

“Ready for Action”

I Peter 1:13

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To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, [2] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood:

May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

[3] Blessed 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, [4] to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, [5] who by God’s power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. [6] In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, [7] so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. [8] Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, [9] obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[10] Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, [11] inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. [12] It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

[13] Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. [14] As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, [15] but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, [16] since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”. (ESV)

HOPE

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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Introduction

Hope. It is the name of this church. It is that confident expectation in God's faithfulness that holds firm even in the midst of a storm, like a well-set mooring. It is the strength of martyrs and the strength of quiet people to live a quiet life of service and love. However, it seems to be polished by trial – hope shines in darkness in ways that are hidden to the eye by fair skies.

One of those dark moments in literature I remember best is the tension at the end of the first book of Lord of the Rings, *The Fellowship of the Ring*. All seems lost for the fellowship, but she speaks these words regarding hope:

But even now there is hope left. I will not give you counsel, saying do this, or do that. For not in doing or contriving, nor in choosing between this course and another, can I avail; but only in knowing what was and is, and in part also what shall be. But this I will say to you: your Quest stands upon the edge of a knife. Stray but a little and it will fail, to the ruin of all. Yet hope remains while all the Company is true.'

Her hope is in what she knows only vaguely. Her reliance is on that little band of heroes and her mirror, but that is not so with us. We are not dependant on humans (or dwarves or elves for that matter) to bring victory over darkness. And though we might struggle in this life, we can know that the victory is won already. However, even knowing that, doubts and fears trickle in. Life often seems like evil and darkness will win. Indeed, for some simply the discussion of the present spiritual state of America will produce language that is far from the hope that we are given in Christ to survive in dark times. Does hope gleam brighter when the world seems darker? Let us unpack our passage and find what good things the Lord has for us this morning in it.

We return again to Peter's first epistle, looking at a brief portion that contains rich truths that we need today. If hope seems distant even amongst many in the church, how much more distant is it from the culture at large? In a world that is a results driven, demanding world, it is hard to imagine a Wall Street big-shot giving anything approximating Peter's words here. These are not words that any other group in our society could hear without the danger of resorting to simply blind optimism. To the Christian however, hope is not blind optimism! It is confidence in Christ's complete keeping of the covenant; that he will do what he has promised to do. We find in our passage a single command. A command that is revolutionary. I guarantee you that this is a command that you can take to your heart and apply it no matter whether you are young or old, mature or a new Christian. I guarantee that this command is a challenge to everyone who encounters it. None of us can keep this command perfectly, but with the help of the Holy Spirit renewing you, you might know it more and more each day. So what is this command? It is to set our hope fully, completely, perfectly upon Christ. As a famous hymn puts it, my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness – however we could easily say this: my hope is built upon nothing but Christ. To put it a better way, as a more modern hymnist has written:

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
this Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
when fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
here in the love of Christ I stand.

In short. What is this sermon about: you will have one hope. Christ. To support this, let us turn back to the text. To help us out here, I'm going to go through the text a bit woodenly, because I think it will help us see the color of Peter's language. Our text has, as I've said, one command and two participles – participles are the -ing words that support the command. They are not themselves the command, but tell us about how the author sees the command being realized.

Therefore,

Girding up the loins of your mind [*ESV: preparing your minds for action*]

It captures this wonderful visual image of the ancient middle-easterner in flowing robes, hitching them up and tucking them into his belt so that he would be able to run. While preparing for action is nice, it doesn't quite get it. Any time you translate a passage, some words share some of the meaning. Imaging it like two overlapping circles (Venn Diagram) with the original word in blue, the English word in yellow. Where they overlap will be green. However parts of the blue and yellow still poke out. Some words are a one for one match, some are conceptually close – every word is generally clear enough – and when it hasn't been, say with the concept of atonement, we've invented the word. I'm saying that because I want you to trust the Bible, translators and scholars have labored hard to produce the excellent translations we have today. In this case we have an idiom in Greek, that means something like preparing for action, but it might also be colored as "unencumbering yourself for action" which is like preparing yourselves, but it lets us know that we're getting rid of the stuff that will get in the way. It is readying by removal of the stuff that will trip you up. So again picture a middle-easterner, with flowing robes getting ready to run, pulling up his robe, tucking it in the front of his belt – that's what this kind of preparing for action is. Readying yourself by removing what keeps you from freely acting.

