

1 Peter 1:2-4 "The Mercy & Hope of the New Birth"

Last week's study was more of an introduction to this most important letter inspired by the Holy Spirit and given to us through the apostle Peter.

Much of what Peter writes about centers on problems many of the churches were encountering which had to do with everything from life in general to trials in particular.

And though entire churches were addressed we must never forget that real life people, individuals, make up these churches. There were faces connected to the recipients of this letter and they were no different than you or myself.

But Peter wants to start off with the good news and then address these aspects of life that have to do with various trials. The good news of course is that Jesus Christ has come to take our penalty for sin and reconcile us back to the Father. He has personally given His life so that we may have eternal life with Him, and that eternal life is secured by His resurrection from the dead.

There are five geographic areas, mentioned by Peter, where these churches were located: Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. All of these areas would make up the better part of what we know today as Turkey.

By and large they were Gentiles, but certainly included Jews as well. Since I touched on the doctrine of election which Peter describes as God's choosing of us in verse one of last week, and the doctrine of man's bound will to sin, I won't go over that ground again today.

But I will say that this was intended to encourage the churches so as not to lose hope in the midst of a world which made them feel like they were in this alone. God assures them they are not alone and their plight isn't going unnoticed; after all He has known them from eternity, purchased them with the blood of His Son and has no intention of leaving them on their own.

But what we notice about verse two of this letter is that Peter places all three persons of the Godhead together. 1Pe 1:2 [we] "who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to

Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance."

Dr. D. Edmond Heibert in his commentary on Peter makes this observation: "Peter undergirded their faith by portraying the entire Godhead as active in their Christian experience. Peter's primary purpose was not to teach Christian doctrine but to strengthen Christian faith."

Peter wanted these Christians to be assured that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, simultaneously were working in their lives even as He is presently working in our lives to build us up for service to His glory.

Since our text mentions it, and even though I've mentioned this repeatedly on Thursday evenings as we study the Gospel of John, which also addresses the Trinity, it's important to know that there is only one God who has revealed Himself in three persons.

And though the word Trinity appears nowhere in the Bible the teaching certainly does. It's not just a N.T. concept. And as we've done before we need only go to the first book of the Bible, Genesis, to see this.

In Gen 1:1 "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth."

But then we go to Gen 1:26-27 "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

The Hebrew word for God in verse 26 is 'elohiym and it speaks of God in the plural. It doesn't infer many gods but God revealed in more than one person. We're not told how many persons in this passage, but we are told in another O.T. passage.

Isa 48:12-16 "Listen to me, O Jacob, Israel, whom I have called: I am He; I am the first and I am the last. My own hand laid the foundations of the earth, and my right hand spread out the heavens; when I summon them, they all stand up together. "Come together, all of you, and listen: Which of the idols has foretold these things? The LORD'S chosen ally will carry out his purpose against

Babylon; his arm will be against the Babylonians. [Or Chaldeans; also in verse 20] I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him. I will bring him, and he will succeed in his mission. "Come near me and listen to this: "From the first announcement I have not spoken in secret; at the time it happens, I am there." And now the Sovereign LORD has sent Me, with his Spirit."

The One in verse 12 who calls Himself, "I am the first and I am the last", is the one in verse 16 who now says, "And now the Sovereign LORD has sent Me, with his Spirit."

The first and the last is Jesus Christ according to Rev.1:17. And the now the Sovereign LORD has sent Christ along with His Spirit.

One God, three persons, all equal in power, essence and glory. This is why Jesus could say in John 10:30 that "I and the Father are one." Not the same person but one in essence, being God Himself.

And so Peter reminds them that this same God of the O.T., the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is the same God who loves them and knows them and desires to draw close to them in their time of distress, even as He does with us today.

But there's something else that's interesting about this description of the Triune God. We see God as Father. As a Father He loves us and protects us and watches over us. But as Father He sends forth the Son who, though He existed from eternity with the Father, was sent from the Father in time, to come to earth in the flesh to redeem us. And then Jesus, after His resurrection, sent the Spirit to reside in us sealing us for the day of Redemption.

And so we see different functions of the Godhead in each of the persons. This doesn't mean that the Father is more powerful than the Son or the Son more powerful than the Spirit. God is God, He can't be more powerful than Himself.

This is a mystery which our finite minds cannot comprehend in this world. But it doesn't make it any less true. In verse two we also see that the Spirit's work involves our sanctification in relationship to the salvation that we have in Christ as God chose us in Him..

