

The Tenacity of Hope

1 Peter 1:3-9

According to the world, there is little difference between what one would call “hope” and what one might call “wishful thinking.” After awaking one morning, a woman told her husband, “I just dreamed that you gave me a pearl necklace for our anniversary. What do you think it means?”

“You’ll know tonight,” he said.

That evening, the husband came home with a small package and gave it to his wife. Delighted, she opened it to find a book entitled, *The Meaning of Dreams*.

To a believer, “hope” and “wishful thinking” are quite distinct. The ancients did not use the word as moderns use it; “I hope she likes me,” or “I hope the weatherman is wrong about calling for rain.” The ancient use of the word always had an air of expectancy, and this was all the more true of Christian hope, the certain expectation of a blessed future. Christian hope is not something a man’s mind conceives. Biblical hope is always rooted in a vision of something that God has promised.

Peter was writing to Christians “throughout the world” who were suffering and would continue to suffer for their faith. Peter invites them to consider their “living hope” for there is no power in a myth, but limitless power in a promise from God. God will one day bring His resolution to all things.

Today, in matters of faith, anything goes. Allegedly, all roads lead to God, and God, to many, is whatever they fashion him to be in the idol factories of their own imaginations. Such a god is typically manufactured to be a loving, nonjudgmental sweetheart of a god. Modern idolaters do not incorporate into their designs any hatred of sin or jealousy for human loyalty. God is all-indulgent if not all-powerful. The only “hope” to which such “worshippers” can cling is that their notion of their gods might at least turn out to be close to the real thing, but their hope, like their gods, is imaginary.

Christians believe in a God Who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ, the only Way to God, for He alone provided atonement for the sin that keeps us from God. These specific claims, embraced by faith and undergirded by historical witnesses, set Christian hope far above the wishful thinking of our age. We now wait for something that has been “made known” by God and not “made up” by men.

Biblical “hope” is a tenacious virtue. Our hope in a coming salvation sets us apart from “the rest of men, who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Hopelessness is terrifying. Wishful thinking is fragile. True hope is so resolute that Peter suggested that even under the most severe trials, we can praise God. Is this possible? How can the expectation of an unseen future be so firm and tenacious?

I. This Tenacious Hope Rests in an Unshakable Salvation verses 3-5

A. We Have Been Reborn verse 3

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

“New birth” assures us that we can begin again as God’s children. Jesus repaired our estrangement from God. We need simply to embrace His free gift. John, Peter’s fellow-Apostle, put it this way:

... ¹²Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God – ¹³children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. – John 1:12, 13

Something dramatically new began when we trusted Jesus. We were newly-born into a “living hope” that is nothing like “wishful thinking”, which is often desperate and quite dead. Our hope, our certainty of seeing Jesus, comes “through the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ!” The Resurrection, which is as historically well-documented as any event in history, proves that our hope is more than just some odd religious myth. We base the hope of our own resurrections on His. We know that God can raise the dead because He has already done it. Our hope lives because Jesus lives, proving death can be defeated.

B. Now, We Wait verse 4

(We have been newly born into a living hope ...)

... ⁴and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you ...

Deep within a forest a little turtle climbs a tree. After hours of effort he reaches the top, jumps into the air waving his front legs, only to plummet to an inglorious crash. Slowly, he repeats the process again and again while two birds sitting on a branch shake their heads at his sad efforts. Finally, the female bird turns to her mate and chirps, “I think it’s time we tell him he’s adopted.”

Salvation is sometimes described as adoption. Here, it is called new birth. In any event, even now God is equipping us with all that we will ever need to one day enter into and enjoy our inheritance.

This inheritance “can never perish, spoil or fade.” Peter always thought of his people’s inheritance as Canaan, the land first promised to Abraham, pursued by Moses and secured under Joshua. Now, he writes of an inheritance more enduring than any parcel of real estate, and that is eternal fellowship with God. “Perish” could mean to be ravaged by invaders. “Spoil” means to be polluted. “Fade” means to wither. Canaan was not exempt from foreign armies, sinful influences or from simply wearing out. Nothing, on the other hand, can damage our eternal inheritance – life in God’s presence.

