

The 1st Letter of Peter

Walton Exhort 12.6.05

My dear Bre. & Srs.,

One of the objects of Peter's epistles was to "stir you up by putting you in remembrance." "Stir up" means to wake up. We all know the truth, but we need to refresh our minds to the realities of our hope and how this hope has become possible by Jesus' sacrificial death.

In ch. 1 of this 1st Epistle of Peter, v. 2, we read, "We have been chosen, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood."

It is incredible that God should have decided to have chosen us. There can be no greater honour than to be chosen of God. The original word is used to describe something that has been especially chosen for some great duty, which in our case is to be a witness to God's truth and become the spiritual bride of Christ. There are three elements of our calling, 1) the foreknowledge of God 2) sanctification, and 3) the sprinkling of the blood of Christ. The apostle Paul says of those who are foreknown of God, "For those God foreknew, He also predestinated to be conformed to the likeness of His Son" (Rom. 8:29).

To be foreordained is to be marked out beforehand, and our privileged position is that out of all the millions, Almighty God has foreordained you and me to share in His Kingdom and the ages beyond that are beyond our finite minds to comprehend.

God does not make mistakes; He has called us because He wants us. Jesus said, "No man can come unto me except the Father, which hath sent me draw him." He further said, "No one can snatch them out of my hand". Jesus grasps each one of us firmly by the hand.

The gradual transformation of our lives is not automatic, it involves a voluntary action on our part which is foreknown by God. Of course God knows everything; we are told that "the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him" (2 Chron. 16:9). Of course we make mistakes, but we are committed to Him, hence our presence here this morning.

The means of our transformation, v. 2, is "by the sanctifying work of the spirit". Sanctification means to make holy, to cleanse from evil. This is achieved by the operation of the spirit word of God upon us and by Jesus' sacrifice. Jesus said, "Sanctify them by the truth, your word is truth" (John 17:17). And the apostle Paul adds "But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the spirit and through belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13).

Sanctification is no automatic process, but necessitates a diligent, conscious effort to cleanse ourselves by God's word so that we become a holy people.. Our natural minds care not for God's ways; naturally we all are "children of disobedience" (Eph. 2:2) but we have to cultivate the spirit of obedience. The idea behind the word is not so much a rigid compliance, but an obedience motivated by a love and desire to please God, a delighting to please Him.

This, of course, is the ideal, but our failings and disobedience give us an uneasy conscience. Like Paul we say, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 7:24). Our consciences rightly reprove

us, but we must always remember that Jesus died to save us from our sins. Paul says, “How much more shall the blood of Christ...purge your consciences from dead works to serve the living God?” (Heb. 9:14).

The Divine election has put us in the privileged position of being cleansed by the blood of Christ. Because we strive, howbeit with many failings, to serve the Lord, we are sanctified and cleansed and made a forgiven people. Hence Paul encourages us, “Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:22-23).

Our salvation is certain, providing we continue in the faith. We cannot earn salvation, it is the gift of God. We are saved by grace, which is the unmerited gift of God. When we talk of judgement, we tend to think of justice. If we were all judged justly we would all be rightly condemned – salvation is a free gift. Forgiveness is real. Why, then, are we sometimes downhearted? We should be the happiest of people. But we know that we are weak, erring mortals. Our confidence in God can waver, but there should be no anxious thoughts about anything, for God is in total control and has assured us of salvation.

Let us read 1 Peter ch. 1 vs. 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”.

God’s infinite power is limitless. No matter how the world or anyone else may try to harm us – they could even kill us – they cannot take away the certainty of our Hope. Paul told the Corinthians, “God will keep you strong till the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful” says Paul. (1 Cor. 1:8-9). In order to be kept by the power of God, we just have to believe, have faith in Him.

Every word of v. 4 of ch. 1 is charged with encouragement. “An inheritance”. By our natural birth we only inherit suffering and death, but because Jesus has purchased us to himself, we are related to his inheritance. Romans (8:17) tells us, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs, heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ”. Worldly inheritances at best last only for a lifetime, but our inheritance in Christ is “incorruptible”, it cannot be destroyed, it is endless. It is also free from the slightest blemish, it is undefiled and unfading. The root of the word ‘unfading’ is not to lose strength, it is unchanging perfection.

Everything in this life, alas, fades, withers and dies. Young men soon become old and frail and die. Beautiful young ladies – like beautiful flowers - all pass away. But at the appearance of Jesus they will be transformed into beautiful, unchanging beings, to share their eternal inheritance in the blissful wonders beyond the imagination of the human heart. No wonder Peter describes this as ‘a life of hope’ – it certainly is!

In spite of the immense joy we have in the realisation of this life of hope, we do not always have it to the forefront of our minds. As Bro. Stewart said last Sunday, we ought to always have our thoughts and minds on Christ. Peter says we have to gird up “the loins of our minds” – pull our socks up, be sober, not allowing other things to fill our minds. Here we are, living in the most exciting days of the world’s history when Jesus will be back, but, alas, many in the truth are not

ready for his coming. Remember it was only five of the ten virgins who were ready. For many Jesus' coming will be unexpected, like a thief in the night. Remember Lot's wife; she was reluctant to leave the things of this life. Jesus' words have never before been so urgent, "Behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 20:12).

