

HEIR TO A VAST FORTUNE

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." I Peter 1:3-5.

This picture will appear more beautiful if you can see it silhouetted against its background. The Romans had destroyed Jerusalem, and what Christians escaped were scattered in many lands. Persecution seemed to be the popular pastime, and to kill a Christian was considered to be a laudable ambition for the average Roman soldier. It was to comfort these dispersed Christians in their sorrows and to encourage them in their sufferings that this letter was written. The writer was cognizant of their hardships, but he reminded them that God was not dead, that He would sustain them, and that He would ultimately bring them into a great victory. The picture painted by these words is a striking one. They were reminded that they were walled in by divine providence.

We can well understand why Peter began his first epistle with a glorious doxology, for believers possessing the joyous hope of immortality, a hope which was so vivid and real to them, could indeed lift up their hearts to God in thanksgiving and praise. They could utter a joyous "Amen," when Peter said, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy has begotten us anew to an ever-living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." To those who had been born again, life was no longer dull, drear and desperate. When we are regenerated a glorious hope possesses the soul; the future is full of light, and we can face the grave with a shout of triumph giving thanks to God "which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I. The Possibility of This Inheritance.

Peter traced the great joy he was describing to its Source, which was God. He saw the gift in the open hand of the Giver. Peter's doxology in verse three is one of reverence, gratitude and love. It is genuine praise for a great mercy. And mercy is simply love to the undeserving. God's mercy is described as great, abundant, plenteous and eternal. Here is praise to God for a glorious hope. This hope is expressed out of the abundant mercy of God, for He gratuitously bestows it upon His children. It is the simple gift of God's love to those who by faith are brought into union with His Son. It is based on the work of Christ and is for all who believe on Him and receive Him as their Saviour. We become heirs of this inheritance just as one becomes an heir of an inheritance from an earthly father, because we are born to it.

The inheritance to which the Christian is heir, and in which he is to share, is not something that he has earned for himself, but it is his by reason of his birth. It matters not how many works one may perform, that never makes him an heir. On account of his works an inheritance is never waiting for him. An inheritance is not something one earns, but something that comes to him as a gift from God just because of his birth.

This glorious possibility of an inheritance rests upon the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. What the resurrection of Jesus Christ did to revive, reinforce and make radiant the dead hopes of the disciples is one of the outstanding and stupendous wonders of all times. Yesterday the hearts of these men were breaking with despair. All along they had expected to see their Master move on to a throne. Instead, they had watched with incredulous eyes as He was nailed to the cross. "They all forsook him and fled" are words that may be taken as the measure of their despair.

But look at them now! You can scarcely believe that they are the same men--and indeed they are not, though they have the same names and wear the same clothes. To say that

hope has been restored to their lonely, melancholy hearts would be a weak understatement. Hope had so rushed back into their despairing souls and taken possession of them that they were exultant, radiant and overflowing. "The Lord is risen!" became their thrilling cry. For forty days they had communion with Him, being confirmed in the resurrection faith.

"Christ and Him crucified....." "Jesus and the resurrection"--this was their dual theme interpreted by their sacrificial lives and irradiated by their exuberant song. So powerful was their testimony, and so pervasive was their influence, that by the second century Justin Martyr, who died in 167, could say: "There is not a race of men, barbarian or Greek, nay, of those who live in wagons, or who are nomads, or shepherds in tents, among whom prayers are not offered to the Father and Maker of the universe through the name of the crucified Jesus."

It was to these scattered Christians that Peter was writing when, in our text, he made a revealing reference to the resurrection. Christian hope, based on the resurrection of Christ, is no timid wistfulness, no mere feeble wish, but a towering, tremendous confidence that fairly sings its faith along every darkened road and across every desolate field of this world's life.

Christ's resurrection, like all the other mighty deeds in the holy drama of redemption is an act of mercy toward our sin-twisted, death-doomed humanity. It was the redeeming God, in an act of merciful power, Who brought up Jesus Christ from the grave. And by so doing He crowned with dazzling honor all the other deeds of mercy that had come before. He "was delivered for our offences and was raised again for our justification." Romans 4:25. That is mercy. Hope breaks into song when, in the resurrection of our Lord, it beholds the compassion of God. As Isaac Watts expressed it long ago:

"With pitying eyes the Prince of grace
Beheld our helpless grief;
He saw, and, O, amazing love!
He ran to our relief.

"Down from the shining seats above
With joyful haste He sped,
Entered the grave in mortal flesh,
And dwelt among the dead.

