

NEW FUTURE

SERIES: PETER'S PROGRESS

By Danny Hall

Some time back I was on sabbatical. The elders are very gracious to allow the pastors to take a sabbatical every few years to retool and recharge, so to speak. One of the things we often like to do during those periods is visit other churches. I was particularly looking forward to seeing how other churches in our area do worship. One church I wanted to visit was PBC Cupertino. I knew Brian Morgan, John Hanneman, and Gary Vanderet, but I had never had a chance to hear them teach the word. Well, the day Ginger and I showed up there, they were having their men's retreat, and all these pastors were gone! But lo and behold, the guest pastor was Dorman Followill. Dorman preached from Romans 8, and I'll never forget the opening question he posed to the congregation.

Dorman asked us to think about the very worst day of our lives. I was thinking about that, but I've had a really easy life. I've never really had a day that I would call so bad that I didn't know how I was going to go forward, a life-paralyzing, crushing day. I realized again how blessed I was. It made me back up and ask myself, "Is my life too easy? What's going on in my life?" But then I remembered that while I'd never had one of those life-crushing worst days that I could recall, my life, like most people's lives, had been filled with all kinds of little things day by day that were challenging. There were personal disappointments and times that were hard. Life is

filled with all kinds of difficulties. Many of those challenge our faith to the point where we say to God, “What in the world are you doing?” or, “Where are you?”

In our study of the life of Peter, we’ve watched how God has grown him up. We watched God call him from his nets on the shores of the Sea of Galilee to become a wonderful, fearless spokesperson for the gospel. We’ve seen his ups and his downs, his great victories and his failures. In our last two messages we’re going to look at some of Peter’s own writings from late in his life, reflecting back on what God has done in him, as he seeks to give encouragement to others.

In this message we’re going to look at a passage in 1 Peter.

Now an older leader of the church, Peter has lived a life of faith and following Christ. His faith has been challenged over and over again, and he is writing to those who are beginning to see God allow persecution into their lives, having their faith challenged on a regular basis. The price for following Christ is growing. (Peter himself probably died under the hand of Nero, the emperor of Rome who persecuted and killed many Christians in that day.) Here he wants to bring encouragement and hope to them. He writes about how to go forward in their faith in the face of daily challenges.

The passage that we’re going to look at in this message, 1 Peter 1:3-9, is one of the greatest in all of Scripture. Most people would say Romans 8 is the greatest passage in the New Testament. That passage is filled with grand, beautiful, wonderful explanations of the presence of God in our lives, the future hope that we have in him, his unshakeable and secure love for us, and all that

those things mean. But if there is any passage that rivals Romans 8 for those grand themes and wonderful assurances, it's this one in 1 Peter. We took a brief look at 1 Peter 1:3-5 in Discovery Paper 4921, observing how Peter viewed the resurrection of Christ and how it affected his life. Now we're going to examine the passage more fully, particularly in regard to what difference it makes in our lives today.

In this passage Peter does two things. He rehearses for us the promise that God gives us in Christ, and then on the basis of that promise, he gives us some encouragement and instruction on how to view life in the here and now. Peter anchors our ability to sort through what's going on in our lives by telling us to keep our eyes fixed on what God is doing in the big picture, on where he is taking us.

Born to a living hope

In verse 3 he begins:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Peter cannot even begin to rehearse for us our hope for the future and the plan that God is unfolding without being struck by the greatness and the grandeur of God himself. So his whole exhortation begins with a word of praise.

We talk a lot about praise and worship, and I've thought a lot about this. I love to sing, and I love all kinds of music. I listen to a lot of worship music on CDs. But I've also begun to think how much of my enjoyment of worship music is just enjoyment of the music. God gives us many good things, one of which is music. But I'm reminded that for Peter, this great sense of worship and praise is rooted not in enjoyment of music, or any human experience, but in the reality of who God is, what he has done, and what he is doing.

With that opening of worship he continues in verse 3b:

In his great mercy he has given us new birth....

God has done something profound and wonderful. It has flowed out of his mercy, and is far beyond anything we could ever imagine or deserve. God has acted decisively on our behalf, and through what he has done, we have been given a new birth. This isn't just a matter of our turning over a new leaf and hoping to do better. It isn't just some new way of thinking. It's a real alteration of who we are at the core of our being, through the work of the Holy Spirit, who has made us new in Christ. When we come to faith in Christ, there's a radical reorienting of who we are that takes us out of bondage to a new place of life and relationship with God himself.

This new birth, Peter says, issues forth in two great things. Verses 3c-4a:

**Into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
and into an inheritance....**

First of all, this new birth leads to a living hope. Hope is a powerful thing. Nothing is more debilitating to human life, or rips the rug out from under our feet more quickly, than losing hope. When there is no hope, all of our emotions come crashing down around us. We experience despair.