Being Sober-minded [some translations read, being self-controlled] What does that mean? Well, both concepts hit well on the mark. The word isn't quite one we have in English, it is a positive virtue for the ancient Greek. In English, at least popularly sober means "not-drunk" and self-controlled, means "not-out of control." For the ancient Greek word this was contrasted with being drunk, but it was also used of someone who remained in control of his or her faculties even while drinking. A word that is gaining popularity in certain circles is intentional, that is always have an intent for your actions. Some translations might add, "in the spirit" but that is an addition (as noted by italics in the NASB) – I think it is clear from the context that Peter isn't just talking about spiritual things, he's talking about everything. Our lives are to be lives of complete hope, unencumbered by things that can trip us up and without anything that dulls us from living our lives in the reality of Christ.

So, Therefore, girding up the loins of your mind, being sober minded, completely [fully, wholly] hope [that's the command] on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Well, what's our command, "**completely hope on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**"

Now that we've gone through it woodenly, giving you an idea of the grammar and the vocabulary you're looking at, let us unpack it.

Hope in God alone!

As a member at Hope Presbyterian Church I see the word Hope a lot. It might even be enough that I most often say it and think it without turning my mind to why it is that way. We are told repeatedly of God's relationship as one to be hoped in, psalm 146 tells us:

146:5 Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD his God,
6 who made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them,
who keeps faith forever;
7 who executes justice for the oppressed,
who gives food to the hungry.

Romans 15 tells us that our God is a God of hope! He is a God of hope for his people. Not only that, but our reasoning for hoping in him is not ourselves, but because of Grace. Think of it as a little program for your mind: IF GRACE = TRUE THEN CHRISTIAN HAS HOPE. Paul puts it this way in a small benediction in 2 Thessalonians 2:

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

We receive our hope not because we make ourselves hope, but because hope is necessary consequent to grace. That is to say, Grace therefore Hope, that is the mark of a Christian. There is no hoping without grace. In the passage from the psalms we just read it is God's character as a covenant keeping God, who made the earth, keeps his promises and will do what he says. It is our hoping in him that is part of him receiving glory. In the following psalm it is not earthly power that delights God, "but the LORD takes pleasure in those who fear him, in those who hope in his steadfast love." If the Westminster Divines were right and the chief end of man is glorify God and to enjoy him forever, if you aren't hoping in him you are glorifying him nor, are you likely enjoying in him very much either.

Grace produces Hope. Grace results in a people that hope in God. That gives God glory. You want to glorify God. Don't go building a monument or paint a painting. It is wasteful lies if you don't Hope. To not hope in him is deny God's grace. To deny his sufficiency. To deny his keeping of his promises and his faithfulness. Hope in God alone because of his grace. This is the result of all of the constant barrage of Peter's opening, he has been building a case for God's grace. We see that because our passage starts with a THEREFORE. Therefore points backwards to the exaltation that occupied the first 12 verses of chapter 1. So, lets look really quickly over the first few verses:

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The whole opening section is about Grace: that is what God has done for you without any consideration of your merit. **God saves his people** THEREFORE HOPE! Shortened: GRACE THEREFORE HOPE! Good news.