Sanctification is simply that process of God whereby after having given us new life He takes that new life in Christ and begins to bring it to the surface more and more as we are made more like Christ in the way we live.

The Bible refers to this as holiness. And holiness is simply being set apart for God's purposes and reflecting the holiness of God. Now obviously our holiness is not designed to save us from the penalty of our sins, only Jesus could do that, but holiness is an outward expression of an inward work of the Spirit whereby His fruit is working in and through us.

In fact we are not saved by our good works, but rather unto good works as the Spirit of God empowers us. This is what Paul meant in Eph 2:10 "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Sanctification is a lifelong process. We will never be perfect in this life in our present bodies, but we will be in glory. And Peter reminds these Christians that the Spirit's work is sure and His purpose is to mold us and shape us into Christ reflectors, if you will, so that Jesus is lifted up for the world to see in us.

As I alluded to just a moment ago sanctification is the Spirit's work in our life but we are responsible to submit to the Spirit and desire to please the Spirit as opposed the grieving the Spirit.

And so Peter says in verse two... "for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood..."

We're told of our Lord Jesus in Phi 2:8 "And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death-- even death on a cross!"

His whole life reflected what He said to the Father in Luke 22:42, "not My will but Yours be done."

Obedience is an element which shouldn't be glossed over for the Christian. To obey doesn't have to be a four letter word at which we rebel. Obedience is really an outworking of the Spirit's influence in our life as the fruit of the Spirit is being manifest.

But obedience should never be seen as a drudgery which we bear like some loathsome burden to a set of laws etched in stone. Jesus said in Mat 11:30 "For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

But only as we are willing to follow Him faithfully will that become a reality. You see it's all in the realization that He loved me even unto death as He took my penalty. And He say's to me, "...if you love Me, keep My commandments."

Our obedience to Him shouldn't be under compulsion, but should be out of love and gratitude for the life He's secured for us on the cross and in His resurrection.

That's Peter's message as he speaks of us being sprinkled with Christ's blood. What's interesting about that phrase is that it's reminiscent of a covenant promise the nation of Israel gave to God.

Exo 24:4-8 "Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said. He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Then he sent young Israelite men, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings [Traditionally peace offerings] to the LORD. Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls, and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Of course the blood of the Covenant spoken of here was a shadow of the blood of the Covenant which Jesus, who is the Lamb of God, who came to take away the sin of the world, completely and finally fulfilled in His death on the cross.

And it was Jesus who said in Luk 22:20 "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

And we as believers in Christ who, by faith have trusted in that redemptive work on our behalf, and who have been sprinkled clean by Christ's blood, should be able to say with those whom Moses sprinkled with the blood of a sacrifice, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey."

Dr. Heibert makes the comment: "Obedience is the first act, as well as the permanent characteristic of true faith."

And the beauty of this New Covenant with God through the shed blood of Christ taking our penalty for sin, is that we didn't deserve it and yet He freely gave it. That is grace and mercy. And so Peter sums it up at the end of the verse by saying, "Grace and peace be yours in abundance."

The NAS puts it, "May grace and peace be yours in fullest measure." The KJV has it, "Grace unto you and peace, be multiplied."

Peter simply acknowledges that though God's grace is undeserved we should always look to the Lord who gives life and gives it abundantly.

It's not as though God stops giving grace the day we believe in His Son for our redemption. No, everyday of our lives is filled with His grace and we should seek to be filled to overflowing every moment of our lives with God's amazing grace.

He is the Giver of all good gifts, He is the supplier of all our needs, He is the protector from all of our enemies and He is the forgiver of all our sins. Basically Peter says, 'I pray God just piles His grace on you so abundantly that it's yours in the fullest measure possible.'

But with grace also comes that responsibility to lovingly obey the Lord who gives such grace. Paul puts it this way when writing to Timothy.

1Ti 6:17-19 "Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."

This is the life Peter refers to, and as if unable to contain himself over this new life he has in Christ he breaks forth into praise.

1Pe 1:3-5 "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and 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."

There's so much to say here and so little time. We should always dwell on so great a salvation. And it should always cause us to turn to God in praise and adoration.

"In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope..."

Jesus talked about this new birth to Nicodemus when he told that Pharisee that he must be born again, or must be born from above. It's a birth which only God can birth. Our new life in Christ comes from above. Salvation is of the Lord.

