

Armagh Baptist Church Bible Studies
Wednesday 2nd December 2009 – 8:00pm

1 Peter 1:3-5 – The Benefits of being Born Again

Introduction

In our introductory study of 1 Peter we answered the following questions:

Who wrote the Letter? – It was the Apostle Peter.

Who did he write it to? – Believers in rural areas of Northern Turkey.

But where did he write it from?

See 1 Peter 5:13. It mentions 'Babylon' – This is a cryptic name for Rome. Rome was the Capital City of a World Empire at that time – the Roman Empire. Rome was the Capital of the Empire in which God's people were scattered as exiles / strangers – a bit like the OT Babylonian Exile. 'Babylon' was the City doomed for destruction according to the prophecy of Revelation (See Rev.14:8 and ch.18). This is probably another cryptic reference to Rome, or possibly to the old world order in general. N.B. Rev.18:20 '*God has judged her for the way she treated you...*' Roman persecution of the Christians was about to break out under Nero. So Peter is writing from the Capital City of Rome just before this happened. That brings us to our next question...

When did he write this letter?

The Great Fire of Rome happened in AD64. Nero is believed to have started it maliciously so that he could clear away vast swathes of poor dwellings or slums in the City to make way for his new development plans. He was said to have 'fiddled while Rome burned' and then callously blamed the fire on the Christians as his scapegoats. This allowed him to unleash the fiercest persecution on the Christians they had ever seen. One of the early Church fathers, Origen, says that: "*Peter was crucified at Rome with his head downwards, as he himself had desired to suffer*". In fact other historians tell us that both Peter *and* his wife were martyred at Rome towards the end of this period of persecution. Paul was also crucified near Rome under Nero's persecution. The earliest mention that we have of Peter's death is in a letter to the Corinthians from Clement, who was bishop of Rome from AD 88-97. He mentions the suffering and martyrdom of Peter *and* Paul in Rome.

So we can conclude that Peter wrote First & Second Peter from Rome just before the outbreak of Nero's persecution in AD64 – (N.B. 2 Peter 1:12-15). So AD63 is the probable year of writing. This was just 30 years after the crucifixion of Jesus. Peter's experiences of Jesus would have been still very fresh in his mind. He was now probably around 60 years old.

What did he write about?

As I said last time, because of what these Christians in Northern Turkey were about to face in terms of suffering and persecution Peter wrote about '**Hope in a Hopeless World**'. So here in vs.3-5 he gets down to his theme straight away. In 1 Peter 3:15 we are told as Christians that we should always be ready to give a reason to those who ask us, '*for the hope that we have within us*' - well here in ch.1:3-5 Peter gives us some answers.

Peter reminds us here of four things that God has given us as believers:

1. A New Birth (v.3)

'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth...'

Sometimes, as evangelicals, we can be accused of always talking about being 'born again.' Some people say to us, sure it's only found in one chapter of the Bible – John ch.3 – but they're wrong. It's found here as well! 'Born again' is a term that has come in for bad press over the years: e.g. Mike Tyson, the boxer, claimed at one point to be 'born again' and yet he famously bit someone's ear off in the ring, among other shameful things. The singer Bob Marley claimed to be born again too. And yet at other times they didn't seem to lead very wholesome lives. So our critics will point to people like these to try to discredit the whole idea of being born again! 'Born again' is a term that is bandied about by many people. It is often dragged through the mud. So much so, that at times we're almost ashamed of the term! But we shouldn't be, because it's a wonderful term! It's a Biblical term. And because it's Biblical, we shouldn't be afraid to use it. But we need to quickly go on to explain what it means (remember 1 Peter 3:15).

- To be born again – **is a miracle!** God performs it by the power of his Holy Spirit, the moment we trust in Jesus (John 1:12).
- It's a miracle that God works in a life **out of his mercy** and grace. No-one deserves to be born again. In fact we deserve the opposite, we deserve death (Romans 6:23a). But God gives us new and eternal life as a free gift instead (Romans 6:23b).
- It is not man-made. You can't make yourself be born again. It is not turning over a new leaf or simply becoming religious (Romans 3:20)
- It is the old sinful man being put to death, and a whole new spiritual life beginning (2 Corinthians 5:17). It's a fresh start (Galatians 2:20)
- So if we have this new birth tonight, if we know we've been born again, then we should be the most thankful people on earth! We should be echoing those words of Peter: '**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ because he has given us new birth!**'

The second thing God has given us is not only the new birth, but...

2. A Living Hope (v.3)

*'...He has given us new birth into a **living hope** through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.'*

When you are born again, you are obviously a new born spiritual baby (See 1 Peter 1:23-2:2).

You've got new spiritual life – you've started a whole new way of life – everything is absolutely new! You feel as if you have just started to live for the very first time! (See John 10:10).

Peter explains that new found feeling here by saying you've received a new birth into a living hope! – You're alive to God; not dead in sin anymore!

You've got hope now; you're not lost in despair anymore!

Remember the theme of this letter? '**Hope in a Hopeless World!**'

What grounds do we have for this real living hope?

