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“Whom having not seen, ye love,” I Peter 1:8a.

Heavenly Realities

Lesson Aim: To encourage believers to set their affections on eternal things.

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INTRODUCTION

“We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal,” II Corinthians 4:18.

We live in two worlds. In one, things are known because of their witness to our senses of sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing. In the other, things are known because of their witness to our spirit. Things in both worlds are real. Just because the things of the other world are not susceptible to measurement by our physical senses does not mean they are unreal.

Some persons challenge Christian faith. They insist that the Christian cannot be sure about the reality of things unseen. Because unseen things are unreal to them, unbelievers suppose these things must be unreal to all others. Suppose a blind man denied that there was such a thing as sight. Suppose a deaf man denied there was such a thing as hearing. Suppose an unbelieving man denied there was such a thing as spiritual realities. They would be in the same category in that each denied the reality of that which he had not experienced.

But Christian believers have experienced the reality of God. They are assured of the reality of heaven because their citizenship is there; their Saviour is there; their home is there; their hope is there; their prayers are directed there. The things which are seen are real to the natural man; the things which are unseen are equally as real to the spiritual man. A person has stopped short of full Christian experience and assurance unless the things of heaven are real.

Today's study speaks of a Heavenly Inheritance, Heavenly Affection, and a Heavenly Salvation. Its aim is "to encourage believers to set their affections on eternal things."

EXPOSITION

I. OUR HEAVENLY INHERITANCE IS REAL, 1:3-5.

1. Motive.—God has provided a heavenly inheritance for believers because of His abundant grace, verse 3a. Indeed, God's mercy is an "abundant mercy." It is because of His mercy that He forgives sin. It is because of His mercy that He reproveth and restores and pardons the backslider. It is because of His mercy that He sustains His children in trials. It is in mercy that He qualifies them for service. Indeed, His is an "abundant mercy."

Mercy is a word which makes men want to cry. It breaks hard hearts and melts sinners in repentance before God. Mercy is the expression of grace and the means by which the peace of God possesses men's souls. It is a disposition to forgive, pity and be kind; a kindness in excess of what might be expected or demanded by fairness, forbearance and compassion. Peter relates his hope of an inheritance to the mercy of God in these words, **"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 . . ."**

2. Assurance.—The resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead gives assurance to the believer's hopes of a heavenly inheritance, verse 3. Those who know not Jesus have no hope. In contrast, the Christian believer rejoices in a "living hope" that abides. A.T. Robertson well wrote, "Hope rose up with Christ from the dead." Because Jesus lives, hope is real. If Jesus were dead there would be no hope. However, the resurrection of Jesus shows God intends to go through with the way of salvation and the believer's heart responds in hope which does not die.

Think of what this hope meant to the Apostle Peter who wrote of the "living hope." He could hardly believe the word when told that Jesus had risen from among the dead. He and John ran to the tomb to see for themselves, John 20:1-10. From then on Peter not only believed but saw the resurrection of Jesus as the basis of the believer's hope. His resurrection proves beyond reasonable doubt that Jesus lives and that it is safe to make Him the center of one's hope.

3. Nature.—The believer hopes for an inheritance in heaven, verse 4.

This inheritance is described in a four-fold statement. (1) It is incorruptible. That is, it is not liable to decay; it is imperishable. So many earthly inheritances vanish before they can be enjoyed, or are wasted soon after inheritance, but it is not so with this inheritance. (2) It is undefiled. That is, it has no flaws nor faults but is absolutely perfect. Indeed, it is so pure and faultless that men must be purified before they can enjoy it. (3). It is unfading. Earthly inheritances are often wasted by a careless heir. Not so this heavenly inheritance. It will be ever new and delightful and satisfying in eternity! It never grows old or unattractive. (4) It is unfailing. Since it is “reserved in heaven for you” the believer can be sure no one else will ever take it and that he will ever have an inheritance there.

Since it is a heavenly inheritance, it partakes of a heavenly nature. Since it is given of God, it shares His divine glory. Since it comes to those who are “joint-heirs with Christ,” it is as enduring as His own blessed place with the Father. Since each believer has such an inheritance waiting, it inspires a “living hope.”

4. Heirs.—An inheritance is “reserved” in heaven for every person who is “kept by the power of God,” verse 5. Each believer's heavenly inheritance is “reserved” for him. This term means “to take care of, to guard.” So it waits there “. . . **where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal**” Matthew 6:20.