C. Until then, We Are Protected verse 5

... ⁵who 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 are under God’s around-the-clock guard. We need that. When Christians pursue holiness in this sinful world, they will agitate the world. Opposition can come from without, but often, the most insidious onslaughts are from within. Satan attacks us when our resistance is down. In our anger, he will tempt us to explode. In our exhaustion, he will entice us to give up. In our disillusionment, he will beckon us with siren calls into worldly and lustful distractions. When we are worn down by this world’s constant criticism and ridicule, he will advise us to adjust our convictions. Always know that the faithful garrison of God is never absent, no matter how alone or overwhelmed you feel.

“Shielded” emphasizes God’s power, but this shielding is secured “through faith” which emphasizes that we too bring something to this process of becoming holy. We too play a role. The Apostles would cringe in horror at out how some have distorted faith to mean only the shallowest possible profession of belief in Jesus, yet devoid of any personal responsibility for clinging to Him by faith or for aggressively pursuing His likeness. True faith expresses itself not simply in belief, but also in endurance, in carefully choosing one’s values and in obedience. Consider Paul’s words to Titus:

¹¹For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. ¹²It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, ¹³while we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ ... – Titus 2:11-13

II. This Tenacious Hope Rejoices in Unlimited Trials verses 6, 7

... ⁶In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that your faith – of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire – may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

A. Faith Is Refined through Trials

Bubba goes to the revival and listens to the preacher. After a while, the preacher asks anyone with needs to come forward and be prayed over. Bubba gets in line. When it's his turn the preacher says, "Bubba, what do you want me to pray about?"

Bubba says, "Preacher, I need you to pray for my hearing." So the preacher puts one finger in Bubba's ear and the other hand on top of his head and prays a while.

He removes his hands and says, "Bubba, how's your hearing now?"

Bubba says, "I don't know preacher, it's not 'til next Wednesday in Baton Rouge."

Trials are a fact of life. Peter's readers were facing persecution, but this word for "trials" covers the broadest range of challenges to one's faith. Ridicule is a trial. Temptation is another. Grief and sickness are still others. A unique area of susceptibility to temptation is another. Faith is not proven to be faith unless it is tested. Nobody enjoys obstacles or desires to endure trials, but we can never be sure of the authenticity of our faith, no matter how strongly we feel about it, until it is challenged.

Even gold perishes. Refined faith, on the other hand, will result in "praise, glory and honor" from Jesus when He appears. It is one thing for us to give "praise, glory and honor" to Christ now. It will be quite another to hear Him say, "Well done!" because our proven faith has secured His approval. Insisting that our faith is strong means little. Only testing can prove its worth. In the meantime, trials can build us, and if we keep ourselves together, they can encourage the faith of others.

B. God Limits the Trials We Endure

God allows testing, but never beyond our limits to survive it. Helmut Thieleke pictured God as intercepting every fiery dart Satan hurls and inspecting it. If He can build us through the ordeal, He lets it pass. If it will destroy us, He snaps it like a dry twig. We never even know it existed. To us, that image is kind of sweet, but Thieleke preached to people from fallout shelters in World War II Germany, because the churches had been leveled. To Thieleke, a God Who shields His people was crucial.

Trust that God protects you from more testing than you can take so that you can come to understand His divine objectives when your faith is tested. Testing could serve to better fit you for service. It could bring you one step closer to holiness. If, from the eye of a storm, anyone seeks to understand his trial with worldly rationale, he will be chewed apart. God may be condemned as unkind. Testing will come, but not because God is unkind. He is building a people for His eternal fellowship.

III. This Tenacious Hope Relies on an Unseen Prize verses 8, 9

... ⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

A Presbyterian minister constantly insisted to his fellow-ministers at the alliance meetings that his church was closest to the truth. Eventually, the Baptist and Methodist ministers tired of this and conspired to play a prank on him. They drugged his coffee. When he nodded off, they took him to the cemetery, and laid him in a borrowed coffin, next to a freshly dug grave. Then, they hid to see what would happen. Finally, the Presbyterian began to awaken. Yawning and looking around he noticed the coffin, the tombstones, and the open grave. Then he shouted: "Hallelujah! Amen! I knew it!" The day of resurrection is here, and the Presbyterians are the first ones out!"

