

1 Peter 1:3-5 (Part II)

Introduction

- 1 Peter 1:1-2 — Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To the chosen, who are resident foreigners of the Dispersion of Pontus, of Galatia, of Cappadocia, of Asia, and of Bithynia, [chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, [chosen] in the sanctification of the Spirit, [chosen] for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: May grace and peace be multiplied to you.

All of these words that Peter writes to the Christians in Northern Asia Minor are ultimately *God's* words—*God's* message—to us gathered this morning in Morris, Illinois. We are *foreigners* residing “permanently” in a *foreign* land. This is uncomfortable, and difficult and, at times, even dangerous. Peter knows that to absorb and assimilate and to be like the world around us is a constant, ever-present pressure and temptation. So Peter writes (ultimately) to us living in the midst of these challenging circumstances, encouraging us to stand firm in the true grace of God.

After Peter's opening greeting, he starts the main body of his letter with these words: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who** according to his abounding mercies...” We've been waiting all week to see how Peter fills in that blank. So, let's pray and ask that God would grant us to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in our inner being, so that we may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. (cf. Eph. 3:16-19)

I. 1 Peter 1:3b — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who** according to his abounding mercies, **has begotten us anew...**

Would you agree that this is an unbelievably bold—and even a shocking—thing to say? “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who... has begotten us anew.**” And yet as shocking as these words may be, they're also equally wonderful and beautiful.

In our thinking and our language, we usually separate very clearly between the events of **conception**—when a life first begins in the womb, and **birth**—when a fully developed baby first enters this world. The New Testament does this, too. There's a Greek word that refers exclusively to that first moment of conception when life begins. (cf. *syllambano*; Luke 1:24, 31, 36; 2:21)

- Luke 2:21 — At the end of eight days... he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was **conceived** [*syllambano*] in the womb.

Isn't that a miracle—that **life begins**?—that where there wasn't a life, there comes to be a life? But this isn't the word that we have here in Peter. There's another Greek word that can refer to *either* event – to the beginning of life at conception or to actually being born into this world.¹

- Matthew 2:1 — Now after Jesus was born [*gennaō*] **in Bethlehem** of Judea in the days of Herod the king...
- Matthew 1:20 — An angel of the Lord appeared to [Joseph] in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is begotten [*gennaō*] **in her is from the Holy Spirit.**”

So how do we know which of these meanings Peter has in mind here in his letter? Well, it's pretty obvious that none of us had anything to do with accomplishing our birth or with first coming into existence as a brand new life in this world. If we were ever passive in anything, we were passive in that! That's why the word, *gennaō*, is very often **passive** – because it's speaking of someone *being* born or *being* conceived. So how could this word ever be active? Well, when it's active, the “actor” will obviously always be either the father or the mother. When we have an active verb and the “actor” is the mother, the meaning is always that she is the one who **gives birth**.

- John 16:21 (cf. Luke 1:57) — When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow because her hour has come, but when she has delivered [*gennaō*] the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born [*gennaō*] into the world.

On the other hand, whenever we have an active verb and the “actor” is the father, the meaning of the word changes because *he* obviously never gives birth. When the “actor” is the father, the meaning is always that he's the one who “begets.” I know that's an old word. It doesn't mean that he “conceives,” but rather that he plants the **seed** by which the new life comes into existence. We read in Matthew chapter one:

- Matthew 1:2 (HCSB; cf. NKJV) — Abraham fathered/begot [*gennaō*] Isaac, Isaac fathered/begot [*gennaō*] Jacob, Jacob fathered/begot [*gennaō*] Judah and his brothers...

The ESV says, “Abraham *was* the father *of*” as though there wasn't any active verb here and he didn't actually **contribute** or **do** anything. But the whole point of the Greek word is really Abraham's **action** (active verb) in “fathering” or begetting a son. So, in Matthew 1:16 we see both meanings of the word in the same verse:

- Matthew 1:16 — **Jacob fathered** [*gennaō*] Joseph the husband of **Mary**, of whom Jesus was **born** [*gennaō*].

