

Before Time & Eternity

1 Peter 1:20-21

Series: *True Grace - 1 Peter*

Introduction: Take your Bibles and join me in 1 Peter 1, 1 Peter chapter 1. Hope in future realities are the engines which drive present practice. So, if you made any New Year's resolutions you are essentially shaping current practice differently than it was last year because you want a different result in some area of life. Your hope in a future reality which looks different than a past reality drives you forward in resolve to this new practice.

But the reverse can be true as well. If hope is lost in the future being better than the past, then present practice digresses into doing the bare minimum to survive the day. This is what happened to the residents of Flagstaff, Maine, in 1950. Their small town was in a fertile river valley where it had been started over 100 years before. But the expanse of the need for electricity put their small town in the crosshairs of demise for the sake of progress. A hydro-electric dam was being built which would dam up their river and flood their valley. By edict of the State government there was nothing they could do to stop it. And so, while the dam was being built the residents continued to live and work in their town. But all repairs and improvements to their town stopped. No houses were painted, no landscaping was improved or even really kept up with. The wind of pride had been knocked out of the sails of the small town because there was no hope for their future. What was the point of maintaining or fixing a home that within a year would be 30 feet under water? As one man spoke of the town's predicament he was heard saying – "Where there is no faith in the future, there is no power in the present."

Hope in future realities inform and shape and ultimately propel our present practice. That is what is at stake in 1 Peter 1. We have been a few weeks removed from this wonderful section of Scripture, but you will remember that Peter is proclaiming to us and exhorting us with true grace – the grace which is a result of the great mercy of God at work in us to cause us to be born again. If you know Christ through saving faith, then you know this true grace. And if you know this true grace then you have taken to heart the three commands of this paragraph in 1 Peter 1. In verse 13 we were called to set our hope fully on the grace that will be brought to us at the future revelation of Jesus Christ. And in 15 we were called by Peter to be holy in all our conduct because the God who called us is holy. And then in verse 17 we were exhorted to walk in our exile here on earth with a fear of God that flows out of a proper understanding of our being redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. This morning we are going to turn our attention to verses 20-21 which serve as Gospel explanation for the Gospel exhortation we have just received. These verses are serving as the Gospel rudder which is to steer the Gospel ship of

Christian living. So, maybe you are familiar with reading Paul's writing in the New Testament. He is prone to give you three chapters of Gospel indicative, or explanation, before he goes on to give you three chapters of Gospel imperative, or command. Well, Peter gets right into the commands which flow out of the true grace of the Gospel. But Gospel truths are always close at hand for Peter. You can never read too many verses before you bump into a further explanation of some Gospel truth. That is what is happening here in verses 20-21. Having commanded us to hope and to holiness and to fear – he now roots our tree in the rich soil of Gospel truth. To give some context to our verses I want to start reading back in verse 17 and we will read through verse 21. *Read 1:17-21.*

Did you notice that there is no command in our 2 verses – simply further exposition of the greatness of Christ and His work on our behalf. We are told that this Christ who shed his precious blood as a spotless lamb without blemish was the Christ foreknown before the foundation of the world and now made known to us in these last times. These two Gospel truths steer the rudder of our lives with hope in future grace. That is what is at issue here in these two verses – true hope which flows out of true grace. So, what hope can we really have in this world, and how does that hope really compel us to walk in obedience to the Gospel imperatives of being holy and walking in fear? Well, the hope that compels us is wrapped around the fact that Christ was chosen and that Christ was made known.

