

1st PETER BIBLE STUDY

1 Peter 1:03-04

Lesson #2

Introduction

Last week we began our study of this first epistle of Peter. We discussed the first two verses, which made reference to our being chosen by the foreknowledge of God for a specific sanctifying work to be performed within us by his Spirit, which work will begin to make us obedient to His Son Jesus, and afford us forgiveness of our sins by the sprinkling of His blood. We saw from these verses that God has a particular purpose of His own for those whom He chose to redeem and transform. This work clearly includes bringing a select group out from among the larger body of humanity for the purpose of training them in obedience to His Son. We discussed how this obvious fact seems to be entirely absent from the present day teachings of the church, which truly seem to perceive that the entire purpose of God is to see how many people He can save from judgment. The present-day perception is that the escape from hell, for as many people as possible, is the primary purpose of God, not the sanctifying work of his Spirit, upon a chosen and predetermined group to create a people who are suitable and obedient to His Son.

It's easy enough to see how this mistake can be made, the Bible certainly does speak much of redemption, and from man's point of view, I suppose there can be no higher concern. But there is a higher concern, and that concern is God's concern. Does God have a particular purpose of His own which supersedes our own self concerns? Is it possible that our primary concerns are not God's primary concerns? Is it possible that His ways are our higher than our ways, and His thoughts different from our thoughts? Is it possible that God has certain concerns and purposes of His own that supersede, and render subservient, our concerns and our purposes?

Virtually everyone I know who calls himself a Christian would answer "yes," certainly God does have His own concerns and His own purposes, and they are higher than ours, but the vast majority believe that this purpose that God has is to see how many He can save from hell. However, the scriptures undeniably teach us that God's purpose for mankind goes far beyond His concern for their salvation, and is focused **much more** on what becomes of them **after** He grants them that salvation. Salvation itself is not by any means God's end purpose for mankind, but rather the commencement of a process to produce that which is His intended end purpose for mankind. Which purpose is to set apart, and sanctify a particular predetermined group, known to God by name from before creation, to become transformed into the image of His Son, so that His Son will be the first of many like minded brethren, who will ultimately form God's eternal everlasting kingdom. (Rom 8:29-30; 12:1-2; Eph 1:4, 4:13; 1Pet 1:2) This, according to scriptures, is God's ultimate and higher purpose for humanity, and it supersedes man's self interests of mere salvation from hell and judgement.

But, having said this, I fully realize that very few will be willing to accept it, because, it demands a subsequent attitude of total self-denial, and absolute subservience to the Lordship of Christ, and few are those who are willing to take this road. (Mat 7:13-14; Luk 13:23-24) It's so much easier to simply teach everyone that God's only purpose for man is to try His best to get them saved. It requires no knowledge of God's purpose, no repentance from sin, no daily warfare against the flesh, no regular and diligent study of the Scriptures to thoroughly know and understand the will of God, and no surrender to his Lordship authority. Just believe in Jesus and preach the gospel, this fulfills the whole purpose of God for creating humanity, according to most of the churches of today. Everything else is just non-essentials of individual preference, as a recent e-mail I received just declared. Our denomination needs to lay aside its debates of theology and refocus its concerns on that which really matters, evangelism, according to this e-mail. This childish simplicity seems sincere, and loving, and kind, but in fact its effects are ultimately devastating, by virtue of critical omissions. (It's half truth)

This over simplification, and loose handling of Scriptures, has caused this denomination to be literally overrun with false converts, to the point that the real ones have difficulty fitting in and surviving in their own churches. What makes it tragic is that the leaders of this denomination know what's happening and are perfectly content to continue it because they've been taught that it's godly. They know full well that their true ratio of real converts to false ones is something like one in 100, but instead of trying to fix this their solution is to simply increase it even more. Our denomination is perfectly happy to have 90% of its membership unregenerate, as long as the pews are full. And this is why I say that it's tragic.

Now I know this has been a lengthy introduction, but I felt like this needed to be said to properly conclude our study of last week's verses. A simple understanding of the first two verses of last week's lesson would change the whole way our denomination functions, and what we perceive to be God's order of priority for His creation. Our denomination has a rich history of godly men who knew these things well and taught them openly, but liberal theology has managed to creep in and do its deadly work, and there are now only a few in our denomination who still know, understand, and diligently teach these historic biblical principles, commonly called the doctrines of grace, upon which our denomination was founded. I extend my heartfelt thanks to these dear brothers who are standing firm in the faith, and exhort and encouraged them to continue to teach the word, whether in season or out, and not grow weary in the process.