"O for this love let rocks and hills
Their lasting silence break;
And all harmonious human tongues
The Saviour's praises speak!"

Besides proclaiming the compassion of God, the resurrection provides for the conversion of people. Peter says, "By His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." "Born anew" means being so changed by the power of God, through His Spirit, that an old life dies and a new life--even His very own--comes to birth within us.

No wonder Peter reverted so often to the fact of Christ's resurrection. Try to imagine what it meant in his own life, as well as what it means to all. To it we owe the triumph of spirit over matter, of hope over despair, of life over death. It was the turning point in the history of the race.

II. The Nature of This Inheritance.

1. It is imperishable.

As to substance this inheritance is incorruptible. This is the very opposite of an earthly inheritance. All earthly and material things have a tendency to decay. Change and ruin belong to them by the very laws of their being. But the heavenly inheritance, to which God will ultimately bring His own, consists of those things which are imperishable. There will be no change for the worse, no decay, no death, no vanishing or perishing; on the contrary, it will grow richer, stronger and brighter with the passing of time. This inheritance can never decay and can never be taken away, for it is "where moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." Death's bloodless fingers cannot reach it. No mortuaries or cemeteries can ever disfigure it.

2. It is undefiled.

All our earthly inheritances have defects of some kind. Earthly inheritances are often defiled in the getting. Some have grown rich by fraud, by violence or by the oppression of the poor. Many earthly inheritances have been defiled by the dishonest manner in which they have come into the possession of some of their holders. Others have been defiled by the sins into which their possessors have been tempted by means of them. But the heavenly inheritance has never been touched by any foul hand. It was won by the perfection, the obedience and the sufferings of Christ. It is pure, spotless and without blemish. When we come into the full possession of it, we shall be perfect. We shall have been cleansed from every stain. Our sins will have been washed whiter than snow.

3. It is unfading.

Its beauty will never fade. The best earthly enjoyments and possessions sometimes lose their charm. Earthly garlands are prone to fade, but the joys of heaven will never fail to delight the soul. The beautiful things of heaven will never lose any of their freshness. It is beyond the blight of change.

What a contrast to all earthly possessions! The glory of earth is a fading glory. The honor of men is a vanishing honor. The scenes of earth are changing, but that which awaits the children of God will be an inheritance whose beauty will never fade. We may grow tired of our earthly inheritance, but the things of heaven will never grow old. The beauties of the heavenly estate will never diminish.

4. It is secure.

It is unaffected by the uncertainties of earth. Since it is "reserved in heaven" it is safe from any and all danger. Heaven is a certainty; there is no supposition about it.

The glorious thing about the hope of this Christian inheritance is that it is a living hope. Other hopes are dying. They buoy us up and lure us on, only to disappoint us. How many hopes of our youth have been shattered through circumstances beyond our control. But the Christian hope is not a vain one, which perishes like so many earthly hopes. It is an ever-living hope. It has a vital and powerful effect upon life. It has a living, effective action on thought, outlook, feelings and conduct. It influences every activity. Early believers were distinguished by the quality of their lives from those who were without God and without hope.

An earthly child is born into a family. Immediately it begins to share its father's nature, watchcare and possessions. But it does not come into the full possession of his heritage until the death of his parents. When one is born again and becomes a Christian he begins to share the nature of God, His love and His life. He enjoys the watchcare and provisions of God, but the full possession of his inheritance will come when he enters his heavenly home which the Lord has prepared for him. What a joy to know that as Christians we are being kept for that inheritance in heaven! And it is the power of God which keeps us. The certainty of our arrival in heaven is in the hands of God. Salvation originated with Him, was perfected by Christ, and He will perpetuate it. The salvation which we have

on earth shall never be interrupted by any power this side of the Father's House. May His love for us constrain us to be faithful Christians until He calls us home.

Accommodations in heaven are available to those only who make their reservations. And there is no reservation over there for anyone except sinners. You will never be saved unless you come to Christ as a sinner and accept Him as your Saviour. Do not plead any fancied merit of your own. Do not plead church membership or anything like that. Do not plead reformation, or that you are doing your best.

"Let not conscience make you linger,
Nor of fitness fondly dream;
All the fitness He requireth
Is to feel your need of Him:
This He gives you, This He gives you;
'Tis the Spirit's glimmering beam.

"Come, ye weary, heavy-laden,
Bruised and mangled by the fall;
If you tarry till you're better,
You will never come at all;
Not the righteous, No the righteous--
Sinners Jesus came to call."

Do not be left outside because of your failure to make a reservation.