But this hope is not just some wishful thought. Peter calls it a living hope that is rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Now, “resurrection” is an important word that we use over and over again. It’s one of the two key words we need to home in on in the early part of this passage. We all understand from Scripture that Christ was dead in the tomb and was raised to newness of life. The descriptions of his resurrection are powerful and compelling. They show us Jesus in the glorification of his resurrected body, operating in a new and different dimension. He was recognizable as who he was, yet raised to a newness of life. But the wonderful promise of Scripture is that if we are in Christ, our future destiny is tied up in his future destiny. So as Christ was raised from the dead, it is our living hope as those who follow him that we too will be resurrected!

Now, there are all kinds of ideas about life after death. Even in Christendom there is a lot of muddy thinking about that. Perhaps most of us, at least at some level, think we will be some kind of disembodied spirit floating out there in the great beyond. But that is not the picture the Scriptures give us. Christ was raised as the firstfruits from the dead (1 Corinthians 15:20-23); that is, many will follow him in resurrection life. That’s where we’re headed. Our bodies will be given new life, raised from the dead. My identity will, in some sense, come forth in a new and

improved version. John, Peter's friend and fellow disciple, writes in 1 John 3:2: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." We have a living hope of resurrection from the dead on that great Day when all is brought to culmination. We will have an eternal existence in new and glorified bodies to live forever in fellowship with the risen Christ. What a wonderful hope!

The other great thing our new birth issues forth in is an inheritance.

Born to a glorious inheritance

Verses 4-5:

Into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

We have an inheritance that is described as imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. It will never end. It can never be corrupted. It will never diminish in its scope or grandeur. This wonderful, beautiful inheritance that God will give us is absolutely indestructible and sure. Peter says it is currently being kept for us in heaven. God himself has reserved a place for us in his eternal kingdom. But more than that, he is guarding us right now, shielding us by his power until that

Day. We are not left in our own impotence to somehow marshal enough strength and can-do spirit to make it to the end. No, the wonderful truth of this living hope in Christ is that he himself guards us as his faithful followers, keeping our hearts, working with us, molding us into the people he wants us to be, so that our hope is a secure one.

But what is this inheritance? We don't have time in this message to trace the wonderful theology of the inheritance through all of Scripture. But it begins in the Old Testament and is spoken of in fuller form in the New Testament. The inheritance that was originally given to the nation of Israel was the slice of land God promised to Abraham, but even from the very beginning, God's people were to inherit the whole earth. All the way at the end of the story of Scripture, in Revelation 21 and 22, John talks about a new heaven and a new earth. God himself, in the final act of judgment and re-creation, is going to restore earth to its full and complete glory. In that new heaven and new earth, we who are risen in Christ, resurrected and in our eternal, wonderful, resurrected bodies, will inhabit the kingdom of God.

Now, the dimension of heaven is not some distant place so far out in the cosmos that we can't see it, but the spiritual realm where God dwells. And currently God's realm in heaven and the temporal world in which we live do not intersect very often. From time to time in Scripture, there are instances when God pulls back the veil and allows those living in this time and space to interact with the kingdom of heaven. One example is in Peter's own life, in that incident we call the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter and his friends are allowed to see Jesus conversing with two of the great saints of the Old Testament (Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36).

But there is coming a day in the final restoration of God, the new heaven and new earth, when that veil will be completely removed. It's not about inheriting a little slice of land, or even the earth, but being a part of where God is. Our longing is to be in intimate and eternal fellowship with the living God, who will be among his people. This is the wonderful inheritance that God has promised for us, secured by his own power. Through the resurrection of Christ we get to be part of God's complete, final establishment of his eternal kingdom, fellowshiping with him, living with him forever, serving and worshiping him forever and ever!

This is where God promises us it's all headed. The plan of God that began with the creation of man, that found its high point in the death of Jesus Christ by which God set everything right, is moving toward the final exaltation of Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords, and the creation of the new heavens and new earth for our life in the eternal kingdom with God. By faith in Christ, joined with him, that is our hope. That is the promise of God.

That would be glorious enough! We could stop right there and sing praise and prayers of exaltation to God for the rest of the day without exhausting the wonder of that great promise that God has for us. But Peter takes us one step past that.

Faith vindicated

In verse 6 he begins a new theme:

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

In light of this future promise, Peter turns and addresses the present. How do we live with the daily trials of life, the challenges, even the persecution for our faith that may come? He says we are to start with rejoicing. “In this—that our future is secure, that history is marching toward the fulfillment God has planned—we greatly rejoice, even while suffering grief in the midst of our trials.” We can rejoice because we understand that God is in the process of preparing us for that eternal kingdom, that he is absolutely committed to forming us into the people he called us to be, conformed to the image of Christ.

Notice the description Peter gives in verse 7:

These [trials] have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

God uses the crucible of this life with its difficulties and challenges and even persecutions as a way of molding us and honing us into the people he wants us to be, both individually and as the family of God. In the process, Peter says, two things happen: First, our faith is proved genuine. That simply means it’s tested; we come through trials and see God working in our lives. He is able to redeem even the worst things of our lives for his glory. But our faith is proved genuine to others who see as well. This world is looking for people who are able to handle the struggles of

this life in some way besides the futile things people chase all the time. As our faith is being tested, the world sees a better way to live, a way of faith that lifts us out of our selfishness, out of our myopic view of life.