The Gospel is Good News because God saved sinners! If you've been born again you hope in God fully! If you hope in something else, guess what? Idolatry. Hope belongs to God alone because he is the God of Hope. To hope in anything else supplants God's rightful place as the object of all hope. In particular I'm talking about the hope of salvation here. I'm not talking about the kind of hope you have that maybe the Cubs will have a winning season. This is existential hope. Now hoping the Cubs will win can warp your view of salvation hope by knocking about the focus of you life, but we are given two things to help us from having that happen. So that the passing earthly hopes doesn't interfere with The ETERNAL HOPE. If good things, interfere with God Things they become bad things. In this case even rooting for the cubs could be idolatry (now whether it is foolishness might be another matter). SO we are not just told to hope, but we are given ways to realize that hope in our lives.

Being unencumbered

Imagine trying to run wearing flowing Middle Eastern robes. There you are, in the starting block. The starter pistol is soon to be held high... and you're wearing robes. What do you do? You pull them up and tuck them in, you get ready for action. Well, what does this look like in relationship to our minds? Well, if we think about it like this: our legs are meant for running and it is the flowing garb that restricts the stride so we cannot, so too our minds were meant for contemplating God, particularly in relationship to what he has done, is doing, and will do as he works out in time that which he promised from eternity: namely the salvation of his people.

Our lives are responses to this. Our minds must be shaped by this. Where do we find this: in the Word. Our minds become unencumbered with the things contrary to their purpose not by a checklist, but by being conformed to the image (or likeness) of Christ. No longer, as Peter will write in the next verse, do we keep our deformed minds of our former ignorance, but new, reformed, conformed minds to Christ. Seek him. Seek him in his word and seek him in prayer. You will be conformed to him, you will become unencumbered of this things that get in the way of your mind doing the thing it was created to do. It is the knowledge of Christ that fuels our hope, without Christ there is no hope. If hope is the confident expectation that God will fulfill all his promises it is only in and through Jesus Christ that it can come. Just as a runner is not to let his legs atrophy (so that in girding up he might still run, otherwise why gird up?) so too we must keep our minds actively engaged in this. Exercise your minds upon Christ, he will most certainly keep you fit no matter what befalls you.

Being Sober-Minded

Being sober minded, being self-controlled, being intentional... why is this part of Christian hope that results in hope flourishing in the lives of believers? What does it even look like?

Well, firstly, as I said before it is a positive attribute. It is a discipline and self-control. However, sometimes it helps to define something negatively. In short, it is not being numbed or dumbed down by anything that causes you to lose your focus on Christ. If you think of your hoping much like a pair of binoculars. The lens must be clean, smudges and dust keep it from being able to focus on what is really important. Or wine, hence the contrast with drunkenness causes you to lose focus and control over your body. What causes you to lose your focus on Christ? Identify it. Whatever it is, combat it. That's being sober-minded. Strive to keep your life one of clarity and focus on Christ. You don't have to be a pastor or anything special. Doctors, plumbers, lawyers, tea-sellers – all can do this. It works itself out differently. It might be battling against lust, or gossip, or thoughts of ill-will... whatever it is fight it. Keep the focus clear! Let nothing numb you to the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. What is keeping the Gospel of Grace from being the most precious thing in your life? What deadens your enjoyment of God? Flee from the numbing and dumbing down of your enjoyment of God. Where do you flee to? Christ. He awaits you. Next time you realize that you are being numbed or intoxicated, so that you no longer can fully hope in God, come to him. Fling it on his throne. Plead for him to take it from you and grant you his peace!

Wholly Hoppers

We are left knowing that our fully hoping in God is because of his faithfulness to do all he has said he will do. He will save his people. Hope. Ready yourself for action through the unencumbering your mind so that you can pursue Christ; being Sober-minded so that nothing numbs you to the glory of the Christ; as the way to accomplish the imperative of our passage: set your hope fully on the Grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Unencumbered and intentionally we Hope in the Grace of Jesus Christ. A soldier readies himself for action to fight, a runner to run... we ready ourselves for action in order to hope. Therefore, Saints of Hope, hear Peter's command: "HOPE."

AMEN.