The answer is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead!

Jesus died on the cross and dealt with our **sin**.

He rose again from the tomb and defeated **death**.

Sin and death are the root causes of despair and hopelessness in our world today. But Jesus has dealt with them both! He's given us a living hope based on a sure foundation! So I trust that each one of us here tonight have this real hope and certainty in our hearts?

He has given us a new birth, he has given us a living hope, but thirdly He has given us...

3. An Eternal Inheritance (v.4)

*'...and into an **inheritance** that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven **for you!**'*

So you've been born again. You've got this living hope to help you to face life's problems now. But listen to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:12-19. N.B. v.19 – *'If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men!'* (NIV) or *'...we are of all men most miserable!'* (AV) Being born again doesn't just give us hope to help us face life in this world, it also, and perhaps more importantly, gives us tremendous benefits for the life that is still to come as well (look at v.4).

- You've been born again into God's family – you're His child.
- So you'll share in the family inheritance.
- What is this inheritance?
- According to 1 Corinthians 2:9 there is a lot we don't know about it.
- But we can say it's something that is kept in heaven (Matt 6:19-21)
- It's something that's waiting there 'for you'! (John 14:1-2) – a place! (2 Timothy 4:6-8) - an eternal reward!

- It's something that can never lose its value! (Matt 6:19-21).

I said that one of the reasons why I was starting to look at this book with you was because of the tremendous lack of hope that there is in Western European Society since *'the credit crunch'* began to bite, and since the recession began to set in. I called this series, 'Hope in a Hopeless World!' Well here is an investment that is rock solid! We used to say 'as safe as houses' – but sadly that's not the case anymore! But this investment is...

- It's kept **in heaven**, so it's not subject to the rise and fall of stocks and shares in the market places and trading floors of this world!
- It's kept in heaven **for you**, so it can't be snatched away or stolen by anyone else – it's for you!
- It's something that can never **lose its value**. Just yesterday we put our house on the market. The price we are asking is £100,000 less than it was worth two years ago!! It's still worth about £35,000 more than we paid for it, so we're not into the dreaded 'negative equity' but nevertheless, if someone broke into your home and stole £100,000 in cash you would certainly feel it – you'd be heart-broken. But that's money we never had. It was only value on paper. What's kept in heaven for us, is something that will never lose its value. Thieves can't break in and steal. Moth and rust can't cause it to decay, or devalue. What God has in store for each one of us, is an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. So it's not a bit of wonder Jesus told us not to store up our treasure on earth, but to lay up real treasure in heaven – that's where it really counts!

So are you still holding on to the passing benefits and treasures of this world, or have you really invested in heaven? Are you putting your energies into things down here that are going to stand the test of time, and are going to continue to bear fruit in eternity! It's time to reassess our values, isn't it? Don't waste your life running after things that aren't going to last in eternity! Make sure you're counting on that inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade that's kept in heaven for you; Don't be counting on the stocks and shares and failed investments that are all so full of holes down here!

So He's given us a new birth, He's given us a living hope, He has in store for us an eternal inheritance, and fourthly and finally, he has given us...

4. A Certain Salvation (v.5)

*'...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.'*

We have just thought about that *eternal inheritance* that is **kept** in heaven for **you**. But you know, according to v.5, if you're born again, then we can

actually look at it the other way around: God is **keeping you** for your inheritance in heaven!

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Yes, there are great things kept in heaven for you; but they wouldn't be much good to you, if at the very last moment in your life you did something that blew it all, that meant you could never go to heaven to enjoy your inheritance! What if you could lose your salvation? Praise God, you can't!

Here in v.5 is the lovely truth that God is actually **keeping you for heaven**, as much as he's **keeping heaven for you!**

And God is able to keep you going on as a Christian:

- 'You are shielded (kept) by God's power' (v.5)
- It's the same power that raised Jesus from the dead that is keeping you for heaven, if you're truly born again.
- If you're truly born again, you can never lose your salvation!
- You are saved, if you've trusted in Christ – from sin's penalty.
- You are being saved, as you go on in faith – from sin's power.
- You will be saved, in the end – from sin's presence – when Jesus is revealed!

Conclusion:

We have an awful lot to be thankful for tonight if we're saved:

- If we're truly born again.
- If we've experienced this miracle of the new birth.
- If we have this living hope, not just in this world, but for the life to come too.

Let me close by reading to you from Jude vs.20-25:

*'But you, dear friends, build yourselves up in your most holy faith
and pray in the Holy Spirit.*

**Keep yourselves in God's love as you wait for the mercy of
our Lord Jesus Christ to bring you to eternal life.**

Be merciful to those who doubt; snatch others from the fire and save them;

*To others show mercy, mixed with fear
– hating even the clothing stained by corrupted flesh.*

**To him who is able to keep you from falling
and to present you before his glorious presence
without fault and with great joy**

*– to the only God our Saviour be glory, majesty, power and authority,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
before all ages, now and for evermore.*

Amen!

Heaven's kept for you; God can keep you for heaven!