Only a certain people will receive this wonderful inheritance. Peter describes them as “. . . **you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**” With strong terms he shows the security of one for whom a heavenly inheritance waits. Observe the term “kept.” It is borrowed from military vocabulary. It pictures an armed force employed in sentry and escort duties, surrounding their ward and interposing a wall of enclosure and defense. Thus does God keep His own dear children. So the matter of “staying saved” that one may at last receive a heavenly inheritance is God's work, not man's.

No promise is made those who are not “kept by the power of God.” No promise can be made for they are not redeemed. God keeps every one of His children but none of the children of the devil. “In the last time” the fulness of this salvation and the glory of the inheritance will be revealed. God's guardianship over His children assures them that they will each be there to receive that blessed inheritance.

5. Revelation.—The last time will be a time of revelation, verse 5. Only then will the fulness of salvation be realized. Actually there are three phases of salvation. (1) God saves the penitent believer immediately when he turns from sin and trusts in Jesus. This is a once-for-all eternally-valid salvation

from the guilt of sin. (2) God saves the believer day by day as his life is devoted to the service of Jesus Christ. This is a salvation from the dominion (rule) of sin in the life. (3) God saves the believer in the resurrection when the body is transformed into the likeness of the Lord Jesus. This salvation is from the presence of sin. Only when this third phase of salvation is complete will the fulness of salvation be realized.

Like the prospector who finds a gold strike, but knows not the extent nor value of the vein, so the believer only guesses at what the fulness of salvation will be. He has something wonderful and knows it. But the depth of its fulness is not yet realized. We wait its full revelation with a “living hope.”

II. OUR HEAVENLY AFFECTION IS REAL, 1:6-8.

1. Enduring.—The believer loves the Lord Jesus under all circumstances, verses 6-7. Even when fierce and multiplied trials come the believer still rejoices in the Lord. This is a joy which the unregenerate world cannot understand. It is the practical expression of the peace of the Lord Jesus within. **“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”** John 14:27. Such peace is not dependant upon external circumstances. **“Though the outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day,”** II Corinthians 4:16.

Gold is well paid for its trial in fire when it sits as a crown upon the head of a mighty monarch or is a ring to seal the marriage bond between two lovers. So shall believers be fully repaid for their testings when they see how all trials worked out to the glory of God. “To have one word of God's commendation; to be honored before the holy angels; to be glorified in Christ, so as to be better able to flash back his glory on Himself —ah! this will more than repay all.”—F. B. Meyer.

The believer knows that trials are not evidence that God has forsaken nor that God loves him less. Indeed, in trials the concern of God becomes more real than ever. Therefore, he loves God nonetheless because trials come. He learns that the more he loves the Lord Jesus the more he can endure for Him and the more he endures the more his love grows.

2. Real.—The believer loves the Lord even though He is unseen, verse 8. So fickle are human emotions that an old proverb states: “Out of sight; out of mind.” This is not true concerning the believer's affection for the Lord. He can love Him even though He is never seen with the natural eyes. Jesus is truly nearer a true believer today than He was to the multitudes

that listened to Him preach in Palestine.

If our only relationship to Jesus was in bonds of the flesh, we might fear of losing Him. With the spiritual relationship now enjoyed, all believers in the world may love and commune with Him at the same time. If any person does not love Jesus Christ he is not a Christian, I Corinthians 16:22.

“But,” someone objects, “how can you love One whom you have never seen!” The believer replies, “I have seen Him. In the Bible, in the lives of other believers, in the witness of the Holy Spirit to my heart, in the vision inspired by faith, I have seen Him. He is none the less real because He is not seen with the physical eyes.”

The Christian's experience with the Lord produces a “joy unspeakable.” There are times when, in communion with the Lord, the tides of joy overflow their banks and pour their abundance into the overflowing soul of the believer. Moreover, this joy is “full of glory.” These are moments when heaven draws near to earth and we are made to “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.” Ephesians 2:6. It is a blessed experience to know Jesus in redemption and to love Him supremely day by day.