Do you see how the meaning of the word changes depending on whether it's the father or the mother that we're talking about? Now, in Peter, we're not talking about a **physical** reality; we're

¹ Because of these different meanings of the word *gennaō*, and because each meaning assumes and implies the other, there can at times be a fluidity in how the word is used. If John 3:3-8 is a case in point of this “fluidity,” this could explain how Jesus can be thinking of being “begotten” while Nicodemus can then easily transition to the idea of being born.

talking about a *spiritual* reality! So, we have to be careful. But still, the first thing we need to know is that Peter is using an **active** and *not* a passive verb. The point is not that *we* were born or that *we* were begotten or that God “**caused us to be**” born or begotten (ESV), the point is rather **God’s** action in actually giving birth to us or begetting us Himself!² This is what I want us to see, because I believe it’s what Peter wanted us to see. This is a really, *really* important and wonderful doctrine – and a great, *great* **mystery**!

Since this is very clearly an **analogy** pointing us to **spiritual** realities, Peter’s point *could* be *either* that God gives birth to us *or* that God begets us. But remember that Peter has just identified God **as the Father** of our Lord Jesus Christ. And later on, when Peter uses this exact same word again in verse 23, he writes:

- 1 Peter 1:23 (cf. 1 Jn. 3:9; James 1:18) — You have been born/begotten anew [*anagennao*], not of perishable **seed** [*spora*] but of imperishable [seed], through the living and abiding word of God.

Here in these verses, the **analogy** is very clearly the father’s active role in begetting a child through his seed. So what’s the spiritual reality?—It’s this: That God Himself has “fathered” us or “begotten” us by the powerful seed of His Word!³

But there’s just one other thing we’re still missing. Peter doesn’t just use the word, *gennao*, he uses the word, *anagennao*. The God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to His abundant mercies, has begotten us *anew*.⁴ In other words, God Himself has fathered us, or begotten us, by the powerful seed of His Word **to a wholly** different kind of life and existence than the life and existence that we received from our earthly father and mother. It’s an awesome miracle that any man, through a union with his wife, can “father” or “beget” a child – so that where there *wasn’t* a **life** before, *now* there is. But if that’s a miracle, then how much more mysterious, and wonderful, and miraculous must it be to say that **God Himself** has begotten us, so that where there *wasn’t* **life** before, *now* there is! We remember that this is an **analogy** pointing us to *spiritual* realities, so we can only take the analogy as far as the biblical writers take it. While a man begets a child through his union with his wife, God has begotten us only through the imperishable “seed” (*spora*) of His Word. I have been begotten twice – once by my earthly father to an earthly life and existence, and now I have been begotten a second time, this time by my heavenly father to a wholly new and supernatural life and existence.

Now this is a huge theme in the Bible with a whole host of different practical applications for our lives.⁵ This is something that if we think we’ve comprehended it, all I can say is that we haven’t.

² Because the word “fathered” might risk making the analogy too literal, and because “begotten” is somewhat archaic, I believe that every single modern translation (except for the NKJV (cf. ASV; KJV; YLT) has hidden and obscured the full mystery and beauty and power of these words.

³ 1 John 5:1 (NKJV) — Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot [*gennao*; active participle; the begetter / the one who begets] also loves him who is begotten of Him.

⁴ I prefer “anew” rather than “again” because this makes clear the point that God had not already “begotten” us a first time. This word also emphasizes the different *quality* of this second “begetting” which I believe is implied here in the preposition “*ana*.”

⁵ John 3:3 — Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is **born/begotten again** [*gennao anothēn*] he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

This is the ultimate *source* and the *beginning* of *all* our subsequent experience of the abounding mercies of God and of His covenant love to us. (cf. Eph. 2:4-5) This is a doctrine that God wants us to think deeply about and understand always more and more by applying it always more and more to the living of our everyday lives. But right now, Peter has in his mind just **one** of the life-changing applications of this doctrine.

