

## Exuberant Expectation

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (1 Peter 1:3–5)

One of the greatest hymnwriters in the English language was a man who suffered tremendously. William Cowper lived from 1731 to 1800, did not suffer externally from persecution, arrest, harassment. He had experienced pain in his life – his mother died when he was six, he was sent to a boarding school where he suffered terrible bullying and abuse, he seemed to have a loveless father who tried to force him into a career he didn't want, and his proposed marriage was called off at the last minute by the bride's father.

But Cowper suffered from terrible depression. Someone has defined depression as sorrow without hope. Sadness without meaning or hope ahead, which becomes despair.

William Cowper suffered from the kind of depression that had him committed to an insane asylum for nearly two years. During the course of his life he attempted suicide three times. He came to incredibly dark conclusions about himself, that he is as close to the idea of a Christian without hope as you will ever read about. One of the greatest mercies of his life was to be pastored for several years by one of the warmest and kindest pastors of the time: John Newton, the former slave-trader. Cowper's best moments came when closest to the Word, closest to good preaching, sound counsel, and spiritual friendship.

One of the hymns he wrote during his time with John Newton is one we sing. In those lyrics, Cowper talks about hope in the midst of suffering.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take,  
The clouds ye so much dread  
Are big with mercy, and shall break  
In blessings on your head.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,  
But trust him for his grace;  
Behind a frowning providence  
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,  
Unfolding every hour;  
The bud may have a bitter taste,  
But sweet will be the flower.

Suffering Christians are meant to look beyond their trials and have a hope that sustains and keeps them. Christian pilgrims don't have to drag their feet through this world, because the book of 1 Peter tells us we have been given something that fills us with a living hope, indeed, as he will put it, a joy inexpressible and full of glory.

Christians, in the midst of pain, trial, difficulty, loss, have been granted a hope that is pulsating with life. It is hope that is real. If something is living, then it is real, it is even growing. Christians have a hope that sees through and beyond the persecutor's handcuffs, weapons, torture instruments or execution tools, and sees something pleasurable. Christians see beyond and behind the dark clouds of earthly opposition, harsh treatment, financial setback, reputational ruin, relational isolation. They see shafts of golden light piercing through those clouds. First Peter is going to drill us in what that

hope is.

The hope of Christians and this life is not in luxury, or pleasuresome places, or in amusements. The hope of a Christian can never be in what this world and this life can get me. The hope is a deep, unshakable, all-satisfying, hope, that allows the paradoxical situation of being able to treasure, delight, savour and revel in the hope God gives, while experiencing pain, sorrow, loss from this world.

So the very opening of this letter is in the style of a Hebrew benediction: Blessing God, praising God, thanking God. Hebrew blessings take this form Blessed are you, Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth “Baruch Atah Adonai Eloheinu Melech Ha'olam, HaMotzi Lechem Min Ha'aretz. That's how the Jewish author of this book, Peter the apostle of Jesus Christ opens the book. The tone is praise because His gifts far outshine the pains of suffering.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

In the first 12 verses of I Peter, Peter does not give us a single command. He does not tell us what to do, he tells us what to enjoy, what to understand, and then be filled with hope over. Here is the Christian order: What God has done for you before what you do for Him. Who you are in Christ, before what you do for Christ. God's Grace to us before our obedience to Him. Peter wants you and me immersed in what the Father of our Lord Jesus has done for us and to us. This is the ground of the hope that will be the smiling face behind the frowning providence, the sweet flower after the bitter bud.

So, Christian pilgrim, we should have our eyes glued on the apostle as he speaks Spirit-inspired words. Tell us, what is this living hope? Verses 3 through 5 give us three realities for the Christian to rest in and revel in.

## **I. Christians Hope in their Implanted Position**

who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

Peter tells us the first part of our hope is that we have been begotten again. This means to be fathered, to be brought forth, born a second time. This word is used only by Peter in the NT, used again in 1:23: “<sup>23</sup> having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever, (1 Peter 1:23). This is the glorious truth that to become a Christian is not a change in affiliation, or a change in perspective. It is the birth of God's life in you, the implantation of His nature, creating a family relationship between you and God. Christians have a new position, a whole new place with respect to God.

The Bible describes becoming a Christian as an absolutely new beginning for you in life. You, as it were, start again. Not mentally, intellectually, socially returning to infancy, but beginning again as far as your identity, loves, your orientation, your life's goals, desires, hopes. You are now miraculously brought into God's family, you now have God's Spirit living within, so you have an altogether new, fresh direction of where you are going. In fact, born-again Christian is a redundancy. It's like saying a canine dog, a human man, an avian bird.

One of the terrible confusions brought about by the Pentecostal and charismatic movement is that shifts the emphasis from new birth to Spirit-baptism, and sometimes even confuse the two. People coming into these churches often miss the absolutely crucial nature of new birth, with a new nature,

new life, new indwelling, and therefore new hope.

Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Corinthians 5:17)

I have a living hope because after I receive Christ and am regenerated, my new position means I have a new purpose for living, a new expectation of life, a new view of the future, even a new understanding of my past. I have new enablement to live, new promises to live by, new priorities to pursue.

The Greeks in the time of Peter had no living hope. Sophocles said that it is best not to be born at all and the second best is to die at birth. In the thinking of the time the despair of this life is followed only by the unending night of death. Catullus, a Roman poet of the first century B.C. writes that though the sun can set and rise again, once our brief light sets, there is but one unending night to be slept through (*Fifth Epigram* 4–6). Amongst the pagans, hope was dead.

That is very much the view of those today who have embraced the idea that the universe is dead matter that came into being by itself randomly. Life is without meaning, purpose or goal. Humans have no purpose except to make up their own meaning, their own purpose, find their own pleasure, before the sun sets on their life. People today live the religion of selfism, make much of myself, live my truth, pleasure myself, pursue my own beauty and glory, and try to do as much of it before I die, because there is no hope beyond that.

Now notice why and how the Father has given us this new life with its new hope. who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again. Why? Out of sheer tender love. The implantation of this new life is not because of merit, but because of mercy.

Now if God causing us to be born again was done out of His mercy, what does that imply about us? It implies that our being born again is not something we deserve, or have earned, or should have. In fact, we deserve the very opposite. We deserved Ephesians 2:12: “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”

But God, looking on us as we would look on the battered and injured body of a child, in loving mercy and grace, did not let that happen to us. He gave us new life. He regenerated us. It was not just any mercy – it was abundant mercy. Because to make sons and daughters out of enemies requires much mercy, large amounts of it.

Now how was this done? Peter tells us: through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, The resurrection life of Jesus is the basis of new life in every Christian. In giving life to Christ, the Father gave life to all those united to Christ.

Jesus died once to sin, and then all the penalty and guilt and defilement was paid for and left in the tomb. He rose again, perfected, incorruptible, immortal. When you turn from the dead hopes of this world and ask and receive Jesus as your new life and new hope, God unites you with Jesus on the cross, paying for your sins, and then unites you with His resurrection, giving you new life.

The two thoughts are connected – your living hope exists because of your living Saviour. The objective reality of the resurrection undergirds the inner, felt reality of regeneration. If there is a tomb in Jerusalem (or anywhere else, for that matter) with the bones of Jesus, then our hope is absolutely shattered, and we had better turn to the pursuit of money, power, pleasure, popularity, entertainment and fun, status, fame, prestige, success or any of the other things that the world places its hopes in. But if in the year 33, the man Yeshua of Nazareth actually rose from the dead, and

appeared to His disciples, then new life within you is a reality.

Christian, the Bible says you have been given new life by the Father's mercy, and the Son's resurrection, and with this new life is a living hope.

If there was a hope thermometer, and we could take your hope temperature, how would it look? Trending to despair, or trending to hope? Have you known this new beginning?

Now this hope does not only extend to this present life, but it goes into the future.

## II. Christians Hope in Indestructible Possessions

to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

Pilgrims do not have their inheritance where they are passing through. Their inheritance is elsewhere. What they own, what is theirs, what they possess is somewhere else.

Christians need to know that as pilgrims who are often dispossessed of lands or goods, either forcibly, or because of their convictions, or because God keeps them from having it, that they – all Christians have possessions that cannot be lost.

The word *inheritance* means a possession – something that comes to you by right of family, or by deed.

Sometimes people dream and wish that some unknown relative, or some billionaire philanthropist will include them in their last will and testament. But Christians have been included in a last will and testament: Christ's! In John 17, Jesus gave his last will and testament.

<sup>24</sup> “Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. (John 17:24)

Our inheritance, our possessions are in Heaven. So Paul says that if we are God's children, “then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him*, that we may also be glorified together.” (Romans 8:17)

<sup>11</sup> In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, (Ephesians 1:11) (used 4 times in Ephesians)

<sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. (Colossians 1:12)

So what is this inheritance in Heaven? Well, you might want to go back and review a series we once did on Heaven. It's every good thing you ever wanted in this world, every glorious gift that reminds you of God and causes gratitude towards God. On the simplest level Heaven is a place, a home of extraordinary beauty, grandeur, luxury.

