



ELECT EXILES – 1 PETER

HOPE FULLY

1 Peter 1:13

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¹³Therefore, 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. [1 Peter 1:13]

Introduction

I intended to preach the remainder of the first chapter of 1 Peter but have decided instead to focus our attention simply on verse 13. Let's listen to it again: "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."

Sometimes preaching on a single verse is necessary, because it is either so provocative or so profound—or both—that it deserves to be lingered over, to be eaten by cutting it into smaller pieces, to be savored and enjoyed the same way the meat-eaters among us might enjoy a sizzling sirloin steak.

1 Peter 1:13 is just such a verse. It has something critically important for all of us to understand about Christianity and about the Christian life. And it is this: *Christianity begins with grace, and it ends with grace, and it has hope in the middle.*

The Apostle Peter of course understands this, and his letter reflects this as well. The Christian life begins with grace. And what an amazing portrait of grace Peter paints in the opening verses of this magnificent letter!

- Chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father (v. 2)
- Set apart by the sanctifying work of God's own Holy Spirit (v. 2)
- Sprinkled with the blood of Jesus Christ (v. 2)
- Born again to a living hope (v. 3)
- Destined for an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading (v. 4)
- Guarded by God's own power for a ready salvation (v. 5)

No wonder the prophets of old searched so diligently into this grace that was to be ours in the Gospel (v. 10); no wonder even the angels themselves longed to look into this grace that would be ours in our Lord Christ Jesus (v. 12). What amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me!

But, friends, the Christian life not only begins with grace; it also *ends* with grace. There is not only past grace, the grace we see in verses 1-5 of this opening chapter; there is also *future* grace. And this kind of grace, future grace, is what we find Peter pointing to in verse 13. There is grace that will be brought to sometime in the future, "at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Future Grace at the Final Judgment

But what is this future grace to which this verse refers?

First of all, Peter says it is something that is “brought to you.” You might say it is grace that comes to you, or is even conferred upon you.¹ This is grace we don’t yet have. Jesus has it, however, and he is going to bring it to his people; it’s coming to us sometime in the future.

But when? When will this future grace brought to you? Peter says it will be brought to you “at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Right now, of course, Jesus Christ is concealed from view in heaven. One day, however, he will be revealed and will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God (1 Thess. 4:16). And just as the first Christians saw him ascend into heaven, so too he shall descend and stand upon the earth.

But when he is revealed and returns to earth, what will he then do? He will, the Bible tells us, execute God’s judgment on both the living and the dead. As countless Christians around the world affirm every Sunday in the words Apostles Creed:

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell. The third day He arose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; *from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.*

You see, God the Father is ultimately the one who judges. We’re reminded of this at several points in 1 Peter. In fact, we see in verse 17 that God the Father is the one “who judges impartially according to each one’s deed.” Or as 1 Peter 2:23 reminds us, God the Father is the one who “judges justly.” And as 1 Peter 4:5 tells us, God the Father is “ready to judge the living and the dead.”

But, as we learn in Scripture, the Father has entrusted all judgment to the Son. Jesus says in John 5: “For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man” (vv. 26-27).

Therefore, the Apostle Paul tells us in 2 Timothy that Jesus Christ is the one “who is to judge the living and the dead” (4:1). In Acts 17 we read that God the Father has “fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man who he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead” (v. 31). And as Jesus himself says in Matthew 25: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats” (vv. 31-32).

¹ Cf. Michaels, *1 Peter*, p. 56.

So, you see, then, that when Peter refers here to the revelation of Jesus Christ, he has in mind that great and glorious of event: the final judgment. And it is at this event, on this occasion, that Jesus Christ will bring this future grace to his people.

But what exactly is this future grace that will be ours at the final judgment? Peter has already described it for us earlier in this same chapter. It is there in verse 7: “praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” What is the “grace” that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ? Praise and glory and honor—that is, a *gracious verdict to be given* to the people of God when they stand before their God and Kind and Judge. This will be the “Well done, good and faithful servant,” that will sound forth from the lips of King Jesus.

