

“The Beginning is the End is the Beginning”

I Peter 1:3-5

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. (ESV)

HOPE

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Introduction

Some stories start at the beginning, some at the end. Our passage starts at the end and the beginning. If we end up some where besides the beginning once we get to the end, we haven't traced our course rightly. So what is the beginning? The beginning is worship. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!" Our passage begins with doxology, it begins with praise. It is worship from which the following verses flow and to which, the right understanding of the following two verses should produce. However the grounds of our worship is not simply that "he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Why is it not simply that, because although it is all true, there is a grounds for it all, you see everything relating to the events described that ought to elicit worship is that they occur wholly because of God's mercy.

WORSHIP! WORSHIP! WORSHIP! THE POINT IS WORSHIP!

"According to his great mercy he has caused us to be born again..." It is not because your parents worked hard enough or you scored high enough on a salvation aptitude test proving that you've warranted what you are being given in being born again. Far from it. The grounds and confidence of our salvation are wholly in God's mercy. Why do you think it might be important to begin a letter in praise? Well, besides some letter writing conventions that might come into play, it also sets the tone for the entire letter. Everything that is going to be said, in the entire letter, must not be understood as dispassionate and divorced content. This letter was crafted. Last sermon jokingly referred to the death of the art of letter writing, and while said in jest, it is clear that the first century was an era of the refined letter. The inclusion of a praise as the foundation of the letter is basic to the whole letters identity.

For Peter the foundation of the letter is worship. If we peek ahead to end, to the roofline¹⁰ And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.¹¹ To him be the dominion forever and ever. Amen. The letter is bookended in worship! Interestingly, the beginning speaks of a right understanding of salvation. The end speaks of a right understanding of persecution.

It is here that I'm going to make a brief pit stop for a two-dollar word. Hendiadys. What does that mean? A few of you know. I want to say, that Peter's first letter forms a kind of hendiadys. This isn't a common word. And frankly I might not have known it had I not just spent the last three years in school. So no feeling bad. It is simply three little words, in Greek, strung together. ἕν θιὰ δύοϊν. One through two. Why am I saying this, well. To paraphrase the whole book, and yes, I know this is a bit of a simplification, I might say: We worship God in salvation and persecution. What do I mean by that? Do I simply we mean we worship God when we are persecuted or when we contemplate our salvation. Yes. Do I mean we only worship God when we are persecuted or have cause to remember salvation? No. What I mean to say is we always worship God. I say one thing by saying two things. I connect two things, salvation and persecution, two seemingly distant points and say: worship. Those two points seem as far apart as life's occurrences can seem to throw at you. That's the point. In a hendiadys, such as passages that might talk about Jesus Christ being Lord of heaven and earth. I am not meaning that Jesus is Lord of only heaven and earth, he is Lord of all! So, in Peter's letter we aren't only to worship God when we contemplate salvation or when we receive persecution. We are to worship him always. Okay, back to the foundation.

What can I say about this worship? It should be quick to our lips. Praise God. Blessed be God. Thanks be to God.

There's a tendency to see Sunday worship service as something made worship plus other stuff. Worship is not like a garden. There isn't a patch over here for worship and then other patches for other fruits and vegetables in other places where the worship can't be. It is everywhere. What does this mean for gathered worship? And pardon me while address an issue that I know some of you have certainly learned and know well as many Sunday School classes and the such have been spent on this topic, but I don't think this topic can be brought to mind enough. What does it mean in corporate worship? It means everywhere is worship when we gather to worship. There are no parts of the service that are not worship. Why do we sing – because we are putting voice to the words: "Blessed be God." Why do we listen to a sermon – because we are growing in faith so that we more fully can say, "Blessed be God." Why do we have a collection – so that we can declare, "Blessed be God" with our time and money. Why do we, on those weeks it is celebrated, have communion? So that we can declare for all the world to see and to ourselves, "Blessed be God." We gather on Sundays so that not just a portion of the service is worship, but because the whole thing is. We gather to worship, because a rightly ordered understanding of God's faithful acts produces worship. If we talk about God's redemptive acts and do not worship, I fear that we are not understanding those redemptive acts properly. I say this because we see this throughout the Bible. I say this particularly because we see this beautiful "Blessed Be" in Peter's first letter.

SPEAKING OF GOD'S DEEDS FOR US BRINGS US TO WORSHIP!

What causes Peter to start off with worship? Well, he gives us 5 study bricks to put into the foundation.

