

When I was 20 (and yes, I can still remember it!) I was at Liverpool university and member of a Christian student group. We went on a mission among British holiday-makers in Venice, telling them about the Lord when they were more willing to talk because they were away from the stresses of everyday life at home. Anyway, three of us went by train because there wasn't enough room in the mini-bus. Part of the route took us through Switzerland into Italy, and we went through the Gotthard Tunnel, about 9 miles long. So imagine a tunnel from here to the other side of Lewes, or to Newhaven. A long tunnel.

It was early morning and the darkness of this tunnel seemed to go on forever. But eventually we got to the end and we came out into brilliant morning sunshine and the scenery was beautiful. High mountains, deep green valleys with a river of crystal clear water meandering along the side of the track. Truly beautiful. I really enjoyed the **journey**, but I was looking forward to arriving in Venice – I'd heard so much about it.

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And you know, I think that's a good picture of what the Christian **life** is all about. God's brought us out of a dark place, and he's taking us on a journey to a **wonderful** place, but he's letting us experience a foretaste of beauty and glory on the way. Praise **God**. And that's what we're going to be thinking about this morning.

Let's read from Peter's first letter, blue Bible page 1217, starting at the beginning of the letter.

We're going to concentrate mainly this morning on verses 3-5, but first we need to ask the question '**Why listen to Peter?**' Who **was** he? Why is what he has to say so important to **us**, 2000 years on?

Peter was one of the men chosen by **Jesus** to be a disciple. He was a fisherman when Jesus said to him and his brother, '*Come, follow me ... and I will make you fishers of men.*' Mark 1:17. And from that time on – some 30 years by the time he wrote this letter – that was what Peter was **doing**. He **learnt** from all the miracles he saw the Son of God do; he **learnt** from all he heard the Son of God **say**. In Matthew 16, when Jesus asked his disciples who he was, it was **Peter** who said, '*You are the **Christ**, the Son of the living God.*'

Peter was one of the three who witnessed Jesus' transfiguration in Matthew 17, and Peter had a glimpse of Jesus' **glory**. But Peter was the one who **denied** Jesus when he saw him arrested and led away. Peter was **there** at that darkest time, but he was also there when news came that Jesus had risen from the dead - Peter **ran** to the tomb to see.

Jesus spoke to Peter in a special way and gave him his special ministry: he said, *'I tell you that you are **Peter**, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.'* Matthew 16:18. And after Jesus had risen he said to Peter, *'Feed my lambs. ... Take care of my sheep. ... Feed my sheep.'* John 21:15,16,17. Peter was told by Jesus to feed his sheep, the sheep of his pasture, his followers, his people.

And that's what this letter from Peter has been doing ever **since** – feeding Jesus' sheep. Jesus didn't tell Peter to feed his sheep during the 30-odd years on earth – Jesus intended Peter to feed his people **forever**, until Jesus comes **again**. On this rock Jesus will build his church. So as well as the churches mentioned in verses 2 and 3, Peter's words will feed Jesus' flock in every **place** in every **generation**.

At the beginning of this letter, Peter writes, *'Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,'* Peter was there, with Jesus, the Son of the living God, he **heard** him, he **saw** him, he was **moved** by him, he was **changed** by him. So much so that in the book of Acts we hear Peter say, *'We cannot **help** speaking about what we have seen and heard.'* Acts 4:20. We **have** to listen to him don't we? It'd be foolish **not** to, wouldn't it? Listen to the man who was **there**. I often wonder what it must have been like to **be** there with Jesus. How **important** it is that we read the words of these men who **were** there.

Just as a point of interest. Remember we did a series in Acts not so long ago? And remember in chapter 16 that Paul was prevented by the Holy Spirit from going to certain areas but didn't give a reason **why**? Well, here we see those very **areas** listed in verses 2 and 3. I think the Lord wanted **Peter** to spread the news there. God always has his reasons for opening and closing doors. If you're a child of God, never despair when a door closes – God has a purpose for you **elsewhere**. Have **you** experienced that yet? If you're his, you **will**.