Now moving onto our verses for tonight, our study will focus on verses three and four, but to establish the proper context I'm going to read the first nine verses:

1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,

To those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who are chosen 2 according 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.

3 Blessed 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, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 so 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; 8 and 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, 9 obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls. 1 Peter 1:1-9 (NASB)

As I mentioned last week, the sheer volume of information provided by Peter in these opening nine verses could probably consume an entire career, if one were inclined to search out the full and complete depths of them. But, since we don't have that much time we will do the very best we can to capture all of the richness and truth in these inspired Scriptures which the apostle Peter has left us. The central focus of our lesson tonight will be on verses three and four, which I have titled:

Born-Again to a Living Hope

Verse 3:

3 Blessed 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,

Verse three states emphatically the same thing that verse two just said, that God, according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again. Peter says the cause is God, and he gives Him the thanks and the blessing for doing so. Peter goes on to say that God did this because of His great mercy, not because He was obligated, nor because we had earned it, but simply because of His own great mercy toward that group that He foreknew before creation, and had sanctified for His own purpose and possession. Peter calls this a great mercy, and indeed great it is.

Peter says that the great mercy of God has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The term "born-again" was first used by Jesus in His conversation with Nicodemus. It was apparently a foreign concept to Nicodemus because his response was "how can a man be born again when he is old?" From that moment, and even until today, this term "born-again" gets a wide variety of responses, from genuine question to open ridicule, but Jesus said that unless a man was born again he could neither see nor enter the kingdom of heaven.

Did you know that there are multitudes of churchgoers who associate the term born-again with radical fundamentalists, and don't want anything to do with it. They want to be Christians, just not the "born-again" kind. Can you see how ridiculous this is, when Jesus said you could neither see, nor enter, His kingdom if you weren't. So, what kind of Christian would be a not born-again Christian, obviously a not Christian? A tare, a false convert, a cultural Christian.

But there will be none of these in the kingdom of heaven, according to the words of Jesus. (Jn 3:1-5) Therefore it is a very, very great mercy indeed by God the Father, that He has caused us to be born again, because apart from having been so, no one is saved, and no one enters the kingdom of heaven. There are not two kinds of Christians, the regular and the born again radicals, there is just the born again, and yes, according to the ways of the world, we do appear to be radical in our thinking and behaviors, because the sanctifying work of the Spirit is separating us from the ways of the world around us, and because of this we do appear different, and sometimes radical, but that's exactly what God intended, and it is precisely this difference that brings Him glory. Why does it give Him glory rather than us, because as our verse tells us, He is both the cause of it, and the power that sustains it, through His Spirit. (v.2) We are simply the visible evidence of His righteousness and His great mercy. **(However, not every radical group is necessarily genuine Christian)**

If an unbeliever who isn't familiar with the Bible were to ask you directly if you are born-again, I assume you would immediately respond "yes, absolutely." But then, if they were to ask you "just exactly what does that mean," would you be able to give them a coherent, biblical answer? There isn't a short, one sentence answer to this question, is there? Part of the problem is that the language that Christians use to discuss this topic is foreign to unbelievers. They don't understand the terms themselves, nor the concepts behind them. So to answer that question one must lay the proper foundation first, and then use terminology that is understandable. It's important to clarify that this birth which happens again isn't speaking about our flesh and blood bodies, but of that invisible part of our being which we call our spirit or our soul.

And the term "again" doesn't mean that we already did it once and now we need to repeat it for some reason. Nor does it mean that we were born once of flesh, but now we need to be born again in the spirit also. This is a popular concept, and it's not that it's wrong, but it doesn't really capture the true meaning and intent of the term. That's not what it means by "again." It's not again another time, it's again to another prior condition, that's being referenced here.

The "again" being spoken of here is that spiritual state, or condition which was alive in Adam, but died when he disobeyed God. Spiritually speaking, man is born alive in the flesh, but still dead in the spirit. And the term born-again means a person must experience, for the first time, that spiritual birth to life that mankind had before the disobedience of Adam, which cost him, and by extension the entire human race, that spiritual state of life. The "again" here is, again before Adam sinned and lost the gift of spiritual life. We must again become a spiritually living creature, as mankind was before he fell into sin and lost his life. This is what is meant by the scriptures when they speak of being born again.

