday morning of this past week, it still is something defiled.

Romans 8:22—“For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.”

Creation is waiting with eager longing for the sons and daughters of God to receive their undefiled inheritance.

Third, it is unfading

The word used here translates a Greek word that was used to describe a flower that did not wither or die. When you bring home flowers for your wife, guys, why is it that the first thing you do is put them a vase of water? It is because they easily wilt and wither.

No matter how beautiful a flower is, there will come a time when it withers away. Its beauty fades and quickly passes.

Think about this—here in this life, every earthly pleasure we experience and treasure we value, every temporary thing in which we hope only diminishes with time. That’s why any hope outside of Christ is a dying hope. Have you ever heard of the law of diminishing returns? In the world of economics, diminishing returns means that as more investment is made, overall return on that investment increases at a declining rate. In other words, over time, you don’t get as much as you did initially.

This is why an alcoholic can’t ever drink enough, or a person addicted to pornography can’t be satisfied, or why no matter how much you try to earn the approval of others, you never quite seem to have it. Diminishing returns!

The law of diminishing returns doesn’t apply to my eternal inheritance in Jesus Christ. It is something that is unfading. It will never lose its luster or beauty.

Take all these three words together, and imagine what your inheritance in Christ must look like—it is unending and undying, free from any corruption, and never loses its beauty.

Add to this the promise that it is being ‘kept’ in heaven for you. That is, it is under careful watch and held by way of reservation with your name on it.

illus. of hotel or ticket reservation

Peter is saying that we never have to worry that our eternal inheritance won’t be waiting for us when we get there. It is there on reservation with my name on it! How do I know this?

Isaiah 49:16—“Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands.”

My name is on His hands, and He will bring me into that which He has secured for me, and of this I can be certain.

Then perhaps someone might wonder, “Okay, I get the fact that the inheritance is there, but what about me. Will I ever get there? What if I don’t make it? Is it possible for me to really know for sure, with certainty, that I am going to get there one day myself?” It is that question that Peter gets to in verse 5.

3. We are GUARDED through faith (1:5)

“who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”

Christians can rejoice because they have been given new birth, and they are guaranteed an inheritance. And as if that were not already enough, Peter says we have a third reason to rejoice. He says that we are being guarded through faith. And notice he says that it is:

By the sovereign power of God

Notice that Peter says that it is by God's power that we as believers are being guarded through faith. It is the mercy of God that brings us to faith, and it is the grace of God that keeps us there.

The apostle Paul speaks of this when he says:

Philippians 1:6—“And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”

Imagine how encouraging it would be to these Christians under duress to whom Peter is writing to learn the fact that their eternal salvation is being guarded. It is not by their strength that it is being maintained, but by God's power.

“Guarded” — *word is military term that means to garrison or to hem in with protection*

Philippians 4:7—“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

As one who belongs to Christ, I am 'garrisoned' with His own protection. By His grace and providential care, He will lead me into that which He has prepared for me.

For the saving purpose of God

By the power of God, I am being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

“Revealed” — *word is 'apokalypto' and means that is it all finished and ready to be unveiled*

Think of the three-fold nature of our living hope. To begin with, our hope is anchored in the past—Christ rose from the dead. I have been saved from the penalty of sin. Also, our hope is active in the present—Christ lives in our hearts. I am being saved from the presence of sin. Then finally, our hope anticipates the future—Christ is coming again. I will one day be saved from the presence of sin!

By God's power, believers are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Peter didn't conceive of faith as a single isolated act; rather, he is speaking of a genuine faith that persists until the day of redemption. Kept by God's power—what promise!

I can't begin to tell you how grateful to God that I am for the background that I come from. Growing up, I look back on those tiny mountain churches that I went to. In my mind, I can go back to those Sunday mornings when me and my cousins would go to church with my grandparents. There wouldn't be more than 40-50 people in the whole church. Before Sunday School, practically everyone would gather up in the choir loft. The song leader would ask for a number, and someone would call one out from a little paperback hymnal, Songs For Inspiration #12. As long as I live, I'll never forget hearing some of those old saints of God singing songs about heaven.

I can still hear my papaw leading out in his favorite:

*I saw a wayward traveler in tattered garments clad
While struggling up the mountain,
it seemed that he was sad.
His back was laden heavy, his strength was almost gone,
Yet shouted as he journeyed, "Deliverance will come."
Then palms of victory, crowns of glory*

Palms of victory, I shall wear.

*I saw him in the evening, the sun was sinking low
He'd overtopped the mountain and reached the vale below.*

*While gazing toward that city, his everlasting home,
He shouted loud hosannas, "Deliverance will come."*

Then palms of victory, crowns of glory

Palms of victory, I shall wear.

*He saw the Holy city, his everlasting home.
A band of Holy angels all gathered round God's throne.*

*They bore Him on their pinions
safe o'er the dashing foam,
And they shouted "Hallelujah, deliverance will come."*

Then palms of victory, crowns of glory

Palms of victory, I shall wear.

*I heard the song of triumph they sang upon that shore,
Saying, "Jesus has redeemed us to suffer nevermore!"*

*Then casting his eyes backward
on the race which he had run,
He shouted loud, "Hosanna! Deliverance has come!"*

Then palms of victory, crowns of glory,

Palms of victory I shall wear!

Do you have reason to rejoice? If all your hope is in Jesus Christ, then my friend, you most certainly do. And if you have never by faith trusted in Him, if you have

never been 'born again,' then I invite you to respond to the Spirit's call and receive Christ now as your Savior.