Whilst we cannot earn places in the Kingdom, if we really love Christ we will be showing our belief in the way we live and act.

The way we should develop ourselves is explained in 1 Peter 2:2-3, "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good". Just as a baby craves for the nourishing milk of its mother, the same longing for the word of God has to be in us before we can develop as new born creatures in Christ. As we develop we become part of God's temple; it is through us that God is revealed to the world, we are His witnesses, therefore it is essential that we prepare ourselves as suitable building blocks for this temple. Let us look at 1 Cor. 3:16-17 where we see that, even today, we are the temple, the dwelling place of the living God. 1 Cor. 3:16-17:

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him, for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple".

Jesus is the perfect corner stone and we each are, one of the stones laid upon the foundation. Unlike Solomon's temple where the stones were knocked into shape before being assembled, we are rough stones put on top of each other and have to be shaped on site, as it were, bits knocked off, and sometimes material put in which is needed to make us fit. It is essential that we all help each other to fit in – maybe at times we have to shift our position to help others fit in. The sober fact is that we are the temple of the living God and are being prepared to be part of the New Jerusalem, the ultimate temple of God. We are, as Peter says in v 5 of our chapter, "being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices". Being built indicates a gradual process so that we and every part, may fit in perfectly together.

In the AV this v. 5 is rendered, "an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices". The phrase "to offer up" are the words used in the Septuagint translation to describe the way the priests carried the sacrifices up to the brazen altar, which we considered at Tuesday's Bible Class. The priest ascended the ramp carrying the offering to be made. The altar represents Christ. What is the offering that we offer up? Paul says, "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship" (Rom. 12:1,2).

Back to the 1st Peter ch 2 we see Jesus was no ordinary stone; in the middle of v. 6 he is referred to as "a chosen (AV 'elect') and precious corner stone". Jesus is not just precious to God, but also precious to ourselves, as we see in v. 7, "Now to you who believe, this stone is precious". Peter refers to "great and precious promises", "precious faith" ch. 1:19 "the precious blood of Christ". The word "precious" indicates something which is held in honour. Perhaps we could examine our hearts to see if there is anything more precious than Jesus in our lives; if there is it could be we do not value Jesus and the hope set before us as much as we should.

We have already seen the confidence we can have in the living hope before us, but when we reflect upon faith without works, being dead, we can become doubtful. Even if we could do everything, that would not be enough to gain salvation. Jesus says in Luke 17 (v 10NIV), "So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, We are unworthy servants;

we have only done our duty” or, as the AV says, we are unprofitable servants. We must not make the Scriptures contradict, but works are not the be all and end all of living the truth. Turn with me to Ephes. 2 vs. 8-10 to get the right balance. Eph. 2 vs. 8-10:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”.

Whilst God works in us, it still requires a conscious effort on our part. We know our salvation is possible, indeed Christ died so that we can be saved, but let us not be complacent about it. We have the example of Jesus to follow; his life was not easy; he struggled with strong crying and tears to serve God until the end.

Peter reminds us of the quality of Jesus’ sacrifice: “We were not redeemed with corruptible things as silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Christ”. No amount of material wealth could have redeemed us. It was not the material things that men value, but the most precious thing of all – the life of a pure, perfect man; anything else was inappropriate and imperfect.

As we remember Jesus’ sacrifice, it is so easy to think of the cold, legal aspects of his death rather than what it meant to him – the reality of the agony he endured so that he could present himself as that perfect lamb. As Jesus preached for 3½ years the leaders listened to him critically. His arrest was illegal; the trials by the priests, Herod and Pilate were unlawful. At each he was brutally handled, violently hit and beaten. He was scourged, tied to a post and beaten with whips; each of the dreadful lashes would have lacerated his body. He was mocked and spat upon, yet through all the intensity of the agony he was self composed and his mind immoveably set upon the joy and the glory ahead.

As Pilate questioned with him, he put his case logically. He showed his trust in God, saying, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above” (AV John 19:11). Yet Jesus was still in command of the situation. He had at his command twelve legions of angels, just one of whom was more than enough to save him. What self control! Yet if he had yielded and saved himself, we would not have our great hope of salvation. We feeble creatures were part of the joy set before Jesus; we whom he is prepared to save to the uttermost who have come unto God by him. We have been redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot”.

We must try and appreciate Jesus’ agony and what he has accomplished for us. We must clear out all the petty, mundane things that clutter up our minds, and concentrate on him, as we now remember him.

Jesus forgives us our sins even as we forgive others. Surely there can be nothing we cannot forgive others, for Christ’s sake, as we need so much forgiveness ourselves. Jesus endured all the pain and all the humiliation so that we can be with him for ever, joint-heirs with him of the glory he has so dearly won.