On a higher level, Heaven is a place of responsibility and reward, where we rest from some labour on earth, but take up new ones, with boundless energy and enthusiasm. It is a place filled with rewards, equated to crowns, awards, and treasures – where your work and achievements don't go down the drain.

On a higher level, Heaven is a place of family love, where all that friendship and marriage and family was supposed to be on earth is present in perfection: love, companionship, society in perfection.

On an even higher level, Heaven is a place of the beauty of holiness. No sin and no sinners, no curse and no judgement, no corruption and no evil, only beauty: visual, but also moral, spiritual

loveliness.

And finally, Heaven will be the very presence of God. As Jonathan Edwards put it, “ They have obtained that delight which gives full satisfaction...They can sit down fully contented, and take up with this enjoyment forever and ever, and desire no change. After they have had the pleasure of beholding the face of God millions of ages, it will not grow a dull story. The relish of this delight will be as exquisite as ever”

Now these glories: the place, the positions, the people, the perfection, the presence of God – this is your inheritance, your possession, believer! Peter now tells you the quality of this heavenly possession by using three words which in Greek all begin with the same letter, giving this sentence a poetic sound. An English version might be unaging, unspoiling, unfading. Incorruptible, undefiled not fading way. These are some glorious gems to hold up to the light.

*Incorruptible* – or imperishable. That is, it can't be destroyed, cannot die. Your car can be destroyed, your house can have a truck smash into it, or a natural disaster happen to it. Every possession you have in this world can be destroyed. Even that which is living, will some day perish. Your plants, your pets, your loved ones, your own life. None of these are immortal. If you place your hope in that which can perish – you have an inferior hope. A hope in God cannot perish, it is death-proof.

*Undefiled*. That is, it can't be spoiled. Everything in this life is infected or affected by the fall. The world itself suffers under the weight of a decaying creation. The best holiday spots soon become trashy and spoilt. Anything you can imagine in this life has its beauty and perfection and glory somewhat marred and stained and flawed by sin or the effects of sin. But our inheritance in God is sin-proof.

*And that does not fade way*. That is, it doesn't lose its lustre, its brilliance, its vitality and youthfulness. This word is actually used to describe a plant that withers. And what sin doesn't spoil, time erodes. Things decay, appliances break, our bodies start to fail and are filled with disease. We lose our health and vitality. The best possessions in the world start to crack or rust or lose the sheen or colour. Even your reputation, and your memory in the minds of others fades. But our inheritance in God is time-proof. The ages and ages of eternity won't cause it to diminish one bit.

Notice how Peter has to keep using negatives – it can't be destroyed, it can't be defiled, it can't wither or fade away – and the reason he has to use negatives is because that's all we know! That's how our hopes in this world are! There are almost no words to describe this heavenly hope, because it is outside of our sin-cursed experience.

Now this unaging, unspoiling, unfading inheritance is *reserved* in Heaven for you. The word here means guarded over, watched, preserved. It's in the perfect tense, means it is absolutely complete, a finalised and finished transaction in the past with results flowing into this moment and reaching the future, making it guaranteed. It's in the passive, meaning it is God who does this.

Gold-bullion storage places have CCTV cameras so you can go online and check that your gold is actually still there.

But Heaven doesn't require that. “but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. (Matthew 6:20)

God has placed your inheritance in the Fort Knox of the cosmos. Heaven is the most secure place in the universe. If I suffer, if I experience loss, deprivation, I remember, I have indestructible possessions waiting for me.

Now, it is one thing to speak about how immortal, imperishable, indestructible, impervious to age

our possessions are. No one can break into Heaven, and destroy, defile, despoil our inheritance. But, says the anxious Christian, what if I forfeit this inheritance by my own hand? It would be small comfort to know that we have this indestructible inheritance, if in fact we could lose it by our own failure. So Peter anticipates that objection and shows us a third glorious truth about what the Father has begotten us to.

### III. Christians Hope in Invincible Protection

<sup>5</sup> who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Verse 5 is tagged to the last word of verse 4 which is you, you believers, you truly born again Christians. You truly regenerate ones are *kept by the power of God through faith for salvation*.

You are kept. The word kept is actually a military term. The same Greek word is used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 11:32 where he writes, "In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me. *Garrison*. That's the word – we are garrisoned, protected as it were with an army.

You are guarded against losing this living hope, losing this inheritance reserved for you. So what is this army that protects us from losing our salvation?