After Adam sinned, a curse settled upon the creation, but God promised a Redeemer Who would reverse the death and destruction introduced by the serpent's lie, Adam's sin and the Fall. From the very moment of that promise, God's people have longed to see that Redeemer from God revealed.

A. Theologians Describe Four Biblical Perspectives of this Redeemer

1. The Futuristic Vision

Many looked to the future for a Savior: Adam, the patriarchs, David - Jesus secured redemption for them as well as for us when He died. Before He died, these were reckoned as righteous by faith. By faith, they believed God, they obeyed Him, and they made the sacrifices required by the Law that symbolically covered their sins. Many made their sacrifices without searching for any deeper meanings, but others knew there must be more. Once, in private, Jesus told Peter and the group:

²³... "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. ²⁴For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it." - Luke 10:23, 24

2. The Fleshly Vision

God sent Him that kings and prophets had longed to see, but not to such noteworthy individuals. The Father sent Jesus, and Jesus revealed the Father to twelve ordinary men like Peter. This great honor came with an awesome duty. They must persuade others that they had seen God's glory. One wrote:

¹That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. ²The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us ... - 1 John 1:1, 2

3. The Faith Vision

Could twelve such ordinary men really convince others to see Jesus with eyes of faith? After all, they could even not convince one of their own that Jesus had been raised from the dead. Thomas missed Jesus' first post-Resurrection appearance and demanded to examine the wounds of Jesus for himself before he could believe. Jesus accommodated Thomas, and he believed. But, then Jesus said to him:

... "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." - John 20:29

How could this group convince others when they could not even convince one of their own? They needed help, so Jesus instructed them to wait in Jerusalem to be “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49). For people to see Jesus by faith, the Holy Spirit must assist both witness and hearer.

4. The Final Vision

“Now we see a poor reflection as in a mirror then we shall see face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12). All who have looked to Jesus through the ages will share this final vision. For now, we do not behold the glorified Christ. Reckoned as saints, we still sin in practice and we need to be holy in order to see Jesus. One day we will see Him. This is not wishful thinking. This is our certain hope - established by His death on a cross for our sins, proven by His Resurrection and sealed by His promise.

B. This Final Vision IS Our Tenacious Hope

Some people are so eager to believe that God wants to make Himself uniquely known to them that they hear His voice or detect His leading in every impression, no matter how vague, subjective or weird. “God told me this.” “God told me that.” Have you ever noticed how many of the same people who claim this inside tract to God’s mysterious, hidden will are often the same people who tend to struggle with obedience to His manifestly clear will and commands as they are revealed in the Bible?

We don’t need to hear audible voices to enjoy the assurance that one day we will see Jesus. We do not touch Jesus as did Thomas, but we know He rose from the dead. We have not seen Jesus, but we love Him. Our knowledge of Jesus is largely experiential. Still, recorded history supports our faith. Peter and the others convinced us that what they witnessed in Christ fulfills our longings. God’s Book records their words. The Bible is essential to the survival of our faith until our final vision of Jesus, for it teaches us how to pursue holiness and how to live under His Kingship until He comes. We’ll need a handle on those things. In the meantime, Paul calls us to patient endurance:

²²We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. – Romans 8:22-25

Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of the text is a bit free, but it is still intriguing:

“Waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting.”

We live in a narcotic age. Hardship doesn’t sell. When numerical growth replaces holiness in our minds as God’s supreme goal for His people, we tend to market our churches while, consciously or unconsciously, avoiding all emphases on personal holiness, duty, sacrifice, and, especially, suffering. People are not equipped for trials as a result. Rejoicing in them just seems bizarre. Still, Jesus never promised us exemption from trials. They should not surprise us. Our hope is not based in a present euphoria, but in a certain hope pertaining to the end of time when we will see Jesus.