Peter is going to return to this specific promise of future grace a little later on in his letter; he’s going to return to this promise, this prospect of praise at the judgment seat of Christ in order to encourage us along the way. At the beginning of Chapter 5 he will encourage the sacrificial elders among you with these words: “And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (v. 4). And to the rest of us, he has this to say: “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’ Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you” (vv. 5-6).

Unrestrained Hope

Future grace at the final judgment: This is both the prospect and promise for the Christian. But how should we respond to the prospect and promise of this future grace being brought to us by Jesus Christ at the final judgment?

Peter captures it with one word: *hope*. He says, “...set your hope fully on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” Christianity thus begins with grace, and it ends with grace, and it has hope in the middle.

Now, the way the Bible uses the word hope and the way we use the word hope are very different. Biblically speaking, hope is not wishful thinking, but confident assurance. We say things like this all the time: “Gosh, I really hope that works out.” We want it to. And it might. But there’s no guarantee. That’s human hope. Biblical hope, God-centered and God-given hope is of a very different nature. It is oriented toward the future. But it is rooted in the past. And because the past is certain, the future is just as certain. This is the nature of biblical hope.

But what does it mean to hope *fully*? I think it means two things. First, to hope fully means we are to hope *ultimately*—that is, to set our hope not upon anything in this life, but ultimately upon that which is coming at the end of life. Of course, our world is awash with invitations to place your hope in something in this life. Regrettably, many Christians have made a big business of doing the same: they too invite you to hope for some event in this life: physical healing, financial freedom, relational reconciliation. But Peter calls us to look farther out, beyond any hope in this life to the end of life, when Jesus returns. This is what it means to hope fully.

To hope fully, however, also means to hope *completely*. We are to hope entirely, not moderately; whole-heartedly, not half-heartedly; completely, not reservedly; fully, not partially. About hope, Peter is saying: Do it with complete abandonment. Don’t hold back. No restraint. No balance. Forget moderation. Do it entirely. Do it completely.

How unlike every other physical activity or bodily appetite! Every bodily appetite or physical activity must be met with moderation, otherwise it will kill you. Balance is the buzz word. And, with physical things, that's right. Do you know what the most popular New Year's Resolution is? To lose weight. And what is losing weight but largely an issue of moderation in what you eat.

You see, there are so many things in this life we cannot give ourselves entirely over to. But we can give ourselves entirely over to hope. When it comes to hope, we are to be completely immoderate and unreserved!

So we are called to live a life of hope: a robust, unrestrained and immoderate life of hope. Or, as Peter says, we are to hope fully, completely, entirely.

Help With Hope

Now, one would think that it would be easy to set our hope fully on the grace to be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ. But the reality is: it's not. Which is why, as A. W. Tozer said a number of years ago, hope in the coming of Jesus Christ is "all but dead among us."²

But why is it so hard to hope fully in this future grace? Why do we find it so difficult to fix our eyes on the final judgment? Why is it that so many of us feel so uninspired at the prospect of Christ's second coming? Why do many of us find it far easier to eagerly anticipate the outcome of the Super Bowl than the outcome of human history?

There are doubtless a variety of reasons. But perhaps the main reason is that we have not nourished ourselves on the *eternal* perspective of the Bible.

Instead, we have drunk deeply of the *temporal* perspective of the world. So much so that we've become intoxicated with the here and now, with the cares and concerns of this world. And how could we not be? Just look around you, as Harry Blamires says:

Turn to the glossy magazines, to the sensational press, to the cinema, T.V., and the like. Ask yourself what kind of a world is pictured there. Is it the world known vividly to the Christian mind? A world in which angel and demon are locked in conflict? A world packed full of sinners desperately dependent upon the mercy of God? A world amok with fundamentally powerless creatures, running hither and thither, foolishly imaging that they can do without God, and making an appalling mess of things as a result? A world voyaging like a little vessel across the sea of time, taking its passengers to their final home? A world fashioned by God, sustained by God, worried over by God, died for by God?³

² A. W. Tozer, "Why Are We Lukewarm About Christ's Return," in *The Best of A. W. Tozer: Book One* (compiled by Warren Wiersbe; Camp Hill, PA: Wing Spread Publishers, 2000), p. 56.

³ Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind* (London, SPCK, 1963), p. 73.

No, it is not. It is a self-sufficient world, a world centered in and upon itself, a world without a worry for the end of the world.

Yet this is the world in which you and I live and move and have our being. It is the world in which we've grown up, gone to school, gotten married, had children, bought houses, taken vacations, saved for retirement, and grown old. It is a highly secular world, an extremely comfortable world, a very safe world. Thus it is an intoxicating world. And it has made us all drunk.

As a result, we've lost virtually all sensitivity to the future. Or, to put it practically, many of us Bible-believing Christians are so preoccupied with hoping for things in this life that we scarcely have any reason to hope for what might be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Clearly, then, we need *help with hope*—which is just what Peter provides for us at the beginning of this verse. Did you see the help there at the beginning of verse 13? He's got two closely-related words of advice to help you and me to hope more fully in future grace at the final judgment.

The first is, as Peter says at the beginning of v. 13, to "prepare your minds for action." Now this is a fair translation of the original, but frankly a rather flat one. It doesn't bring the metaphor over into English. The original is more interesting. If you're using the ESV, you will see a footnote beside this phrase, alerting you to the fact that the Greek of this verse reads, more literally: "girding up the loins of your mind."

Now that's a nice colorful expression! What it communicates in a first-century context, where men ran around in long robes, is that one needs to take care to remove anything that might hinder ease of movement. If you're in a hurry, you don't want to be tripping all over your robe; you've got to pull it up and tuck it into your belt.

So, Peter is saying that in order to cultivate hope we need to gird up the loins of our mind. But how do you do that? You do that by bathing your mind in the Bible. You gird up the loins of your mind by tucking your thinking into the truth of God's word. You become oriented toward the future by living in the world of the Scriptures: by being at home there, by letting its horizons shape your horizons.

Peter's second tip on how to cultivate hope is similarly colorful. He says we are to be "sober-minded." Now this is obviously a first-century idiom with quite a bit of cultural currency today. And, of course, the point is fairly obvious, as well. Don't imbibe too much of the intoxicating brew of our God-belittling culture. Don't drink too deeply of the temporal perspective of this world. Otherwise, you'll begin to lose your spiritual sense for that which is ultimate, and thus you'll lose your ability to hope fully in the future grace of God.

But how do we stay sober-minded and hope in the future in such a highly intoxicating and highly secularized world? Two suggestions: First, mentally lean into the realities of death all around you. Remember that as the book of Hebrews says, "it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment" (9:26). The reality of death all around us is, if we will let it, a constant reminder of the impending future, of the coming judgment.

The second suggestion is to meditate much upon the Last Day, upon this great and glorious occasion when Jesus Christ will be revealed. I like the way the Puritan Thomas Watson puts it:

Meditate much upon the day of judgment. Feathers swim upon the water, but gold sinks into it; so, light, feathery Christians float in vanity; they mind not the day of judgment; but serious spirit sink deep into the thoughts of it.⁴

So fill your minds, friends, with thoughts of that final day.

Conclusion

In his book, *Reflections on the Psalms*, C. S. Lewis describes how surprised he was to see how the psalmists talk about God's coming in judgment. "Judgment is," as C. S. Lewis says, "apparently an occasion of universal rejoicing."⁵ The psalmists, as Lewis rightly points out, talk like this: "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity" (67:4).

Yet God's coming in judgment is not only an occasion of universal rejoicing for the people of God; it is also an object of unreserved hope. This is Peter's point in this verse: *hope fully and unreservedly in the future grace of the final judgment*.

Are you hoping in it? Or are you hoping in yourself or something else to provide you with a happy tomorrow? Are you eagerly anticipating more grace, future grace, at the final judgment? Or are you relying upon your own efforts to secure your right standing before God on that day?

Christianity begins with grace, and it ends with grace, and it has hope in the middle. Our Christian lives are thus hemmed in before and behind by grace—past grace and future grace. And you and I live in the middle, and are to live lives of unreserved hope, as we await our "blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:13).

Amen.

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⁴ Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1997), p. 315.

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1986), p. 9.