In other words, God created man up-right and alive spiritually. Adam disobeyed God and it cost mankind his life, both physically and spiritually. Now, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, mankind may again be reborn unto that state of spiritual life that he once knew before Adam's sin, through faith in Christ Jesus. Born again means a restoration, a rebirth, to that state of spiritual life that mankind was created with, and enjoyed, before sin took it all away. Our physical life is visible from the outside, but our spiritual life is only visible from the inside. However, for those who have experienced this rebirth of our spirit, it is as real and tangible as the physical birth, and displays inescapable evidences within us that are as real, and obvious, and undeniable as are our own tangible flesh and blood bodies.

Those who are familiar with the Scriptures, and the terminology of the Scriptures may simply respond that they have been regenerated, or often we use the term converted to describe this condition of rebirth. These are accurate and viable answers, but only if the listener understands what we mean by these terms. And this is why I said that we must lay a proper foundation and use terminology that an unbeliever can understand. In very simple terms God created humanity both physically and spiritually alive, but through intentional disobedience, death entered into mankind. Both the physical death and the spiritual death of mankind are the result of the disobedience of Adam to the commandment of God. The wages of sin is death. (Rom 6:23)

When Adam sinned the spiritual death was immediate, as evidenced by his subsequent behaviors, but Adam lived in the flesh for 930 years before his body died, but his body did die, which it would not have done had he not sinned against God. However, all of that which was lost by mankind through disobedience to the commandment of God, can be reacquired through the manifold grace of God.

This re-acquisition of both spiritual life, which is immediate, and a new eternal body which follows later just as it did with Adam when he fell; these are the consequential end results of being born again. It is a reinstatement by the grace of God, through faith in his Son Jesus, to that condition which mankind knew before he ever disobeyed God. Alive spiritually to a relationship with God, and eventually alive bodily, to live forever in His kingdom and in His presence. This is the meaning of born again. It is certainly not an exhaustive explanation, we could go on for ever with the various and diverse consequential effects that take place within this rebirth, but the end result is a restoration to bodily and spiritual life eternal, wherein mankind may reside in perfect communion with the God who created him, through his Son Jesus Christ, who forms the tangible link between an intangible Spirit entity, God, and his tangible physical children, mankind. Jesus Christ is, and eternally remains, the singular, unique, and only, linking means, the only mediator, between God and mankind, forevermore. (1Tim 2:5)

And thus we can see why Jesus could say that unless a man, meaning any person, has been born again, they cannot see, nor ever enter, that eternal kingdom of God. And as our verse tells us, it is God, through His great mercy alone, completely apart from anything we have done on our own, who is the sole cause of this rebirth of that small remnant of mankind whom He foreknew and predestined before creation, to set apart for this sanctifying work of regeneration, which the bible also calls being born again. (vv.2-3)

Now that we've discussed what it means to have been born again by the great mercy of God, we can discuss the remainder of verse three, which goes on to say "*to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*" Our verse tells us that we are born again **to** something, and that something is a living hope. What does Peter mean when he says a living hope? Whatever he means it's directly associated with Jesus Christ's being resurrected from the dead. Does he mean that our hope is living, or does he mean that the object of our hope, Jesus Christ is living after having been crucified and been resurrected back to life? In reality this question is probably meaningless, this is probably a distinction without a difference. Our hope is alive because He is alive. Our hope of resurrection to eternal life after death is a realistic hope, a living hope, because our Lord and Savior Jesus has demonstrated his ability to resurrect Himself after his crucifixion, therefore His promise to us is alive, because He is alive.

Until the resurrection of Jesus, all sacrifices to God were dead animals that were offered up on an altar after having been slain and prepared. These animals never came back to life, so there was no tangible evidence that God had received these sacrifices or had accepted them. But now we have a man, a sinless perfect man, who was crucified on a cross while He was still alive, as an offering to God for the sins of all men who received him through repentance and faith. And as evidence of His acceptability to God, and His divine power to bestow eternal life, He was visibly resurrected from the dead Himself, and seen by the 12 apostles as well as over 500 other people of that time. If the object of our hope, Christ Jesus himself, raised himself from the dead, then His promise of resurrection and eternal life to all those who are His is certainly not a hope in dead sacrifices, but a hope in a living, resurrected, divine, Savior.

His resurrection from the dead is the very basis of our hope of eternal life. He told the 12 disciples that He was going to die and that He was going to rise again in three days. If He had not done this our hope would certainly not be a living hope. Every promise that Jesus made regarding forgiveness of sins and resurrection to eternal life, for those who followed Him, hinged on His own visible bodily resurrection to life after His crucifixion. He had plainly said that He would, and His credibility was on the line, and with His credibility all of our hope. Was He who He claimed to be, was He truly the divine Son of God? All of this stands or falls on the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He had to truly and literally die, and He had to truly and literally rise again, to fulfill His own claim of divine Sonship. And He did!

