

The Inheritance

1 Peter 1:3-25 — Understanding I and II Peter Series, Part 3

By Escape the Mustard Tree

Introduction

Last time we met the people Peter wrote to. Many of them, in Asia especially, had sat under Paul's teaching for the better part of three years, and the subject Luke names for that teaching is "the kingdom of God" (Acts 19:8). When Paul said goodbye to the elders from Ephesus, he left them with a word about an inheritance: "I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

Now Peter opens his first letter to these same people, and within three verses he's writing about that inheritance. Watch how quickly he passes over the new birth. He mentions it in a single phrase and moves on without explaining it. He doesn't need to; they'd been taught it. What he spends his time on is what the new birth looks forward to.

I. Born Again to a Living Hope

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." (1 Pet. 1:3-5)

Start with the people. Is Peter writing to men and women who need to be born again, or to people who already have been? The text settles it: God "has begotten us again." It has already happened, and Peter counts himself among them.

Now notice what that new birth is *for*. Peter does not say it ends in a settled standing and stops there; he says it opens onto "a living hope," and the hope rests on Christ's resurrection. A hope, by definition, is something you don't hold yet (Rom. 8:24). The new birth points forward, to "an inheritance."

Look at what Peter tells us about that inheritance in these few lines:

- It is **incorruptible**. Nothing decays in it.
- It is **undefiled**. Nothing stains it.
- It **does not fade away**. Time does not wear it down.
- It is **reserved in heaven for you**. It's being held there, waiting.

Then Peter turns from the inheritance to the people who will receive it, and the wording shifts. The inheritance is *reserved*. The people are *kept*: "kept by the power of God through faith." God's power does the keeping, and it works through their faith, the very faith Peter is about to say will be

tested by fire. And the salvation they're kept for is "ready to be revealed in the last time." It's ahead of them, not behind.

II. Grieved by Trials, Headed for a Goal

"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls." (1 Pet. 1:6-9)

"In this you greatly rejoice." In what? In everything Peter has just named: the living hope, the inheritance, the salvation ready to be revealed (1 Pet. 1:3-5). That's what they are told to rejoice in, and they are told to do it while grieving. The trials are real, but they're "for a little while," and they're "if need be." God wastes none of it.

Peter compares their faith to gold in a furnace. Gold is tested by fire to prove what it is, and even refined gold "perishes." Their faith is worth more than that, and its testing has an outcome: it "may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." That revelation is His return. Peter names it again a few verses later (1 Pet. 1:13), and both times he points his readers' eyes ahead, to the day Jesus appears. Hebrews puts the same thing as a condition: "whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end" (Heb. 3:6).

Then verse 9 gives the destination: "receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls." The word translated "end" is *telos*. It means the end in view, the point a thing is aimed at. Faith has a goal, and Peter names it. It is not the new birth; that was verse 3, and it's already behind them. The goal is the salvation of the soul, and it is tied to the revelation of Jesus Christ.

So the opening of the letter already lays out the whole course. They *have been* born again (v. 3). They *are being* kept through a faith under testing (vv. 5-7). And they're headed toward the salvation of their souls, revealed when He is (vv. 5, 9).

III. What the Prophets Searched For

"Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into." (1 Pet. 1:10-12)

"Of this salvation." Which salvation? The one he just named: the salvation of the soul, bound up with the inheritance and revealed at His return. That is what the prophets searched into, and it is what angels "desire to look into."

What did the prophets see? "The sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow." They saw both, and they saw the order: suffering first, then glory. What they could not make out was the "what, or what manner of time," and it was revealed to them that what they were ministering was not for themselves. They were serving someone else: "not to themselves, but to us."

Paul had a name for what was hidden from them, and he wrote it to this very region. To the church at Ephesus he called it a mystery, "which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel" (Eph. 3:5-6). *Fellow heirs*. That's inheritance language. Paul goes on to say this mystery "from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God," so "that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (Eph. 3:9-10). Peter's angels stoop to look. Paul's principalities and powers, the same ones he names as the enemy in "the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12), are being told.