I like the way the NAS puts the end of verse 3 when it states, "His great mercy has caused us to be born again." But we're not born again simply to have forgiveness, as important as that is, we are born again to a living hope.

This new life is living because the One who indwells us is the living God. He has given us life whereby we have ears to hear and eyes to see and the power to walk after Him as sheep follow their Shepherd.

The world doesn't have this hope. Paul talks about our former lives when we were without Christ.

Eph 2:12-13 "remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ."

Brought near to what or should I say to whom? Brought near to the living God in a living relationship with a new birth. I like that phrase because it should give every child of God hope that there is a new beginning in Christ.

Old things have passed away, behold all things become new. Though your sins were as scarlet, they will be made white as snow. That's a new beginning that only God can give. But it's a hope that is not only believed on now and growing everyday, it's a reality we have to look forward to as God promises to bring that hope to fruition.

But you know this living hope is the direct result of Christ rising bodily from the grave the third day, defeating sin and death for us. Peter says it's "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead."

Without Christ's resurrection there is no hope, there is no forgiveness, there is no life in eternity with God.

1Co 15:13-14;17 "If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our

preaching is useless and so is your faith. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins."

But praise God, Jesus is alive and in the business of giving new life, resurrection life with Him, with the same hope of being raised from the dead ourselves, given new glorified bodies, or incorruptible bodies as Paul says, to dwell with God forever on the new earth among the new heavens, or new universe.

What does this new life involve? First and foremost it involves receiving forgiveness for the penalty of our sins and in that we are now brought into a relationship with our Creator. The debt of sin has been paid on our behalf by Christ.

But it also involves a new nature which desires to please God. God gives us this new nature as He indwells us with His Holy Spirit. All of this is here and now and we should rejoice in this present reality.

But there are also future blessings which will make this life pale in comparison. And so in verse 4 Peter tells us that we obtain an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you,

All inheritances in this world are temporal. Whether it's money, possessions or authority and power, they will not last forever and as such they will perish, spoil and eventually fade.

By contrast the inheritance which Jesus has purchased for us will not perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is our living hope. It's difficult for us to imagine the kind of inheritance God has in store for us.

Many people might get pretty excited if they knew they were going to receive an inheritance where the estate was worth billions of dollars. Beautiful homes in various parts of the world. Lear Jets to whisk you to them when you had a notion. Yachts, stretch limo's, and every other comfort one could only dream of.

And yet compared to the inheritance we have in Christ those are mere trinkets. Dr. Wayne Grudem in his commentary on Peter says, "The N.T. regularly uses inheritance to refer not only to an earthly inheritance but also to a believers share in the heavenly kingdom, his or her future heavenly reward... The inheritance is thus their portion in the new creation and all its blessings."

Eph 1:13-14;18 "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,"

But you know I like the way William Barclay puts it when he states: "What, then, is this wonderful inheritance which the reborn Christian possesses? There may be many secondary answers to that question but there is only one primary answer -- the inheritance of the Christian is God Himself."....

.... The Psalmist said, "The Lord is the portion of my inheritance... Indeed my heritage is beautiful to me." (Psa.16:5). We read in Psa.73:26.. "My flesh and my heart may fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

Barclay concludes his thought by saying, "It is because the Christian possesses God and is possessed by God that he has the inheritance which is imperishable, undefilable and which can never fade away."

But then Peter ends verse 4 by saying this inheritance is kept in heaven for you, or as the NAS puts it, "reserved in heaven for you", inferring that God is the One keeping it just for you.

The word kept or reserved in the Greek, as Dr. Heibert notes, means to watch over, to take care of, to guard against loss or injury, by keeping an eye on that which is being guarded. The inheritance is certain because of God's watchful care." He goes on to say that the Greek implies that this keeping or preservation is presently in force by God."

In other words His hand hasn't been taken off our portion of our inheritance with Him forever. He gave us this inheritance in Christ and He will make sure that we will receive it because He is reserving it just for us.

This was meant to encourage these believers during Peter's time and I hope it encourages you, knowing that your inheritance in Christ is sure because God makes it sure.

Like Paul may we say concerning our eternal inheritance 2Ti 4:7-8 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept

the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."

It's all about eternity and it starts today in Christ. And if we're in Christ by faith, and He is in us, may we begin our eternity by bringing glory to Him today as we look forward to bringing glory to Him in His glorious presence in the new creation He has in store for us.