II. 1 Peter 1:3c — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who** according to his abounding mercies, has begotten us anew **TO a living hope THROUGH the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...**

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the *result* of this wholly new life and existence that we have is a “**living hope.**”

Now this word, hope, can refer to two things. It can refer subjectively to my attitude of hope (“I’m full of hope”), or it can refer objectively to “*the* hope” that is “out there” and set before me – “the hope” that I’m looking *for*, and waiting *for*, and longing *for*. (cf. Col. 1:5) As we’ll see in just a moment, it’s this second, objective meaning that Peter has in mind.

But, if what God the Father has begotten us to is *called our “hope,”* then certainly this assumes that we should also be *filled with hope!*?! This is the direction in which the Bible always moves. The Bible never starts with our own subjective experience of hope and then moves from there to the content of our hope. That would leave us with a definition of hope no different from that of the world – just dreaming and wishful thinking. That would leave us in the end with the vain and futile and empty and dead “hopes” of the world. The world has no hope set before it, and so the world is filled, ultimately, with hopelessness. (cf. Eph. 2:12; 1 Thess. 4:13)

The Bible always **begins** with the content of the future hope that is set before us and then moves backward from there to our own present experience of being filled with hope. (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15) In other words, it’s that sure and certain content of our **future** hope (which we take hold of by faith) that fills us *now* with the equally sure and certain experience of hope in the midst of all of life’s circumstances. It’s *that* hope in the future that should be constantly giving birth to hope *in* us no matter what each day may bring. And so Peter calls this hope a *living* hope. Our hope is not a dead hope – a hope that disappoints us or that puts us to shame in the end; it’s a *living(!)* hope – a hope that is certain and sure; it’s a hope that truly is an anchor for the soul – a hope that fills us

Titus 3:4–7 — But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own **mercy**, by the washing of **regeneration [palingenias; new birth] and renewal [new life]** of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the **hope** of eternal life.

John 1:12–13 — But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were **born/begotten [gennaō]**, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but **of God**.

1 John 2:29 — If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that everyone who practices righteousness has been **born/begotten [gennaō] of him**.

1 John 4:7 — Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been **born/begotten [gennaō]** of God and knows God.

with hope every single day that we are called to live as foreigners in this world. (cf. Heb. 6:17-20; Rom. 5:5; 9:33; 10:11; 1 Pet. 2:6)

What is the content of our hope? Peter will tell us in a moment, but first: God has begotten us anew to this living hope **through** the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Our hope is living because Christ lives – because He is alive today and because He can never die again. Not only is **my hope living** because Christ lives, but even more fundamentally **I live myself** as a child begotten by God only because Christ also lives. Let’s put it together: Because of the **resurrection** of Jesus Christ **from the dead** and the life that He lives now and forevermore— **because** of this and **through** this I have been **begotten anew** by God Himself **to a living hope INDEED**.

Brothers and sisters, if there is one thing that should **distinguish** the Christian **from** the world, and so also be the opportunity for our **witness to** the world (cf. 1 Pet. 3:15), it should be this “living hope” to which God has begotten us anew. Hope, as much as faith, is *the* distinguishing mark of the true Christian. (cf. Michaels) But what is the content of this living hope?

III. 1 Peter 1:4— Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who** according to his abounding mercies, has begotten us anew **TO** a living hope **THROUGH** the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, **TO an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...**

If **God** has begotten us anew as His own sons and daughters, then **as** His sons and daughters we are now **heirs** (cf. Rom. 8:17; Gal. 4:7) – **heirs** to an **inheritance**.

In the Old Testament, Israel’s “inheritance” was the land of Canaan in Palestine, but we have to think of that “land” not just as geography (a place in the middle east with boundaries and borders), but as theology. What was so special about the land was that just like the Garden of Eden in the beginning, this was the place where the people were to have the full enjoyment of God’s presence with them – forgiveness of sins, righteousness and justice, peace and security, feasting and gladness, and the full abundance of every good thing.

