

Oct 13th 2013 1 Peter Series #2 'So Much To Thank God For' 1 Peter 1:3-12

Sometimes I feel that we Western Christians as a whole just don't realize how much we have to thank God for, or if we do, we don't seem to do so as much or as often as the gift deserves. Churches throughout Australia praise and thank God with enthusiasm each Sunday, as we do, and the words we sing are rich and stimulating, but what about our hearts the rest of the week. Are they filled with praise and thankfulness to God as much as they should be? Is praise and thankfulness to God a daily priority for us?

This was the question that the passage from 1 Peter that we are looking at today raised for me. For Peter, who himself was having far from an easy life during this period, was writing to Christians who were poverty stricken strangers in another land—Christians who were suffering because of their faith—and yet his initial emphasis is on all that these people had to praise and thank God for.

And the reason I feel that Peter does this is because he knows the power of praise and thanksgiving. (There's a story Max Lucado tells about the time when he was a missionary in Rio de Janeiro.....At that point Max said that he would have gladly bought the whole store and given it to this boy. And I sense from the Scriptures that when God meets sincere and grateful praise and thanksgiving from the hearts of His children, He just delights to pour even more blessings into their hearts. And this is especially the case when our thanksgiving is for the spiritual things He has done for us.) The power of Praise!

I believe it would be so rewarding for each of us if we could cultivate the habit of listing in our minds last thing at night—during those few moments when we lay our heads on the pillow before we go to sleep—all those spiritual and physical blessings of the day that we just want to praise and thank God for. Maybe you already do so. Well Peter gives us a wonderful list of praise points to refer to.

In fact Peter is so excited about Praising God that he creates one massive Greek sentence that starts at verse three and continues for the next ten verses. And he mentions one fantastic blessing or gift from God only then to link it to another, and then another. Like a chain of praise points.

This wonderful chain of praise points can be displayed in the following way:-

God in His great Mercy has given us

NEW BIRTH

into

A LIVING HOPE

and into

AN INHERITANCE

KEPT IN HEAVEN FOR YOU

who through Faith

ARE SHIELDED BY GOD'S POWER

until

THE COMING OF THE SALVATION

Our praise is due to God, especially as Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. For it was as Father that God sent His son into this world to be our Lord. And that itself was the result of His great, and the word also means, His abundant or plentiful MERCY.

And Mercy itself is an interesting word meaning 'the outward manifestation of pity'. God considered the terrible predicament of mankind and His heart was flooded with great pity because of that, and on account of His even greater love He manifested that pity through giving us New Birth.

Now that is just so easy to say, but a full understanding of the cost that the Father endured because of His abundant mercy is probably impossible for us. Yet the incredible thing is that because of His love and abundant mercy we have this gift of NEW BIRTH.

Our physical birth, important as it is, could never be enough to satisfy the holiness of God. Sin had so broken the image of God within us that we were un-repairable. Then God made a way for us to receive a new spiritual birth through the Son, cancelling out the sins that stood against us by nailing them to the cross. At that moment the new birth became available as a gift from God to us that we needed to accept by faith. As Jesus said to Nicodemus, "You must be born anew—born from above, in order to enter the

Kingdom.” The Spirit now needs to enter your life and regenerate in you a brand new spiritual life as a gift from the triune God to you.

And the truly awesome thing about this gift of New Birth is that it gives us an incredible and secure future because of the resurrection of Jesus.

An open doorway into A Living Hope. All around them they saw people worshipping pagan gods that gave them dead hopes. But the hope(assurance) that the Christian has in Christ is alive. It keeps on going after the grave.

And even today most people have no time for God because they are putting so much effort into the realization of earthly hopes connected, so often with materialistic god’s like wealth and possessions. Things that mean nothing to them when they die.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 says:-

“Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This too is meaningless.”

There used to be a superannuation advert on TV that really annoyed me. It was encouraging people to put extra into their superannuation and it focused on a guy who was doing that. And the question was asked, “How much is enough?” And his answer.....just a little bit more. But it’s a dead hope. Just for this life with nothing gained for the next.

Yet as believers we have this living hope that flows on into an inheritance that can never fade, spoil or perish. The stock market can crash; the world erupt in war; the economy can fail, but nothing can diminish the glorious inheritance that is ours as children of God.

Indeed, even our behavior here on earth cannot reduce it and the evil one cannot touch it. For it is kept, a word that refers to the preserving power of God, in heaven for each one of us.

Then Peter ends his chain of praise points by reminding his readers that they are shielded by God’s power unto the coming of the Salvation.

God is focused on getting all who belong to Him through to that day when THE SALVATION will come upon this earth. And He shield’s us from all that would prevent that happening. Evil within and evil without.

(While I was away I read this book that was talking about warfare in the middle ages....)God has this shield around us that will never fail. It will make sure that on that day when our Saviour returns to set up His glorious kingdom we who have placed our lives in His hands will be there.

Yet even as Peter mentions this final praise point he begins to think more about the situation that the initial readers of this letter were in. They were suffering grief and all kinds of trials. Some were just the result of the hardship of the life they were living as refugee types in another land. Many were deliberately connected to their Christian stand.

And perhaps he could sense them saying as they read his praise points, "But how come all these terrible things are happening to me and my family if God is my shield?" And I can feel Peter saying to them, 'Guys, God's supreme purpose is to keep your spirits safe for that day when Christ is revealed, and although He is not responsible for your suffering, He does use it in your life to purify and increase your faith which is so valuable in His sight. A faith which will be your greatest offering to the Lord when He returns.'

And then Peter goes on to say to them, 'And despite all you are suffering and going through I know that you still love Jesus. You have never seen Him yet you believe in Him and deep in your heart you have this inexpressible joy. That in itself is a sign that you are in tune with God and that you are already beginning to receive the goal of your faith which is the salvation of your souls.

Indeed it is this joy from the Lord deep inside our hearts that is connected so strongly with this list of praise points. For this joy is not what we feel when all is going well for us and there are no shadows in our life. That is happiness not joy. Joy is what we can feel when life is good or bad for us because we are aware of all these things that God has given or blessed us with, and the salvation that is already ours and one day will be revealed in all its fullness.

A salvation that the prophets of old predicted and wanted to be part of but it was reserved for Christians. A salvation that the angels long to look into, but can only look because it is reserved for us.

And all this is the reason why we should think about praising God for these things every day, whatever we may be going through, and He will fill us more and more with His glorious joy. As the hymn writer put it:

***Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine:
O what a foretaste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God;
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Saviour all the day long.***