

RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

Matthew, Chapter 7

Insight on the Word: What Makes the Christian's Hope a "Lively Hope"?

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The Bible text for next week's Sunday School lesson is 1 Peter 1:3-9, 13-21. This is the first of six lessons taken from 1 & 2 Peter. We encourage all Christians to join in the study of God's Word in their churches each Sunday, and hope these commentaries will help students and teachers alike to understand the Bible and apply it to our lives.

It is really appropriate that we move directly from a brief survey of the Gospel of Mark into the Epistles of Peter. According to early Church historians, Mark was a special assistant to the Apostle Peter, and he wrote down Peter's preaching and remembrances about the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus. So in a real sense, we have been studying the teaching of Peter already. Careful scholars have noted a host of similarities between the Gospel of Mark and the Epistles (letters) written by Peter. Perhaps you will be able to spot some of these as well.

The theme of 1 Peter is well-suited for Christians in America's cities today: Christian believers can live a life of hope and holiness, despite the trials and opposition they will endure. As I look around me today, I see many Satanic attacks on the believers' hope, and on our holiness. If we meditate on the whole book of 1 Peter, and take its truths to heart in our lives, we will be fully prepared to stand up strongly against the devil, and to help one another live righteous lives.

Our text this week emphasizes the hope of the Christian life. Peter begins by blessing the Name of God the Father, because he "hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." (1:3) We have just celebrated the resurrection in our churches during the so-called Easter season. But do we fully realize the importance of the resurrection for our faith? First, we are given a "new birth" (NIV) through the resurrection. Being born again was not just a catchy phrase

the Lord invented for Christians; it represents the new relationship we have "in Christ," a relationship in which we share both the cleansing of his death and the victory of his resurrection. As a result, God's people, "in Christ," really have a new life at work in us—just as if we had been physically resurrected ourselves. (For more on this teaching, study Romans 6:1-10; 2 Cor 4:13-14.)

Second, as a result of this new life now, we have a "lively" or "living" hope through Christ's resurrection. That is a lot different from the hope (Greek *elpis*) that the pagans had in Peter's time. The Greek religion taught that the future was governed by capricious gods and goddesses, by Fates and Destiny, all of which was ultimately beyond the control of humanity. Their "hope" was a desire to achieve greatness or immortality, despite the fickleness of the powers they worshipped; it was little more than wishful thinking. I think this must have been a most desperate and frustrating sort of hope, for those who really thought it through.

But Peter declared that we have a "living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (NIV). Not only do we have the sure promise of glory, but we have many "great and precious promises" for this life as well (2 Peter 1:4-8). Peter shares several benefits of our hope in the Scripture: (1) the "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled," which is our reward and glory in heaven (1 Peter 1:4); and then (2) protection by the power of God, which is like a guard or shield around us (1:5); also (3) the purification of our lives as we go through "manifold temptations" (1:6-7); as well as (4) "joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1:8), the beautiful result of an ever-closer communion with the Lord himself. Finally (1:9), Peter reiterates the wonderful blessing of "salvation of your souls," which is something as sure as the promises of God.

So trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ is not just "pie in the sky, bye and bye." On one hand, the promise of heaven and its glory is a sure thing (for believers in

Christ!) and it is a wonderful hope. The prospect of seeing my Savior face to face gives me a reason to keep on in my faith; without that hope, Paul said, "we are to be pitied more than all men" (1 Cor 15:19, NIV).

On the other hand, the hope we have in the Lord makes our life here and now all the more wonderful. All too often Christians are attacked as narrow-minded, bigoted, uncaring and intolerant. Such attacks are simply not true of the vast majority of those who share the Christian hope. Those who know the Lord Jesus have been in the forefront of every effort to relieve human suffering, to promote human dignity and equality of all races and both genders, to respect human life created in the image of God, whatever handicaps or outward limitations we might see. But the stereotypes of passive or unloving Christians persist.