So, we listen to **Peter** because we weren't **there** to experience the tremendous things Jesus said and did, but he **was**. And when the Holy Spirit was poured out at Pentecost, Peter received **power** to share those things with the world. 2

So let's move onto what he has to say to us in the rest of this passage. He begins, verse 3, *'Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!'* **Always** an excellent place to start! Praise be to God! Peter encourages us to give praise to God. He's writing here to Christians who've been scattered around the **world** and who're being **persecuted**. We may be asking ourselves 'What've they got to praise God **about**?' What does **Peter** know? Does he really think these people can praise God in their situation? Of course he **does** understand what they're going through – he was no stranger to persecution, beatings, imprisonment himself. Praise be to God,' he says. But **why**? **Why praise God?**

These verses tell us reasons why Christians – **whatever** they're going through – should praise God. Praise be to God for new **birth**; praise God for new birth into a living **hope**; praise God for an **inheritance**.

Firstly let's read verse 3. *God 'has given us new birth into a living hope.'*

And of course the first thing we have to notice is that this new birth is **given** by God – it's what he's **given** us. And **all** the things we're thinking about this morning, and **everything** to do with our lives as Christians are **given** by God. The lives we have as Christians are a work of **God**. What we enjoy as children of God is given and **received**, not worked for and achieved. It's a gift of God. *'It's by **grace** you have been saved,* and it's by **grace** that you have faith in God, and it's by **grace** you'll know eternal life in our Lord Jesus Christ. God has **given** us new birth. Like when you're born **physically**, you don't think that you earned the right to be delivered! It's a **gift** of your parents. Same when you're born **again** – it's a **gift** of your Heavenly Father. Nothing earned, nothing achieved – it's **given** and received.

Praise be to God – he's given us new birth. He's given us a new life. We're born again. The old has gone the new has come, the Bible says. Whenever a baby's born there's rejoicing and happiness, isn't there, because it's a **miracle**! Every time new life's created it's a **miracle**, isn't it? Think of all the different things that have to come **together** for a child to be born perfect. That **we** can be instruments in the creation of a new life is a **miracle**.

And it must be the same when someone's born **again**, mustn't it? New **life**'s created, not physically but **spiritually** – it's a **miracle**! Just **think** of all the work that's been done on by God through his Spirit in the **mind**, in the **heart**, in recreating a new **person**, a **renewed** person, a changed **life**.

If you're in **Christ**, you've been given new **birth**. It's a **miracle**! We often **pray** for miracles, don't we, and we're **sad** when we don't see **more** happening. God **does** answer our prayers and works miracles, but there's no **greater** miracle than new birth. Angels in heaven **rejoice** when a sinner asks for forgiveness and new birth is given. This is the **greatest** miracle. Someone living a life **away** from God, facing **judgement** for their sins and eternity **apart** from the love of God, that they've been given new birth into a life **enjoying** the **love** and **goodness** and **glory** of God in Christ **forever**. Brought **out** of the tunnel of darkness into the **glorious** sunshine of new birth. What an amazing miracle! Your new **life** is a miracle.

Do you feel the **wonder** of the miracle that's happened in you? If you've had your sins forgiven through Jesus' death and resurrection, you're a **miracle** of God's grace and power! Do you feel it **still**? It may be a long **time** since you were given new birth – has it **lost** some of its sparkle, some of its wonder? We need to remind ourselves of these things again. We need to **rejoice** and praise God that we're **wonderfully** remade by God.

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Secondly: Praise be to God, because he's '*given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*' The Christian's born again **into a living hope**.

The Roman author Cicero said "While there's life, there's hope." In the world, for people living without God, hope **dies** when this life ends. People say they hope against **hope** that something will happen, but that just shows that they don't really **expect** it to happen. Hope in **this** life isn't a guarantee that it will happen. We're just **hoping**.

But **Peter** speaks about **certain** hope, **sure** hope, a **living** hope. **Why**? Because **this** hope has its foundation on something that's already **happened**. Because Jesus rose from the dead, and now lives in heaven praying for his people, this hope that Peter's talking about is **certain**.