- 1) Great Mercy
- 2) Our New Birth.
- 3) The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the Dead.
- 4) An Amazing Inheritance.
- 5) A Secure Inheritance.

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy..."

Here we see clear grounds for what is going on, and as I've let on a little earlier our confidence in this whole matter is not ourselves, but God. He's not some abstract concept. God has characteristics and attributes. One of them is given to us here. What is an attribute that God possesses? Great Mercy. Peter knows God is merciful. It led him to worship. But Peter lets us know that this is not just any kind of Mercy, it is great mercy. If you think God is stingy or distant or uncaring, let me challenge you. God has much mercy. If you don't believe in a God who possesses much mercy, you don't believe in the God that Peter is talking about here, the God of the Bible.

"he has caused us to be born again to a living hope..."

Who is the cause of our new birth? God. He works the act that produces spiritual life in a believer. His mercy is the cause of our new birth. The new birth is not based on earthly actions, but on heavenly decisions. God causes the sprouts to come forth, sprouts of living hope. Don't be tempted to say, "but the seed was mine." No, you were a spiritual rock. Rocks aren't seeds, they may be small and hard but no rock ever produced a tree. Just as surely as that, no dead man comes back to life by his own power. God alone brings the dead to life. We were dead in

our sins. Not mostly dead, but really dead. We were a rock, not a seed. God, by his mercy brought forth in us new life and new hope. He caused us to be born again. Good News!

“through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”

What are the grounds for our declaration about new life? What is the means by which it is imparted to us? Jesus Christ. His death and resurrection. It is his death in our place, and his resurrection as the firstborn from the dead that declares his completed work. God did not let his holy one see corruption! He brought forth our living faith through only one thing, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. There is no new life, no living hope, no eternal comfort to be had without Christ's death, but we know this because of the glory of the resurrection. Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness! Not just nothing less though, for nothing more is needed. He is the fullness and the source of our life and hope.

⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading...

God promises what? An inheritance. That bequeathal to sons and daughters, he gives his inheritance to newborn babes! His children receive his inheritance! God gives this gift to his chosen children, not because of their great worthiness but because he has chosen to. God, in his infinite freedom, chose to make stones into seeds, to give life to the lifeless – and to give them an inheritance. Where are you in this bequest? You receive it. God is the source and the grounds, your only part is to receive this great and awesome gift. However, unlike earthly inheritances which can be gone with swings in taxes, stock markets, moth, and rust – this inheritance isn't going anywhere. It is secure. The perfect work of Christ insures that the first worker will earn the same wages as the last worker. It is guaranteed wages. They can't perish, they can't be polluted, and they will never change in the awesome quality that they possess. Eternal life is one thing that, if rightly ascertained, can never lose its luster. If you find it growing dimmer, seek to contemplate it more.

Millions of people have seen the hope diamond, inspected it, dreamed about it, lusted after it. Yet the guards still yawn. Even a 45-and-a-half carat diamond worth somewhere near a third of a billion dollars grows mundane to those who are exposed to it every day. Not so new life. We are forgetful creatures, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it; Prone to leave the God I love.” We all get in these places where our muddy minds cloud out the glorious things of God, but the murkiness of our minds does not change the nature of new life. If new life seems to have grown dim and dusty, I challenge you to take a second look. They say beauty is in the eye of the beholder, well, that may be, but glory isn't. You're inheritance is glorious.

“kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded...”

Who is being guarded? Those who are inheriting the imperishable, undefiled, and unfading! The born-again, resurrection-insured, inheritors! I joked about sleeping guards just a minute ago, well trust that this inheritance is secured! No museum or vault is safe from thieves, however it is God himself who insures your inheritance, you will get it! It is yours because he's given it to you, you can't lose it, you can't buy it – it comes only by and through God.

Full Circle

Okay, so what? I'm talking about all kinds of stuff that seems to be just out of reach. What does it matter for the here and now? We might be tempted to say, “well I'm secure, see you later.” However, the end of verse five leaves us with these closing words for our passage, **“through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”** Some folks talk about,

“the already not yet” of scripture. Here’s one of those places. We are already saved, secure and YET, we are participating in the working out of the security. How so? Through faith. This faith is the way we see that God has take a stone and made it into a seed that is producing life. We will have a resurrection in the future, but for now we have faith, which is the result of having been promised a resurrection. Our individual stories of faith, yours, mine, everyone who has truly encountered the triune God and been declared to be sons and daughters by adoption all take place in the briefest of spans.