So now, since Christ Jesus **has** risen from the dead, since He has authenticated all of his claims to divine power and authority, every one who has heard of Him, and been granted the gift of saving faith by the mercy of God the Father, is said to have been "born again" to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Our hope is a living hope because the object of our hope is living. The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the irrefutable stamp of authenticity on everything He said, everything He did, and every promise that He made. Praise be to God, our hope is alive, and His name is Jesus. *"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."* Acts 4:12 (NASB)

Now I'd like to move into verse four, but our verse number four is actually just part of the same sentence as verse three separated by a comma, so to carefully stay in context, lets read from the beginning of the sentence:

3 Blessed 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, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

We find ourselves now in verse four, but verse four is just part of the second sentence of Peter's opening comments. In his first sentence which incorporates verses one and two, Peter told us that we had been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father to undergo a sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit which work would bring us to obedience to Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with his blood. Now in his second sentence he has already told us that it is according to God's great mercy that He himself has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of his Son Jesus, and now the sentence goes on to say why. Which is to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and will not fade away with time, and is reserved in our name in a great book which is kept in heaven.

Lets go through this verse carefully. The opening words say "to obtain an inheritance." What is an inheritance? It's something that belonged to another but was given to you. You had nothing to do with earning it, you simply receive it is a totally unmerited gift. Furthermore, inheritance carries the connotation of someone having to die before you can receive it. So what we're being told is that there is something reserved in heaven for us for which we had no part in producing ourselves, and required the death of another before we could receive it. And thus it is an inheritance, not a wage, not a just recompense for services rendered, but a free gift of love given by another, who surrenders their life to be able to give it.

The sentence goes on to say that this inheritance is "imperishable." This is simple enough to understand. Imperishable simply means it will never perish, it will never end, it cannot be destroyed or nullified, or canceled. The sentence goes on to immediately add the that it is "undefiled." So not only is it indestructible, but it's also impervious to damage by defilement. Its value cannot be reduced by improper use. It cannot be dirtied or muddied or devalued by external forces of ungodliness acting upon it.

And then, to just put the finishing touches, he says that it "will not fade away." It is impervious to the normal ravages of time and use. It will never wear out, it will never diminish in effectiveness or value. It will not become obsolete with time. We will never grow tired of this inheritance, nor ever take it for granted, forever. It's not something that will be enjoyed for a while, and then put on a shelf and forgotten as the eons of time pass by.

And then, after establishing that there is an inheritance which is imperishable, and undefiled, and will never fade away in the eternity of time, Peter says that this inheritance is reserved in heaven for us. When we're about to make a trip to another state or even another country, we make advance reservations at a hotel or someplace else, and we get a confirmation number for that reservation. This confirmation number gives us confidence that when we reach our destination there will be a place for us to stay as we expected, and we won't be turned out on the street. It gives us confidence that someone else will not be given the accommodations that we ourselves were expecting. The last thing we want to hear is that the hotel has no record of our reservation and there are no more rooms available. If you've ever experienced this situation you know how disheartening it can be, especially if you're in a country where you hardly even speak the language.

As we conclude from this little analogy that I've just made, the value of a future inheritance, just like the value of a future hotel room, is predicated entirely on the certainty of it being there when you arrive. A beautiful hotel room is of little value if it's not available to you when you get there. A wonderful and marvelous inheritance is only as valuable as the certainty of its reception. In human terms, an inheritance is subject to change or cancellation at the whim of the benefactor. An heir apparent to a vast fortune can find himself disenfranchised at any time, so his anticipated inheritance, as vast as it might be, is never really secured until the final passing of the benefactor, and the reading of his last will and testament.

If you'll permit me to continue to use this analogy, even after the death of the benefactor, and the reading of the will, there is often provisions in the will that delay the disbursement of the property until the heir reaches a certain age, or until certain other conditions are met. In this case the inheritance is a certainty, but the time just hasn't arrived.

Now, let's leave our analogy but apply those principles to the verse at hand. First, God the Father, by His own foreknowledge and intention, chose those certain heirs specifically by name, then implemented the process of singling them out and preparing them for the time. Then, when the time was right, He sent his only Son into the world to live a perfectly righteous and sinless life, and then to be put to death unjustly for the sake of the heirs He had pre-selected.

The perfect sinless life, and the unjust death of Jesus were the necessary qualifiers to eternally secure the inheritance designated by the Father for all of those whom He had given to his Son. Like our analogy, all of the conditions have been met, nothing can change them, the inheritance is eternally secured in heaven, and is now simply waiting for the time of implementation predesignated by God the Father. The Father has designated the time, and He has set certain conditions according to His own free will. One of those conditions we know, and that is, that it will not come until every predesignated heir has come to salvation through repentance and faith in the Son. (Rom 11:25; 2Pet 3:9) But make no mistake, that day and hour is, and always has been, known by God, and it will arrive exactly on schedule. Both the time and the certainty of this inheritance spoken of in verse four, which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, is reserved with absolute certainty in the security of heaven. And thus we are persuaded by the sure and certain testimony of holy Scripture.

As I said earlier, this verse four, is just part of the second sentence of Peter's opening comments. He continues this sentence with an explanation of God's means of protecting this inheritance and its recipients. However, the subject will require more time than we have available in this lesson, so we'll conclude this lesson here, and resume at verse five next week. So now, let me just give a brief recap of this lesson as our conclusion.

Conclusion:

In verse three we discussed that God has caused us to be born again. We discussed that being born again is a term that makes reference to the condition of humanity prior to his spiritual separation from God that resulted from sin. Man was created from the elements of the ground and then God breathed life into this creature and man became a living soul. He then took out of the side of this man that he named Adam, a counterpart, a female which he fashioned from a rib extracted from Adam. This couple was alive to God and were able to walk with him in his garden on planet Earth. After their sin they were afraid of God, and felt ashamed of themselves for the first time in their existence. They felt this shame and fear because their condition of innocence was gone and they were aware of it. Something that had been in them was now gone, and something that had not been in them was now present, and their relationship to God was different.

And this is the essence of being born again. It is a restoration by God to that condition that mankind enjoyed before he chose to disobey God. It is being awakened to a communion, a personal relationship and affection for God that was not present before. And God the Father has made this rebirth possible uniquely and solely through the work of his beloved Son Jesus. The Father chooses to bestow the gift of saving faith, which is also called belief, in his beloved Son to those whom He foreknew and predetermined before creation. And this is why that verse says that this rebirth is a great mercy of God.

The verse goes on to say that this rebirth is based on a living hope. And we discussed that this living hope is described as being predicated on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Prior to Christ, those who sought forgiveness from God offered up dead animals on an altar, and they hoped that God would receive these animals and cover their sins. But they knew in their hearts what the Scriptures later tell us, which is that the blood of animals is not sufficient to cover the sins of man, so God sent his Son, in the form of a man, to pay the penalty of sin for mankind. He was alive when He was offered to God on the cross, and his death was efficacious for the sins of His elect. But this is only half the story, because He didn't remain dead, He rose again back to life from the dead, and has promised that He will raise up to life all those who believe in Him. And thus He is a living hope. As He lives, so we shall live.

And this living hope, this promise of Jesus Christ to raise us from the dead, and grant us eternal life with Him in his kingdom of heaven, is an inheritance bequeathed to us by His death and reserved incorruptible and undefiled and unfading in the record books of heaven. Is it any wonder that the apostle Peter began this sentence with the words "*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy.*"

I wonder sometimes if we thoroughly understand and comprehend that everything that God the Father put his Son through in His earthly life, and on that cross, He did voluntarily, of his own choosing, as a visible demonstration to His elect of the depth of His love for us. Because He first loved us, He first demonstrated that love in a manner that can never be questioned. Christ Jesus voluntarily laid down his life for those whom his Father gave him as His mate, His bride, His church, in demonstration of His great love and mercy for us, and it is the Father's intention that a remnant of humanity would come to believe in his Son and love Him in return, above everything else in the universe. That which we call time, in all actuality, is simply God the Father providentially working out His predetermined plan, day by day, and step by step, in this sphere that we call the universe. (Isa 46:8-10)

God's master plan is a great deal more complex and involved than just a long struggle with Satan to try and keep a few undetermined number of people out of hell. When all has been said and done, God the Father will have an eternal kingdom, ruled by his Son Jesus, and populated by a predetermined and foreknown number of individuals who have been carefully chosen, and painstakingly prepared, to the minutest detail, to be His own children, His Son's loving mate, and the inhabitants of this eternal and perfect kingdom which comes down out of heaven from God, to a new earth where He will reside with this elect group of mankind forevermore. (Rev 21 & 22)

So now, may we close this study with the same words with which we began:

3 Blessed 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, 4 to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you,

Amen, thank you Father, and forever bless your holy Name.

Narrow Gate Baptist Church, Miami
Robert Andrews, Pastor
02/03/10