But what happened to *that* Old Covenant inheritance? *That* inheritance was ravaged and destroyed by enemies; *that* inheritance was defiled by sin and unrighteousness and uncleanness, and so *that* inheritance faded away and was lost to the people of the Old Covenant. Even for those who still lived in the land (and even for those living in that land today) the land was no longer the place where they enjoyed the blessings of God’s presence among them.

The inheritance of the Old Covenant people **perished**, and was **defiled**, and ultimately **faded away**. But all along, it was just the shadow of a better inheritance that would one day be the **birthright** of all God’s New Covenant **sons** and **daughters**. (cf. Heb. 11:8-10, 13-16, 39-40) The Old Covenant people as a whole were never begotten anew to this living hope that we have today through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and so the inheritance was lost. But now, God **has** begotten us anew **to** an inheritance **THAT IS: imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven** for us! What Peter wants **us** to know is that nothing—**NOTHING**—can ever touch this inheritance. It cannot be destroyed by any enemy, it cannot be marred or defiled by any sin or uncleanness, it cannot ever fade with the passing of time, and so there is nothing that

could ever detract from its luster and its glory and its beauty. (cf. Mat. 6:19-20) It's even now being kept in heaven—completely safe from all the ravages of this world—**for us**.

We like to find the safest possible places for the things that are most valuable to us. What could be more valuable to us than our eternal inheritance? And what safer place could there be for our eternal inheritance than to be kept in heaven itself? One commentator writes of this inheritance, “[It] is untouched by death, unstained by evil, unimpaired by time; it is compounded of immortality, purity, and beauty.” (Beare; quoted in Jobes)

So what is “it”? What is this inheritance? Brothers and sisters, here's the amazing good news: It's **the place** that God first promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; it's the land where we will all finally enter into the full enjoyment of God's presence with us – the final removal of sin and all its effects, the universal experience of righteousness and justice, and peace and security, and gladness and merriment, and the full abundance of every good thing enjoyed as the gracious gift of Him who alone **is good**. Peter writes in his second letter:

➤ 2 Peter 3:13 (cf. Mat. 5:5; Rev. 21:1-4) — According to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth [a place and a land] in which righteousness dwells. [SLIDE]

What is our inheritance? Paul calls it the Jerusalem that is above. The present Jerusalem is in slavery with her children (perished, defiled, and faded away), but brothers and sisters the city—the Jerusalem—that is above is free – *imperishable, undefiled, unfading*, and kept now in heaven for us. (cf. Gal. 4:25-26)

At the end of the day, though, we can never fully know what our inheritance will be. Have you noticed how Peter tells us every time what our inheritance is *not*? All three of the adjectives that Peter uses to describe our inheritance begin with the negation “a,” “a,” “a” – it's *not*, it's *not*, it's *not*. Why does Peter do that? It's because when the inheritance is so glorious that it surpasses all powers of description, then all that's left for us to say is what it's *not*—in order that we might better begin to imagine what *we* will all one day know it to *be*.

IV. 1 Peter 1:5 — Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who** according to his abounding mercies, has begotten us anew TO a living hope THROUGH the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, TO an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, **who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**.

What good is an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us if we never make it to that inheritance in the end? Has this ever worried you? Has this ever caused us to doubt and be afraid? Paul writes:

➤ 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 (cf. Gal. 5:19-21) — Do you not know that the unrighteous will *not inherit* the kingdom of God?