I. Christ was Chosen

- a. These are the two main statements about Christ in these 2 verses – that Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world, and that Christ was made manifest in the last times for your sake. So, what does it mean to say that Christ was foreknown before the foundation of the world? We are obviously talking about the foreknowledge of God here because it was before anything else was created – before the foundation of the world. We talked a bit about this foreknowledge of God when we worked through verse 2 of this chapter. We are told there that we are elected unto God according to the foreknowledge of the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, and for obedience to the Son. There are really only two options here as to what it can mean to say that Christ was foreknown by God. It can either mean that God simply looked down the passageways of time and saw that Christ would be the redeemer of His people by giving his life as a spotless sacrifice for sin. Or, it means that God chose Christ as the fulfillment of his plan of redemption before he ever spoke one word of Creation.
- b. If this is a simple foreknowledge of being able to see what is going to happen, then this empties these verses of their hope giving truth. So, how is it possible to be encouraged by the thought of God the Father not having a plan of redemption but just seeing ahead into time that the Son would eventually step forward and provide that salvation? That actually leaves us pretty hopeless about our own

salvation because it empties God of His saving power. If his plan of salvation hinges upon just looking forward and seeing how it is all going to work out, then God becomes a willy-nilly, unprepared, and reactive deity whose plans are open to change.

- c. But if this foreknowledge of Christ means that God the Father chose Christ before the foundation of the world to be our redeemer from sin, then we have true and lasting hope. And as we saw with verse 2, this is what foreknowledge means when it relates to God. When God foreknows something, he doesn't just see it coming. He is God, so He sees all things coming – He knows ahead of time all that will happen in His universe. So, something more is meant in the Scriptures when it makes a point to tell us that God foreknew something. It means that God foreordained something. That he chose for something to happen according to His Sovereign plan and to carry out his immutable purpose. And this truth breeds hope into the soul of the believer. This truth makes known to us that God, before He ever created us and before we ever turned our backs on him in wicked rebellion – He loved us and in His eternal wisdom He crafted a plan for our redemption from sin which included the incarnation, death, and resurrection of His own Son. This foreordained plan of God was hatched before the foundation of the world, and it was brought forth by the Triune God – Father, Son, and Spirit – as they planned together to bring the greatest amount of glory to God through the Creation of man, the fall of man, the redemption of man, and the final consummation of God's saving plan.
- d. In John 17:24 Jesus is praying His High Priestly prayer on the night of his arrest and he says that the Father has loved him from before the foundation of the world. So, this plan of redemption is brought forth in the context of an unending and unbreakable love between Father and Son as they express together their love for mankind in sending the Son to be the Savior of the world. Before that prayer in the Garden, Jesus had said repeatedly that he must go to Jerusalem and be delivered over to the hands of the religious leaders and suffer and die and rise again on the third day. He must go to do that because it had been appointed to Him by the foreordaining purposes of God. This was the path he was to take. This was the cup he was to drink down to the dregs. This is why he says in the Garden – not my will, but thy will be done! He is fully submitted to the Father's perfect plan of redemption even though it will cost him death on a cross. There is no question in the Gospel accounts that Jesus was not on some unknown mission that hopefully would turn out, but that he had come with the purpose of accomplishing a foreknown – and by that we mean, a foreordained plan of redemption.
- e. This is why he said in Luke 22:22 at the Last Supper – “For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!” Though Judas was the instrument of Satan to bring about the betrayal, arrest, and

crucifixion of Jesus, this was exactly how God had planned it to go. The evil intentions of a rebellious heart were no surprise to God, but rather they were used by God to further His saving purpose. After Jesus' work on Earth is done and He has ascended into Heaven, his apostles speak the same way about his coming. So Peter, in the first sermon preached to the church says this in Acts 2:23:

- i. this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.
- f. That word for foreknowledge in Acts 2 is the same word as in 1 Peter 1:20. Jesus was delivered up and crucified and killed at the hands of lawless men, only because it was according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. And then Paul, in Ephesians 3:11 describes the mystery of the Gospel and he says:
 - i. This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- g. You see, the Scriptures are clear about God's purpose and plan for redemption being realized in Christ. His precious blood was shed – not by accident or by chance. We are not lucky to have Christ as our ransom payment. No, we are providentially blessed by the eternal plans and purposes of the God of Heaven.
- h. And this gives us the sure basis upon which we can set our hope. The God who from before the foundation of the world made a plan to provide a ransom through the shed blood of His only Son is the same God who now promises to you eternal life if you will look to Jesus in faith. He promises to you the eternal triumph of being in Christ. He promises eternal love – the kind of love that was known between Father and the Son and the Spirit before the foundation of the world is promised to those who are in Christ by faith. He promises all the eternal riches of being seated with Christ in heavenly places. He promises the full and final victory over sin. He promises the defeat of death in the final resurrection from the dead unto eternal life. He promises unending and unremitting joy in His presence for the rest of eternity. All of this, and so much more, is planned – is foreknown for those who are in Christ – just like Christ was foreknown as our redeemer before the foundation of the world!

II. Christ was Made Known

- a. Not only was Christ foreknown, but he was also made known. The plans and eternal purposes of the Godhead that were hatched in eternity past were now brought to fruition on the pages of time. He was foreknown by God, but he was made known to us in these last times. The phrase “made manifest” has the idea of putting something before us in an observable way. In other words, Jesus really and truly took on human flesh and dwelt among us. This babe in a manger was the perfect and sinless Son of God who came to fulfill the plan of redemption. The apostle John describes Jesus in 1 John 1 as being made manifest to them in such a way as they heard him and they saw him with their eyes, and they gazed upon him, and they touched him with their hands. He was made known to them in

complete reality. And this happened in these last times. He was revealed in the last times, Peter says.

- b. What does this mean – that Jesus was made known in the last times? Flip over with me to Hebrews 9 – Hebrews chapter 9. Let's start reading in verse 23 – Hebrews 9:23. *Read 9:23-28.*
- c. All of God's redemptive revelation before Christ found its perfect completion in Christ. So, Peter can say that in the last times Jesus was made manifest to us because He is the final word of redemption. He appeared at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. He wasn't made manifest at multiple stages of redemptive history. He didn't offer himself repeatedly like the Levitical priests. But rather, he laid down the final word on the matter when he offered himself as the perfect, spotless lamb. And in this way, his work was at the end of the age. He ushered in a new and final phase of God's redemptive work. All the foreshadowing and preparation led to the completion found in Christ. And now this age of Grace in which this Gospel is being proclaimed in all the corners of the world is the capstone to these last times. So, Jesus is the end of God's plan for redemption. He is the fullness of God's redeeming and revealing work.
- d. So, Jesus has been made known in the last times, and he has been made known for our sake – which is at the end of verse 20. This combines with the phrase at the end of verse 21 to let us know that Jesus being made known has eternally significant ramifications for us today. He was made known for our sakes, and because he was made known we can have faith and hope in God. In between those two phrases you have gospel explanation which brings firmness of hope like no other truth.
- e. Christ was made manifest and through him Peter's readers are believers in God. He is indeed the way, the truth, and the life, and in Him alone mankind can come to the Father. This belief in God is bolstered by the validating acts of God upon the work of Christ. So, in verse 21 this is described as God's resurrecting Jesus from the dead and giving him glory. Peter has in mind here the whole of Christ's work as it was validated by the Father. So, when he refers to Jesus' resurrection he has in mind Jesus' incarnation, and perfect life of righteousness, and betrayal, and arrest, and trial, and condemnation, and scourging, and suffering upon a cross, and bearing the full judgment of sin as a substitutionary sacrificial lamb, and his death upon the cross. God the Father approved of all of it, and it satisfied His righteous wrath against sin and it brought to completion the work of redemption. And so it was met with the approving and validating acts of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation. These validating acts upon Jesus' work should fix the gaze of our faith firmly upon God. The God who foreordained the work of Jesus was the same God who made known this plan on the tapestry of time and carried it out to perfection through Jesus Christ. And we know that it went just as it was supposed to because all of the promises of exaltation after humiliation which

were made to Jesus were brought about at his ascension. After bearing witness to his own resurrection for 40 days, he ascended into Heaven and was seated at the right hand of God the Father in glory and honor and praise. The human heart cannot begin to comprehend the reception Jesus received in Heaven when he returned at His ascension. But he did not go alone. He carried with Him all those who would be rescued from sin by believing upon His name. Graven in His hands and written upon his heart were the names of those who would one day also be resurrected from the grave and would also be exalted from our lowly and despised estate on earth to the glories of being seated with Christ in Heavenly places. It is already true – we are already there. But it is not yet realized in the passage of time. When Jesus rose and ascended he guaranteed the future resurrection of those who are his by grace through faith. The believer’s future resurrection is not a different event, but rather it is part two of the same event. It is the completion of Jesus’ resurrection, and when it happens it will also be the final validation of Jesus’ resurrection. Because it happened to Christ, it will happen to us, and because it then happens to us it is proof that it happened to Christ. As Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan pastor, has said – “Whatever God meant to do for us and in us, whatever privilege he meant to bestow upon us, he did that thing first to Christ.”¹

- f. This was done, Peter says, for the sake of you, so that you would put your faith and hope in God. Faith and hope are virtually synonyms here. Faith has the three facets of knowledge, assent, and trust. It must know God and what God says, then faith must assent, or agree, that those truths are true, and then that knowledge must produce singularly dependent trust. This is saving faith in Jesus Christ our Lord. It knows the facts of his righteous life and substitutionary death and resurrection from the grave, and it agrees that I am a sinner in need of a Savior and Jesus is the only one who can save me, and so it then leans completely upon Jesus as my only hope in child-like dependence. This faith is accompanied by a settled hope that all that God has promised in Christ will come true. Hope is the sure anticipation that God will keep His word in the future, especially as it relates to the full and final salvation of our souls.
- g. Peter’s point to your heart in these verses is that the truths of the Gospel – the foreknowledge of God and the manifestation of Christ in the last times to accomplish the work of redemption which was validated by God the Father through His resurrection and exaltation – this settles the case. Your faith and hope are in God. These past realities settle your present faith because they guarantee your future salvation. Let me say that again – these past realities settle your present faith because they guarantee your future salvation. If God has done all that he set out to do for and in Christ, if He fully kept His Word to His Son,

¹ Thomas Goodwin, as quoted in Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ*, pg. 167.

and if His Son could believe Him and walk in faith as the consummate elect exile – then beloved, you too can trust in God. As verse 13 said – set your hope fully in the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Now in verse 21 Peter says to you – based on the foreknowledge of God and work of Christ now made known to you – set your faith and hope fully on God.

- h. Everyone in this room needs this message of faith and hope in God. Everyone is battling in some way for hope in a hopeless world. The answer is not to double down on your efforts or to find your own solution – the answer is always to look to God in faith.
 - i. So, maybe you are facing the hopelessness of still being condemned under the guilt of your own sin. Your conscience condemns you and the Spirit of God is right now convicting you that if you died you would enter into eternity separated from God because you are still in your sin. This is a hopeless and helpless place. There is no way out of this on your own. You are spiritually dead with no way to bring yourself back to life. There is no way to God that you can make while you are yet in your sin. But there is Jesus Christ. He has made a way through His perfect life, substitutionary death, and victorious resurrection. In the hopelessness of your condemnation and guilt, be born again by grace through faith. Look to Jesus and live!
 - ii. Maybe you are a believer in Christ who has lost the fullness of this hope because you are weary from the struggle against sin in your daily life. You know that you are forgiven eternally in Christ, but the power of sin in a few areas of your life is like a flood that is drowning you. The constant battle and your repeated defeat under the power of sin have left you hopeless this morning. You despair over your standing before God because of your ongoing struggle and you have lost hope. The answer is to find hope again in God. The God who powerfully provided a Savior is the God who has powerfully joined you to that Savior in His death, burial, and resurrection. You can say no to sin and yes to God, not because you are strong, but because Christ is, not because you have life, but because Christ does. Not because you are righteous, but because Christ is. Not because you have secured your future salvation, but because Christ has. And this hope in future salvation is really at the crux of present sanctification. Faith in God's promises to fully and finally save us are the foundation and the fuel for pursuing holiness. If this is all going to turn out like God has said it will, then I should live today like I would have wanted to when all of this comes to pass. It's like those residents of Flagstaff, Maine. They knew the future of their town was hopeless, and so their present practice reflected their hopelessness. This is an accurate picture of the sin that abounds in our culture, and often in our own hearts.

People have no hope that there is anything beyond this life that actually matters. They have vague and unrealistic hopes of something panning out for their good, but they do not have a clear faith in a settled reality. And so they live in self-destructive ways – abounding in sin and daily suffering under the weight of sin’s consequence and guilt. But believer – we have hope! Not some vague, uninformed, ignorant wish of some future possibility! No, we have a settled hope and a clear understanding of a future and eternal and secure place with Christ in all of His glory. This means that my present practice should be marked by this hope in that I am daily seeking to be holy as I walk through this time of my exile in fear of my Heavenly Father to whom I will one day give account. You see, if you are drowning under some besetting sin, the answer is to have this kind of faith and hope in God.

- iii. Maybe your sinking in despair or discouragement and you’re not even totally sure why. It might be the struggle to live a godly life in an ungodly world. Or maybe it is the struggle to walk in truth when deception abounds. Or maybe you have lost your zeal to pursue these things. You know better than to say that it is all meaningless, but maybe you feel that way right now. Or maybe you are just tired from the fight to walk by faith in a world governed by sight. You know that it will all turn out like God has said it is going to, but you are weary from the long journey as an elect exile in a world of sight. Or maybe it is a combination of those things in your heart, but you can’t nail it down as to what exactly the problem is – you just find yourself in a spiritual funk which seems pretty hopeless. The answer here is found in Christ! Gaze anew upon the greatness of our Savior who was foreknown and who was made known to us in these last times. The struggle you are facing to walk by faith in this world is but a fraction of the struggle that He knew in His earthly life. Your battle with temptation is but a microcosm of the fullness of temptation He faced and overcame. Your struggle to believe that God will indeed keep his promise to you is but a taste of the great struggle our Savior endured as he willingly suffered for us. Jesus was the consummate elect exile who had to walk by faith in His Father while walking in obedience in His earthly life. He had to walk by faith, choosing to believe that though His circumstances told him one thing, his faith in God told him another. Nowhere is this clearer than on the Cross. Nowhere was Jesus more tempted to doubt His Father’s goodness and question His plan and His mission than when he struggled for each breath knowing he was but moments closer to His death. And yet, in these darkest of moments at the height of being forsaken and condemned under the weight of our sin – which by the way we will never experience because Jesus did for us – even

at the moment Jesus knew that His Father was trustworthy. He knew that this was the path to salvation for us and exaltation for Him. This full humiliation was the gate which opened to the lush green pastures of eternal exaltation. And so, even his final words in excruciating pain and complete awareness of his separation from His Father because of our sin – even in that moment he utters words of complete trust and faith and hope. “Father, into Your hands I commit my spirit.” If in that moment Jesus could entrust Himself to His Father, then in your moment of deepest pain and deepest sorrow and deepest hopelessness and deepest awareness of abandonment by God – there – you can have faith and hope in God. For he received Jesus’ spirit and he validated His cross work three days later by raising this body of sacrifice from the dead! God kept His promise to Jesus and He accepted His offering as sufficient payment for our sin and he subsequently exalted Jesus as the name above all names – the name at which every knee will bow!

Conclusion: This God who foreknew Christ as our Redeemer and who then made him known to us – this God is worthy of your faith and your hope. This salvation we know is all of God. It was planned before time in the eternally wise mind of God, accomplished in the fullness of time by Christ our Redeemer, validated by our Righteous God through Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation, brought to us through the Spirit of Christ, applied to us through the regeneration of our souls according God’s great mercy, and one day – the full and final consummation of this salvation will come at the return of Christ. This salvation is all of God – therefore, hope in Him!