Paul wrote the same thing to Colosse, another town in the province of Asia: "the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations, but now has been revealed to His saints... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:26-27). The hope of glory. Peter's "living hope" and Paul's "hope of glory" point at the same thing.

So Peter is not introducing anything new here. He's reminding people who had already been taught it, by Paul in person and by letter, that what they're heading toward is the very thing the prophets strained to see and angels still watch.

IV. Gird Up Your Minds

"Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Pet. 1:13-16)

"Therefore." Everything Peter has said so far now turns into instruction. Notice where he points their hope: "upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." There's grace still coming. They've received grace already, and more is on its way, brought to them when He appears.

To "gird up the loins" was to gather up a long robe and tuck it into the belt so you could move. Peter applies it to the mind: get ready, stay sober, set your hope all the way on what's coming. Then he gives them the shape of that life: obedient children who don't slide back into "the former lusts," holy because the One who called them is holy. The command is God's own, from the law (Lev. 11:44; 19:2).

Then comes the verse that tells them why it matters:

"And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear." (1 Pet. 1:17)

The One they call Father is also the One who judges their work, and He does it "without partiality." Paul put it this way to the Corinthians: "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10). This is a judgment of the works of God's own children. Their standing isn't what's on the table; their conduct is.

So what kind of fear does Peter mean? It is not the fear that holds back from giving yourself to God completely, afraid of what He might do with you. That fear comes from the enemy: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7). The fear Peter means is the fear of sinning willfully and telling yourself it doesn't matter. It's a sober fear, and it sits right alongside joy. The psalmist knew both halves: "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him" (Ps. 103:17).

And Peter grounds it in the price that was paid:

"knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." (1 Pet. 1:18-20)

They were bought out of an aimless life, and the cost was not silver or gold. It was the blood of a Lamb God had chosen "before the foundation of the world." A redemption bought at that price is not meant to be lived carelessly.

V. The Word That Does Not Fade

"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart, having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever." (1 Pet. 1:22-23)

Ask a simple question of this verse: which part of a person does obedience purify? Peter says *souls*. That is the same word he used in verse 9. The soul is what's headed for salvation at Christ's revealing, and it is what is being purified now, as they obey the truth. The new birth came by the word (v. 23), and the purifying goes on by obeying it.

Now listen to one word that keeps coming back in this chapter. The inheritance is "incorruptible" (v. 4). They were "not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold" (v. 18). They were born again "not of corruptible seed but incorruptible" (v. 23). Peter keeps setting what decays beside what doesn't, and he finishes with a quotation from Isaiah to say it outright:

"All flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of the grass. The grass withers, and its flower falls away, but the word of the LORD endures forever." Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you. (1 Pet. 1:24-25; Isa. 40:6-8)

The psalmist used the same picture: "As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone" (Ps. 103:15-16). Everything about this present life fades. The word does not. And the word that does not fade is the word that gave them

new birth, the word they're obeying, and the word that holds out an inheritance that won't fade either.

That brings us back to where we started. Paul left these people with "the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance" (Acts 20:32). Peter ends his first chapter on that same word: "Now this is the word which by the gospel was preached to you."

Applying "The Inheritance"

Peter's first chapter keeps three things in their order, and it helps to keep them that way.

The new birth is behind them. Peter never once calls it into question or treats it as fragile; he mentions it and moves on (1 Pet. 1:3, 23).

The testing is now. Their faith is being proven by fire, their souls are being purified by obedience, and the Father who judges each one's work is watching how they conduct themselves (1 Pet. 1:6-7, 17, 22).

The inheritance is ahead. It's reserved in heaven, it doesn't fade, and it comes with "the salvation of your souls" at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 1:4-5, 9).

That's why Peter can tell grieving people to rejoice. Trials do not threaten what is behind them; they prove the faith that carries them toward what's ahead. Rejoicing in trials, living holy lives, loving the brethren fervently: none of it earns the new birth. All of it is what a life looks like when its hope is set "fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13).

Looking Ahead

Next, Peter moves into chapter two with a picture of how they're to grow: "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Pet. 2:2).

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version.