If you're placing your hope in anything other than **Jesus**, your hope will **die**. If you place your hope in other **people**, it'll **die**. If its in your **friends** or even members of your **family**, it'll **die**. Where do **you** place your hope? Is it in **wealth**? Is it in **possessions**? Is it in fitness and **health**? Is it in **status** and **popularity**? Your hope will **die**! There's only **one** living hope and that's in Jesus as Lord and Saviour. **Why**? Because he's risen from the **dead**. He's the only man to **ever** have taken up life again.

He's the **only** one who offers **living** hope. If your hope is in **anyone** or any **thing** else, it'll **die**, because for you it's as if Jesus has **not** risen from the dead. If your hope is in other **people** or your own **abilities**, you're **denying** the relevance of Jesus' resurrection. For **you** he never **rose**, for you he's **not** alive. For **you** – if your hope is **not** in Jesus – there **is** no living hope.

Imagine Peter on the night they **arrested** Jesus. Peter had such **high** hopes because of what Jesus had done and what he'd **said** – he was going to bring in the kingdom of **God**. But here he was, **arrested, beaten, crucified, killed**. All the hope Peter placed in Jesus was **dashed, dead**. But then 3 days later the women came and said that Jesus had **risen**. Jesus was **alive**! He ran to the tomb to see for himself. It was **true**. Jesus was **alive**! Peter's hope was **alive** again. There's **living** hope, because Jesus is **alive**. "In Christ **alone** my hope is found" we sing, don't we?

Praise be to God, because God *'has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.'* Jesus **died**, he rose **again**, he's living **now**. Do you **believe** that? He's Peter's **living** hope, he's **our** living hope, he's our **certain** hope of salvation. Why is it certain? Because Jesus rose again. This **guarantees** that we will rise **with** him.

The world **hopes** for salvation, doesn't it? It **hopes** that all its worries and fears will end. It **hopes** for deliverance one day. It **hopes** that things will all turn out right in the end. But that's all it **is** – a hope. And like all **other** hopes which are founded on man and his achievements, it'll be **dashed**.

The **only** hope of salvation is in Jesus. If we **trust** in Jesus, if we believe that he **died** for our sins, that he took the punishment **we** deserve for our sins, that he rose again and defeated **death**, if we're born **again** in and through **Jesus**, then we have salvation. We're **saved**. We have living and certain hope because Jesus rose from the dead. Praise be to God.

If we go back to my picture; we've been brought out of the tunnel of darkness and been given new birth, we're now experiencing some of the light and beauty and glory of God and what we see gives us **hope** for when we reach our final destination. But we're not there **yet**. Let's read on – there's **more**. [Read v 4, 5]

God has given us new birth **into an inheritance**. And it's an inheritance that will never **change**, it'll never perish, spoil or fade:

Verse 4 tells us that it's **kept** for us by God – it'll never change: verse 5 tells us that **we're** kept by God **for** it – it'll **remain** our inheritance. **Nothing** can take away the inheritance of God's people, because **he** looks after the inheritance, **and** he looks after God's **people**, those who'll **receive** that inheritance. How **great** is that for **you** if you're a Christian this morning? Let's look closer.

Throughout the Old Testament we read of the inheritance that God will give to his people. And the inheritance of his people Israel is the **land** he's going to give them. God says to **Abraham** in Genesis 15:18 '*To your descendants I give this land,*' ; **Moses** says in Deuteronomy 12:10 '*you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God is giving to you as an **inheritance,***' ; and when **Joshua** led God's people into the Promised land, we read '*Joshua took the entire land, just as the Lord had directed Moses, and he gave it as an **inheritance** to Israel.*' Joshua 11:23. God promised an **inheritance** to his people, the Promised **Land**, which they **received**.

But then we find that the people of God spoil their inheritance, don't they? They choose to go their **own** way, they follow **other** gods, they don't do what **God** wants them to do. They **spoil** their inheritance. Their **sin** ruins their inheritance from God. They **perish** in their sin. The land is **spoilt** by their sin. Their relationship with God in the land **fades**. **Their** inheritance perished, spoilt and faded.