Imagine a timeline of your life. Mine: Born in North Penn, Pennsylvania 11 Mar 1981 and then onwards, working its way through first job, graduations, marriage, up to today standing before you all. However this passage, and a great number of scriptures remind us that our brief days walking on the earth are not all there is. I want you to imagine stretching back the timeline, one hundred years, all of the wars and changes, TV, radio, rockets, jets, satellites. Back further, countries founded, toppled... all the way to two millennia ago. God took on flesh and dwelled among us, Emmanuel, God with us, in Jesus Christ. He lived a perfect life, but he died a perfect atoning, reconciling, redeeming death – and the chosen ones of God, from all ages, are the ones who receive that sprinkling! We talked about it in the last sermon. That sprinkling is a promise of resurrection, because the one with whose blood the elect are sprinkled is the one who is resurrected. Herein we hope. In that work. That work that is finished. Completed. Is there anything that can be added to this security? No. It is fully insured. Imperishable, unfading! It is going nowhere because all the work has been done. Ah, but the story goes back further, you see Jesus came to save the people whom the father gave him. How far back does it go? To the very beginning.

Paul, in the beginning of his letter to the church in Ephesus writes a parallel passage to Peter’s, and he makes explicit this eternal character: “³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love ⁵ he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

When were you chosen to go from rock to seed, from dead to alive? Before every atom you see around us was fashioned. Before everything.

When does this whole thing, planned form before everything we can comprehend was made, come to pass? Well, following Peter’s praise, at the end of time. Returning to your mental timelines I want you to just stretch them both in either direction as far as you can. You see, the story we find ourselves in, this worship story, this faith story, is not our story alone, but our story as the individual experience of the purpose of the universe.

Some folks like to celebrate how the recently completed TV show LOST had a plot arch, that events seemed to unfold in a way that clearly developed and progressed from the premiere to the finale. That’s what we have here. Well, except that the premiere had no beginning and the finale has no ending, but otherwise it is just like that. From foundation to roof this has a plan. Which sounds an awful lot like what I said about worship, but before I let the cat out of the bag completely lets go back and wrap up this passage.

Faith is the working out of eternal events in your life. Your security in your faith is not yourself, but God. He has worked this out in you as a demonstration of the rest. Seek to inspect the items in this passage. The acts of this God who is great in his mercy and who has caused

you to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an absolutely secure promise that will come, these acts must be investigated. You must know what God has done for you in order to worship. Your faith, that is your belief in the work of God for you, in the great victory of Jesus Christ over death, sin, hell, Satan and all the powers of the world by means of his atoning sacrifice for those who believe is the proof of that work. What am I saying? I'm saying that your faith is not the ingredient required for faith, but it is, as they say, the proof in the pudding. You believe because of what has been done for you. However, that faith is yours, it is part of your inheritance. Like a stage or a progression, it is essential to the whole. However, faith is also not the end, but the means of understanding the whole. We participate in the timeline because we have been grafted into the bigger story, but it has become our story. Christ's victory is our victory, his resurrection is the one we will participate in, we are the people of his salvation, we are his sons and daughters. Who keeps us secure? God, the same one who has great mercy, insures that you will be saved and this will be revealed in the end. God has fashioned his connector to you, he has called you his, he has loved you. Trust in that love. He has lovingly known you, and will keep you steadfast in his love. Relax in it for it is good. Worship in it, taking confidence that he who chose you before the foundation of the world loved you and gave himself for you, and will bring to perfection all his plans for you, to the glory of his name!

So what does faith do in the meantime? We worship. We end where we began. You see, worship is the goal of everything. We, as we gather, participate in a foretaste of the eternal worship, just as Peter does in this letter.

The end is the beginning is the end, worship. Purpose before the foundation of the world: Worship. In our faith now, Worship. In eternity, Worship. Why know God? To believe in him and worship him, in so doing we receive more than we can describe. Because of his great mercy we are born again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Where does Peter bring confidence to speak about God, by worshipping him. Where will he end up when he gives comfort, as I've let you know in the sneak peak, in worship. The Bible is a book of worship, not because it contains songs of worship (although it does), but because it points us to the God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In hearing of the things God has done, is doing, and will do, we can only believe and worship him. May this be Good News to you.

When time has come to an end and this all plays out it will be in worship. We are given a picture of the worship that occurs in a vision to John on Patmos:

^{5:11} Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹² saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" ¹³ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" ¹⁴ And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped.