

Sunday April 30

Lesson 9: A Living Hope and a Non-Perishable Inheritance

Scripture: 1 Peter 1: 3-16

Context:

Today we continue our spring curriculum, “The Life of Faith.” In this last lesson of our second unit, “Wisdom and Doubt,” we conclude our study by reflecting on how Jesus gives us an inheritance. Today we will explore how to express the hope of the gift of salvation.

Our lesson today moves into another letter in the New Testament. This letter is attributed to the apostle Peter as found in the first verse. While some scholars debate whether the letter came from Peter himself, the main point is the close ties the letter has to individuals associated with Peter.¹ We discover as much at the end of the letter in 1 Peter 5:12: “Through Silvanus, whom I consider a faithful brother, I have written this short letter to encourage you, and to testify that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.”² Clues like these indicate the letter was sent from a group of missionaries who had arrived in Rome with Paul or Peter.³ One of the ways a letter was strengthened for its mission was if it could be tied to specific leaders within the Christian faith.

What is also interesting about the letter is to whom the letter is addressed. The addressees are referred to as “exiles” of the Diaspora, those who are Jewish who have been spread about the nations. Yet the term changes as the letter indicates the recipients are converts from paganism facing hostility from friends, associates, and relatives.⁴ Both these Jewish Christians and these Gentile converts are finding themselves in a place where they are something different than the society around them. This use of calling them “exiles” suggest the success of the Christian mission lay in its ability to use the communal symbolism of its Jewish heritage to create communal solidarity among persons who were otherwise without a clearly defined social identity.⁵ These individuals are now bound together by Jesus Christ and his identity.

The beginning of the letter uses familial language to give hope to the Christian community who appear to have trials. God the Father has adopted him and through Jesus Christ, they have been given hope. Their salvation given though does not mean there will be no trials or feats. Instead, they are promised God will be with them in whatever they face.

To help deliver this point, the writer speaks of the prophets who told them of this grace. The prophets point to Christ, the one who came to fulfill these things. Thus, these exiles are to seek holiness and to be full of the good news of Jesus. They are to focus on their own conduct and to have hope in the one who came to deliver them.

¹ Perkins, Pheme. “First and Second Peter, James, and Jude.” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 11.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 12.

⁴ Ibid., 14.

⁵ Ibid., 15.

Application

The Holy Spirit has recently placed 1 Peter in my daily devotions as well as the lesson today and I cannot help but give thanks for this gift. The letter of 1 Peter very much speaks to the people of faith and how we are called to live today with both ourselves and with others. We are reminded of our own identity and who we are in this world. We belong to Jesus and as part of the family of faith, we are given an inheritance which is more precious than riches or other human definitions of belonging. We are given the gift of salvation, of being made whole by God.

What I like about this passage we read of today is how the writer makes clear about how this gift of salvation is not some talisman to protect us from trials or tribulations. Instead, the gift of salvation is meant to give us assurance so even as we face trials or tribulations, our faith blossoms and grows in various ways. As we walk through fires, we realize our faith is not in vain and in fact our faith holds us together. We may lose everything including our prestige, resources, our security; and yet we have the gift of belonging to Jesus. He gives us an inheritance which will never fade and will never go away.

Recently I have noticed how Christians struggle greatly with how people perceive us. We want people to see us as holy, upright, and having it all together. None of these are bad things on their own. In fact, the Bible encourages us to seek holiness, being upright, and presenting ourselves well into the world. Yet sometimes we use these words as ways to not ask deep questions of how we live with others and at times we can become focused on our appearance to others and association is more important. We do not want others to question our salvation based on who we talk to or the ways we hold the tension of living in this world with different people.

As 1 Peter asserts, being a Christian means discovering how to hold the tension of living in this world and being a people of hope. As we love Jesus and seek to follow him, the rest fades away. We cannot focus on what other people think or how they see us. We cannot listen to the cries of a culture which demean those who strive for consistency in values. When it comes to the Christian community, we are meant to encourage each other and not tear each other down. We move forward because of what Christ has already done for us and how he has granted us salvation.

So what are we to do? The last part of our scripture passage gives us wise counsel for how to live. Firstly, we are to be people of action and as my Bible notes confer, “gird the loins of our mind,” meaning we are to think about how we live and interact with others. Are we being kind, good natured, compassionate? When we read the Word, we are to seek how it fills us and reflect on what God is saying directly to us.

Secondly, we are to discipline ourselves. For Christians, spiritual disciplines are to always be encouraged including scripture reading, prayer, fasting, and attending to the ordinances of worship. These are the ways we are built up over time to face whatever trials come our way.

Thirdly, we are to set our hope in Christ. Our salvation cannot come in what other people say of us or of unrealistic expectations we place upon ourselves. Only Jesus gives us grace, and we would do well to allow him to extend it to others as well.

And finally, we are to seek holiness. This holiness is not by us following a stringent list of rules. Yet instead, we are to find the ways where we are connected to God and to one another. Holiness is transforming and those who are made holy recognize how God alone is the one who transforms. From the disciplines mentioned above, we discover holiness leads to changes or perhaps even enhancing what we already do. Jesus will help us discover as much as we go along and he will help us bloom and grow.

How do you celebrate the gift of salvation God has given you? What spiritual disciplines do you practice which have helped you grow more in love with God and those around you? Why do you think we sometimes place the understanding of our salvation in how others see us? Who are the people who you think of as holy? How can you be in relationship with other Christians who help you bloom and grow?

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