III. OUR HEAVENLY SALVATION IS REAL, 1:9-13.

1. The end of faith—Salvation is the consummation of faith, verse 9. This explains why one's joy is “unspeakable” and full of glory” (verse 8). It is because of the salvation which he has received. Salvation is the “end” of faith in that it is the goal toward which faith moves, the fulfillment which faith seeks, the boon which faith reaches for. Faith keeps right on believing that God does save, is saving and will save unto eternal glory. Remember: In past experiences salvation meant forgiveness of sin and deliverance from the guilt appertaining thereto. In present experiences salvation means fellowship with God and deliverance from the dominion of sin over the body and life. In future application salvation will mean the presence of God and complete deliverance from the presence of sin. All this is related to faith. We trusted God to forgive and faith found its fulfillment in the assurance of redemption. We trust God to govern and faith finds its fulfillment in the experience of victorious living. We trust God to glorify and faith finds its fulfillment in the resurrection and transformation of believers when Jesus comes again. Indeed, we receive the end (fulfillment) of our faith, even salvation.

All this was guaranteed when we first trusted Jesus to save. It is to this end that believers are “kept by the power of God,” verse 5. Faith gives assurance that eternal salvation is sure, “**Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God . . . For whosoever is born of God overcometh**

the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith,” I John 5:1, 4.

2. The prophetic message.—Salvation in Christ was the theme of the prophets, verses 10-12. Jesus said. **“I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them,”** Luke 10:24. The prophets knew the days of the messiah were ahead and they longed to see Him. They were amazed to know how God would work among the people in the person of His anointed Son.

Moreover, the Apostles also took up the theme which the prophets proclaimed and preached the same gospel of grace. So amazing is this gospel that even the angels draw near in a holy awe to listen to its truth and sublimity. They also desire a knowledge of this wonder of grace and mercy.

This is holy ground. With what solemnity the Gospel should be preached and heard! God's message is always the same whether declared by prophet, apostle, His only Son, or a twentieth-century preacher. It must never be repeated lightly. It must never be heard carelessly. This gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation unto every one who believes whether he be Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female. **“Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone,”** Ephesians 2:19-20.

3. The call to service.—Privilege always brings responsibility. The privileges of grace are attended by a responsibility to serve. Review this chapter. Peter has written of the believer's election, hope, inheritance, affection for the Lord Jesus, and eternal salvation. These are the privileges of grace. Then he turns to the responsibility attendant upon these privileges. **“Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ,”** verse 13. What is Peter saying? Kenneth S. Wuest has caught the idea exactly when he translates this verse, “Wherefore, having put out of the way once for all everything that would impede the free action of your mind, be calm and collected in spirit, and set your hope perfectly, wholly, and unchangeably, without doubt and despondency, upon the grace that is being brought to you upon the occasion of the revelation of Jesus Christ.” It appears that opposition of unbelievers, plus spiritual sloth, was hindering the Christian service of those who received the Epistle. So the Apostle uses the occasion of listing the mercies of God to call believers to faithful service.

The people of New Testament times wore long, flowing garments.

When on a trip, preparing for energetic work, or desiring to run quickly, the long skirts would be gathered up and secured by the belt. Thus they would be free from impeding progress. So Peter calls for the mind to be disciplined. All doubts, uncertainties, or absence of facts are to be laid aside once for all. The mind is to be ready to serve the Lord at all times.

Peter has a valid reason for making such a requirement. He gives this reason later in this Epistle: **“But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer,”** I Peter 4:7. Jesus said, **“Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat and will come forth and serve them,”** Luke 12:37. The call to service is perfectly reasonable and will be responded to with joy if heaven is real to the believer’s heart.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual things are as real as material things. Never permit Satan to deceive you at this point. At this moment you can think of some dear friend or relative who is absent from you. Is he the less real because he is out of sight? What about some dear one who has died and gone to be with the Lord? He is not less real than before, is he?”

The distinction is this: things which are seen are material and limited to time; things which are not seen are spiritual and unlimited by time for they are eternal. **“While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal,”** II Corinthians 4:18. Therefore the things unseen are more enduring than those things which are visible. God, heaven, forgiveness, eternal life, and such spiritual persons and things are true and real. It is safe for one to stake his hope for eternity on them. To him who believes, they are as real as things of physical reality. Be steadfast, Christian believer, and rejoice in the prospect of glory when anticipation is ended and the “Heavenly Realities” are ours!

QUESTIONS

1. What is the mercy of God?
2. What is a living hope?
3. What inheritance awaits the believer?
4. How does verse 5 teach security of the believer?
5. How can believers find joy in trials?

6. How can believers love One they cannot see?
7. In what sense is salvation the fulfillment of faith?
8. What did the prophets know of Christ?
9. Why is privilege attended by responsibility?
10. Has this study realized its aim in your own heart?