There are two instruments here, that gets you to the destination. You are kept objectively by the power of God ; you are kept subjectively through faith, leading to salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The power of God. It is not my power, my willpower, my moral power keeping me saved. It is the power of God Himself. God's grace is a keeping grace, maintaining the union between us and Christ, which is our only hope. God keeps us saved, by the completed work of Calvary, by the never-ending High Priestly work of Christ in Heaven, by the permanent indwelling, sealing and intercession of the Spirit, by the complete immersion into Christ, so that all He is and all that comes to Him comes to those in Him.

And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand. (John 10:28–29)

That power is actually connected to the next thing that is mentioned: faith. Faith is also the instrument by which we are kept, guarded, garrisoned against losing our salvation. Continually trusting and believing in the Person and promises of Christ, this is the secondary agency through which the power of God keeps us saved.

See, sometimes people ask, "What happens to a believer that stops believing?" But if you understand the theology of the New Testament, you'll know that that question is a contradiction. It's like asking, what happens to a breather who stops breathing? He is clearly no longer a breather, then, is he? There is no such thing as a believer who no longer believes. People say – 'but he/she once believed'. No, if they had truly believed, they would continue to believe, because the power of God sustains their faith.

There is a scene in Pilgrim's Progress, where Interpreter takes Christian by the hand, and leads him into a place where there's a Fire burning against a wall, and one standing by it, throwing water upon it, to quench it; but the Fire burned higher and hotter.

Christian asks Interpreter, what does this mean? The Interpreter answered, "This Fire is the Work of Grace that is produced in the heart; he that casts water upon it, to extinguish and put it out, is the

Devil: But in that you see the Fire nevertheless burned higher and hotter, you will also see the reason of that.”

So he took him about to the other side of the wall, where he saw a Man with a Vessel of Oil in his hand, from which, he also continually cast into the Fire. Then said Christian, “What does this mean?” The Interpreter answered, “This is Christ, who continually with the Oil of His Grace maintains the work already begun in the heart: By the means of which, notwithstanding what the Devil can do, the souls of His people prove gracious still.”

We must keep believing, and yet the promise of grace is that God will be feeding and enabling our faith. But what if, what if I do stop believing? Then you what you had was not faith in Christ. You were seed that fell on hard ground, on shallow ground, on thorny ground, but not on good ground. Repent of your superficial, worldly, selfish attachments to Christ. Ask Him for true faith.

Faith in the living Christ is a living faith. Once you have it, you strive to maintain it. “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life,” (1Ti 6:12). Feed your faith. Nurture your faith. Protect your faith. But know that if the real fire is burning in your heart, Christ is going to keep pouring oil on it.

If it were up to man-made faith to hold on to Christ, every one of us would have fallen off a long time ago. It is God-given, Christ-interceding, Spirit-advocating faith that endures.

When will it endure until? End of verse 5: for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Here the word *salvation* refers not only to being saved in the past from the penalty of sin, and being saved in the present from the power of sin, but the whole package: being saved in the future from even the presence of sin. That salvation, that includes our future glorification with Christ in His presence is ready, waiting to be revealed at the end of history, when God completes the story of redemption. Our faith will endure to the finish line of salvation.

Blessed be God for our internal position of having been born again by His mercy and His Son's resurrection. Blessed be God for our indestructible possessions in Heaven. Blessed be God for the invincible protection of our faith.

I wonder if these three realities today seem near and dear to you, or if they seem far off and faint. If they are near and dear, and if the Spirit of God has renewed your relish and taste for these truths, then drink deeply and join Peter in saying, “Blessed be God”. Join Paul and Silas in singing hymns when outwardly you are in stocks in the prison.

If they are far off and faint, let me suggest two reasons why. The first is that though you have tasted of these truths before and you have found them delightful, you've more recently been trying to place your hope in the transitory things of this world. Your ultimate trust and joy has shifted. And it's a gracious thing that God withholds satisfaction from us when we start treating His gifts like they are the Giver. Admit with Robert Robinson, “prone to wander Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love – here's my heart, ok take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.”

A second reason why these things might seem far off and faint is that you are yet to enter in and receive Christ into your soul and be born again by the Father. It was when William Cowper was in the insane asylum that he came across a Bible and read the words of Romans 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God”

“Immediately I received the strength to believe it, and the full beams of the Sun of Righteousness

shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement He had made, my pardon sealed in His blood, and all the fullness and completeness of His justification. In a moment I believed, and received the gospel...Unless the Almighty arm had been under me, I think I should have died with gratitude and joy. My eyes filled with tears, and my voice choked with transport; I could only look up to heaven in silent fear, overwhelmed with love and wonder.”

Maybe you are yet to begin your pilgrimage, because you must still truly be born again. Do what Cowper did: believe and receive the gospel. Come alive to a living hope.