Have we ever seen our sin, and our failures, and our fleshly weakness and fickleness, and despaired that this glorious inheritance should ever really, truly be ours? And even if we haven't

despaired, have you at least wondered that this inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading should be kept in heaven *for us* who are still sinners, and still subject to death and decay. How can this ever be?—Since the Apostle Paul writes in another place:

- 1 Corinthians 15:50 — I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

The inheritance may be kept in heaven, but how can we—perishable, flesh and blood sinful human beings that we are—how can we ever come to that wonderful inheritance in the end? Peter answers! This inheritance is being “kept in heaven for you—*who* by God’s power are being guarded.” If God is keeping the inheritance in heaven, then *He* is also guarding us on earth. And, brothers and sisters, if we are being guarded by God’s power—think of that!—can there be any doubt that we will be kept safe until the end?

But how is God guarding us by His power? Here’s a great mystery – He is guarding us “through faith.” But wait a minute! Isn’t it our faith that feels at times so weak, and so fickle, and so unreliable?—So susceptible to the attacks of the world and our own sin nature? There are some who say that our faith is what brings God’s guarding power into our lives – that God’s guarding power is the *result* of our faith. But this is clearly not what Peter is saying! **If God’s guarding power is dependent on our faith**, then if we are honest with ourselves, we know that we will all be lost in the end – not a one of us here will *ever* enter into our inheritance. Peter doesn’t say that *we* receive God’s protection *as a result of* faith (cf. Watson; Davids; Kelly, quoted in Grudem), but rather that **God** is guarding us by His power *through*, or *by means of* faith.

On the one hand, this faith is *ours*. God never exercises faith. Faith is *mine alone* to exercise; it is **my** faith. And yet if Peter assumes that this faith is ours, what he’s saying even more clearly is that this faith was first of all **God’s gracious gift** to us. And so even now our continual, day by day exercise of faith is the result of His power always sustaining and upholding that faith in us. Think about it this way: The God who has begotten us anew by His imperishable seed (cf. 1 Pet. 1:23) is the God whose seed still abides in us right now, and is constantly producing, and maintaining, and sustaining in us saving faith.

- 1 John 3:9 (cf. 5:18) — No one **begotten of God** makes a practice of sinning, for **God’s seed abides in him**; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been **begotten of God**.
- 1 John 5:4 (cf. Heb. 6:11-12; 10:35-39) — Everyone who has been **begotten of God** overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—**our faith**.

Brothers and sisters, if God is keeping an inheritance for us in heaven, then *know* that He will also keep **us** and bring us to our inheritance in the end. Even now, at this very moment, we are being guarded by God’s power through faith **for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time**.

What is this *salvation*? It’s our final **deliverance** from all sin, from all trials, from all suffering and tears and death and the day when we come into the full possession of our inheritance. And **when** will this salvation be revealed? *Not* at our death when we go to be with Jesus, but in the last time, when Jesus returns, and this perishable puts on the imperishable and this mortal puts on

immortality and we find our new home in the new heavens and new earth where righteousness dwells along with all of its fruits. (cf. 1 Cor. 15:53-54) And **how long** do we still have to wait for this salvation? Peter answers, it is already—even now—**ready** to be revealed. We don't know exactly how long, but we do know that we are standing "on the threshold of [our] inheritance." (Michaels) "Salvation is *near*... [because] every preparation for the final unveiling of this salvation is completed. The curtain is about to go up. Only the final signal is awaited." (Davids)

Conclusion

In your struggle against sin which clings so closely, in your struggle to live as a foreigner in a foreign world and not to succumb to the pressure and the temptation to be like the world, always remember your **living hope**. It's this **hope**—this **inheritance** that's kept in heaven for us, this **salvation** that's ready to be revealed in the last time—it's *this hope* that animates and energizes and informs our lives in the present. (cf. Jobes) And the reason this **future** hope works so powerfully in our lives today (the reason it's a *living* hope) is because we *know* it is **certain** – because God has begotten us anew to this hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (in the **past**), and because even now (in the **present**) God is continually guarding and keeping us through faith.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, **who**
according to his abounding mercies,
has begotten us anew
TO a **living hope**
through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
TO an **inheritance** that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven
for **you**,
who by God's power are being guarded
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for a **salvation** ready to be revealed in the last time.