We shouldn't be surprised at this. It's part of the trials of our faith (1 Pet 1:7), and God's truth has a way of winning out in the end. But we still have responsibilities to our God, as a part of that "lively hope"—responsibilities which will help us fully experience the joy of the Lord in our lives.

Let's list some of these for our mutual encouragement: (1) "gird up the loins of your mind, be sober" (1:13). The long robes and cloaks of their fashion greatly restricted rapid, purposeful movement. So when a man needed to run, or to work hard in farming or loading a ship or something, he would "gird up his loins" by picking up the loose ends of his clothes and tying them around his waist with a belt. In a similar way, we really need to get busy in the work of the Lord today, preparing our minds for hard work in study, prayer, witnessing, confronting evil in our society. I dare say that a lazy Christian will never be a joyful, attractive Christian.

(2) "not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts" (1:14). Many who now love the Lord Jesus were once involved in very destructive

habits of sin, such as drug addiction, sexual impurity, pornography, alcoholism, thievery, violence, and also such evils as envy, filthy speech, gossip and slander (compare 1 Cor 6:9-11). We need to completely break with these sins, and even with the pattern of life that involved us in these sins. This will mean changing the places we go, or the close friends we hang out with, or the magazines and movies we choose. It will often mean seeking support from a trustworthy Christian brother or sister. But don't give up and keep wallowing in sin! God has the power to break those old patterns, but you have to make up your mind to let his power work in you.

(3) "be holy in all manner of conversation" (1:15-16). That literally means, "be set apart, be dedicated to God, in all you do." We who know the Lord must be distinctive enough that no-one would mistake us for sinners. No doubt people will think some of our views are foolish, or impractical, or out-of-date. We have to use our mind (#1 above) to determine what the Lord wants us to do or say, and then choose to fear God instead of conforming to the expectations of the world (1:17; Rom 12:2). Time will prove the Christian right.

(4) "that your faith and hope might be in God" (1 Pet 1:21). We need to center our attention on our Father and his glory and majesty. We need to worship him, both in church meetings and in private "quiet times." As we seek to know God better, we'll have less problem coping with the trials here below. We'll know God's mind about the difficult issues we face, and we'll have faith to follow his way. Most of all, we will have a "lively hope" to carry us through with great joy—a hope based on the reality of Christ's resurrection, and our new life in him.

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Profile of Brother Charles Edward Coleman I Evangelist Church of Christ Pittsburg, CA



Charles Coleman was born December 4, 1955 in Oakland, CA to Melrose and Ernestine Coleman. Charles completed 14 years of his education in Oakland, which included McOlymonds High School and Merritt College.

Bro. Coleman was added to the body of Christ in 1976, under the teaching of Evangelist Joe O. Pitts, Sr. serving the 13th Avenue Church of Christ in Oakland, CA. Charles' membership remained at 13th Avenue for ten years, during which time he began preaching and teaching God's word. Bro. Coleman

also served in the capacity of Youth Minister, Chorus Director, and New Converts Minister.

Bro. Coleman has served the church by way of teaching classes, home studies and Sunday School. He has preached in various congregations throughout the Bay Area and outside, including Southern California and in Illinois. Bro. Coleman also worked alongside Bro. T.O. Jackson of Oklahoma in the Evangelism department for the 1985 San Francisco Crusade for Christ.

Bro. Coleman later placed membership at the Church of Christ at MacDonald Avenue in Richmond, CA where he served as minister of Personal Evangelism and Care Group Director for four years alongside Evangelist's J.C. Thomas Jr. and Rolland Jackson.

On September 30, 1990 Bro. Coleman became the Evangelist of the Diane Avenue Church of Christ in the City of Pittsburg, CA. There under his direction the following programs have been set up: a Substance Abuse Program, Literacy Program, Child Abuse Awareness Program, and a local network television program entitled "Righteousness Exalts a Nation." This program is aired weekly and can be viewed in Pittsburg, West Pittsburg, and Antioch, California.



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