

“OUR LIVING HOPE THROUGH CHRIST JESUS”

1 PETER 1:3-7, 13-16

AUGUST 3, 2008

MEMORY VERSE

“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.” 1

Peter 1:3

INTRODUCTION

Since we only have one life to live on this earth, it becomes crucial how we choose to live that life on a daily basis. If we give ourselves over to the things of this world, then we truly will live a meaningless existence here on earth. We will have squandered our opportunity to live meaningfully and will pass into eternity with no lasting imprint on this life. On the other hand, if we live for the things that will last forever (God’s Word, men’s souls, our character, etc.) then our lives will be eternally etched upon the pages of time and we will “still speak” after our earthly sojourn is finished. The philosopher, William James, put it well when he said, “The greatest use of life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.”

Apparently, the Apostle Peter was keenly interested in this very issue and he wrote an entire letter (1 Peter) that focused on the importance of living a life that counts for eternity. Peter composed this letter, sometime between 64 and 68 A.D., to encourage Christians who would likely face trials and persecution under the Roman Emperor Nero. The author, knowing that persecution was imminent, wanted to warn these believers concerning what lay ahead and to provide them with words of encouragement that would help them to face this opposition. Peter exhorted these Christians to steadfast endurance and exemplary behavior. Throughout this letter, he carefully prescribed the attitudes and conduct designed to bring honor to the One they represented. The book of 1 Peter gives a theology of practical exhortation and comfort for believer’s daily needs.

In the opening remarks of his letter (1 Peter 1:3-7), Peter thanks God for the salvation we have through Jesus Christ and explains to his readers that trials and persecutions will refine their faith. He goes on in verses 13-16 to exhort these believers to live holy lives. Holiness means being totally devoted, or dedicated to God. Their lives were to be set aside for His special use and separated from sin and its influence. They were to be set apart and different because of God’s qualities reflected in their daily living.

The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, said, “Little faith will take your soul to heaven, but great faith will bring heaven to your soul.” It is not enough that we long for heaven during times of suffering, for anybody can do that. Peter urged his readers to exercise love, faith and rejoicing in their daily living, so that they might experience some of the glory of heaven in the midst of their current suffering. The truths and principles reflected in this letter still apply to Christians today who are facing trials and persecution. As we go through these difficult times, we must learn to lean heavily on God’s grace. For today’s readers, as well as Peter’s original audience, this letter offers a “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”

LEARNING FROM GOD’S WORD

1. Why does Peter use the term ‘living hope’? What does he say grows out of being “born again to a living hope”? (1 Peter 1:3-5)
2. In 1 Peter 1:4, the Greek word for “inheritance” suggests both a present and future reality. In verse 4, Peter describes this inheritance as “imperishable, undefiled and unfading.” In your own words, describe what this means? How do you relate this to your life today?
3. Peter says we should respond to the gifts of verses 3-5 with rejoicing. However, verse 6 explains why we sometimes fail to respond to God’s grace in this way. According to this verse, why are we sometimes not joyful? What are two reasons why God permits Christians to face these times of trouble in their lives (1 Peter 1:7)?
4. The challenge in Peter’s letter is to grow in Christlikeness. According to 1 Peter 1:13-16, how is this accomplished? From the five commands Peter gives in verses 13-15, how would you define “holy”?

1. In 1 Peter 1:6-7, it states that we might suffer various trials to test the genuineness of our faith. This will bring praise and glory to God. Under what fiery trials or circumstances has your faith become more genuine? Explain how God used these circumstances to grow your faith and trust in Him?
2. Peter refers to being “born again,” or salvation, throughout this passage as a central difference between Christians compared to the world. What tensions have you experienced because of this difference? How does God’s gift of salvation help you cope with these tensions?
3. What are some practical ways in which you can be less worldly and more eternally focused? What changes do you need to make in order for you to become more heavenly minded?
4. What are the one or two points that impacted you most from this study? How will you respond to this in your life today?

GOING DEEPER

Everything we love, everything we value, everything eternal is in heaven. Nevertheless, the Church in this century has tended to be self-indulgent and in many respects lost their heavenly perspective. Too

many do not want to go to heaven until they've enjoyed all the world can offer. Only when all earthly pursuits are exhausted, or when age and sickness hamper their enjoyment, are they ready to think about heaven.

The Bible refers to heaven around 550 times. The Hebrew word translated "heaven" (shamayim) is plural and literally means "the heights." The Greek word translated "heaven" (ouranos) refers to that which is raised up and lofty.

Read 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 4 and Revelation 21-22:7. What do these passages reveal to us concerning heaven? What makes heaven so precious to us?