Part of our problem is that we tend to view life through the narrow bandwidth of our own experience. We keep looking for ways to somehow make sense out of the world in which we live with its difficulties, and we chase this or that idea. Sometimes that leads to despair, and sometimes it leads to filling our lives with things to dull the pain we're experiencing. But Peter says, "Think bigger than that. Think about the whole story. Think where God is taking things." So through our understanding of God's great promise, we'll see how God is refining us and building us and moving us toward the goal that he has for us, even using the difficult things of our life, and our faith is proved genuine.

But not only that, our faith will eventually result in praise and glory and honor when Christ is revealed. You see, part of the wonderful thing that's going to happen when all this reaches its end is that those who have walked faithfully in Christ will be vindicated. We'll see that it was worth it to trust him. The end will have come, and he will have brought his people exactly where he promised, out of the bondage of sin into the Promised Land of God's eternal kingdom, wonderfully echoing the journey of the exodus of the Old Testament. We're going to get there, and when we do, we'll give praise and honor and glory to Jesus!

Finally, we walk by faith. Verses 8-9:

Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

We love the One we have not seen and believe in him day by day. By faith we say, “God is trustworthy. Christ is our Lord, and we will follow him. We will attach our future to his.” When we do that, looking down the road to where God is taking us, our lives are filled with joy because we see God moving us toward the goal of our faith, the salvation of our souls. God loves us so much that he doesn’t leave us in our mess, but he keeps growing us and molding us and leading us toward the eternal glory that he has for us. And as we see him completing and perfecting us, we become excited and full of joy. God has given us his Holy Spirit as a down payment that his work is going to continue. The presence of the Holy Spirit in us now anticipates the full, direct, pure presence of God in that future kingdom. We live in joy and hope because of it, and therefore we can face anything. Peter, now a wise, old leader in the church, looks back across a life in which God has done this very thing in his own experience, and he is able to say, “Take heart!”

How can this message become real in our lives? I want to leave you with three C’s to think about.

The earmarks of a living hope

If we embrace this wonderful promise and hope and choose to live rejoicing by faith, then first,

we have the **courage** to live lives wholly devoted to Jesus. Nothing liberates us to be bold in our witness and in our lives like the assurance that God is in control and is going to take us to the end. We don't have to worry about what's going to happen to us, or what other people will think about us, or what might come our way because of our faithfulness to Christ. Now, I have lived a relatively free life as a Christian. I've had little discomfort over the years because of my faith, except for family members and friends who didn't understand what I believed in or did. But I have had the privilege of partnering with and fellowshiping with and praying with believers who have put their lives on the line for the gospel. I don't know what level of persecution or opposition you may have faced in your life, but Peter is saying to us, "It just does not matter—you can have courage. There is no cost you cannot bear. Nothing that opposes you is worthy of your worrying about it. Live courageously, wholly committed to Christ, because your future is secure in him." You know, there are no more dangerous people in the world than those who have no fear of the outcome! We can live radically for Christ because we have courage.

The second C is **commitment** to live lives that reflect the nature and values of the new world to which we are heading, the kingdom of God. In the rest of the book, Peter unpacks what it means to live faithfully and courageously in this world, committed to kingdom values. He will tell his readers that they ought to be holy as God is holy, they ought to live as a different kind of people, demonstrating God's grace. He will talk about what that means in regard to government and family and all arenas of life. He calls us to live out a radical obedience to kingdom values. Peter, whose idea of the kingdom was challenged by Jesus and re-formed by a new understanding, calls us to enter into kingdom living. No way of life can ever make the difference in this world that commitment to Christ can, embracing kingdom values.

The third C is **contentment** in the present because of the surety of the future. Perhaps there is no greater hallmark of the reality of Christ in our lives than contentment. I don't know about you, but I get restless, and I think my life would be better if I had this or that. Sometimes I think the perfect life would be to have enough money to live somewhere where I could play golf in the morning and ski in the afternoon, and be able to fly anywhere I wanted to watch the Atlanta Braves play. I don't ask much out of life! We get restless and worried about things, so we start imagining, dreaming of what might be, of what comfort we might need. If we just had a little more money, if we just got that promotion at work or a better job, if we were just married, if we just had kids, or if our kids were better, or our parents were nicer... Name it—there's this restlessness of spirit that keeps saying, "If you just had this, you'd be okay." And there is nothing evil about the things I've mentioned in and of themselves. God graciously gives us enjoyment in this life as a taste of his goodness and mercy. But Peter is saying there is *nothing* that this world has to offer—no success, no relationship, no experience, no amount of money—that can compare with the greatness of knowing Christ. The surety of his promise gives us an amazing contentment right now, because everything we will ever need or could ever dream of or want is ours in Christ.

So we live in the present in light of the promise of the future, because we belong to God, and we are in his hands, and we are marching toward his wonderful, glorious conclusion. It frees us to live with the hard parts of life to his glory now, watching him mold us into the people he wants us to be, rejoicing in faith, living courageously, committed to kingdom values, and content, at peace with God. That's God's calling for us.

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1 Peter 1:3-9

Eighth Message

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