God has given his people new birth into an inheritance that can **never** perish, spoil or fade. The world **around** us may be ruined, it may be corrupted by the sin of man, the **greed** of man, the **selfishness** of man; but the inheritance comes for those who have been born again through the mercy and grace of God in the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus; it's **given** by God, and verse 4 tells us that it's also **kept** by God for us in heaven. If **he's** keeping it for us – who can take it **away** from us?

It's like a little child giving their precious teddy bear to their mam or dad for safekeeping, while they go off to play; the parent will look after it until the child needs it again. God looks after **our** inheritance until we **need** it. He keeps our inheritance **safe**. In Matthew 6:20, Jesus talks about '*treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.*' An inheritance kept in heaven for you, if you're a Christian.

But it's no use having an inheritance if you're not going to **be** there to **enjoy** it. There's no point that parent looking after their child's teddy bear, if they're not coming back. God's keeping the **inheritance** for us in heaven; but he's also keeping **us** so that we'll **enjoy** that inheritance in heaven. Verse 5 tells us that we *'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're shielded by God's **power**, and we have the picture here of being kept under **guard** in protective custody, kept **safe** from our enemies until we receive our inheritance.

Our inheritance is kept safe in heaven for us, but **we're** kept until that day we enter into our inheritance. **Think** about it. Our inheritance is **certain**, and God will make sure that we get to enjoy it in heaven. It doesn't depend upon **us** to get there, God will **shield** us and **protect** us and **keep** us for that day when we receive our inheritance in full. Praise be to God.

Our inheritance is **safe** because Jesus has risen from the dead and is alive. Our inheritance is **guaranteed**, if we're born again, if we're **his**, if we're in **Christ**. Because our inheritance is **in Christ**. The life of the Christian is hidden in Christ, Colossians 3:3 says, *'your life is now hidden with Christ in God.'* Galatians 2:20 says, *'I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who **loved** me and gave himself **for** me.'*

The Christian is in Christ, and **Christ** lives in the Christian. What we **have** is in Christ. Our **salvation** is in Christ. Our **faith** is in Christ. Our new **birth** is in Christ. Our living **hope** is in Christ. Our **inheritance** is in Christ Ephesians 1:3 tells us God *'has blessed us in the heavenly realms with **every** spiritual blessing in **Christ**.'* Colossians 2:3 says that *'**in Christ** are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.'* And Philippians says that *'God will meet **all** your needs according to his glorious **riches** in **Christ**.'* Do I need to go on?

Our inheritance, the inheritance kept for us in heaven is in our resurrected Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. It's in Christ. Are **you** in Christ? Do **you** know anything of these things? Have **you** experienced the new birth given by God? Are **you** driven by the living hope which will be revealed when Jesus comes again to take his people to a new earth, like we read right at the beginning of our meeting? Do you understand that you'll be **kept** for that day, **shielded** by God's power, the power that raised Jesus from the dead, until he comes again? Then praise be to **God! Praise** him!

If **not** – **why** not? Why miss **out** on all these wonderful things?

God **wants** you to know these things. **Turn** to him and be **saved**. Be born **again** into this living hope and into an inheritance that can never **perish**, spoil or fade.

Salvation is prepared, it's complete, Jesus won the **victory** over sin, death and the devil when he rose from the dead.

We wait for Jesus to be revealed in the last time. This is our final destination, this is what we're looking **forward** to, what we're **hoping** for, our **inheritance**. There's more to come, **Christ** is to come, he's coming to restore and renew **all** things, our living hope is **real** if it's placed in the Lord, the one who was raised from the dead. Paul writes in Colossians 1:27 that for Christians '*Christ in you, [is] the hope of glory.*' The full glory of salvation will be revealed when Jesus comes **again**. And our hope will be realised. And our inheritance will be enjoying life in all its **fullness** with our Lord and Saviour forever.

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Where are **you** on the journey – are you still travelling through the dark tunnel which seems to go on forever? Or has God brought you out into the sunshine and warmth of a relationship with him? If you're a Christian, you're experiencing a foretaste of what's to come, but what you know **now** is **nothing** compared to the glory you'll enjoy when Jesus comes again, and takes you to that wonderful inheritance, life for eternity in heaven with God. Praise be to God.

Where are **you** on this journey?