

First Peter No. 3 “The Two Sides of Salvation”

1 Peter 1:1-6

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Text Comment

v.3 Let me read to you a fine passage from the late Dr. Edmund Clowney’s commentary on 1 Peter. He is reflecting on the phrase “born again to a living hope.”

“In his play *No Exit*, Jean-Paul Sartre gives his own vision of hell. Two women and a man, doomed to perdition, enter a room that seems to threaten no torment. But they are sentenced to remain together in that same room forever – without sleep and without eyelids. All three enter with pretensions about their past. The man pretends that he was a hero of the revolution. In reality, he was killed in a train wreck when he tried to escape after betraying his comrades. The women have even more sordid lives. In the forced intimacy of the room their guilty secrets are all wrung out. Nothing can be hidden, and nothing can be changed. Sartre’s imagination has well prepared us for his famous line, ‘Hell is other people.’ But the moral of the play is the line of doom to which the drama moves: ‘You are – your life, and nothing else.’

“Sartre rejected Christianity, but his play invites heart-searching. Who wants to say that he is what he has been rather than what he meant to be, or what he hopes to be? Sartre implies that hell begins where hope ends. Sartre’s image falls far short of the reality of hell, for God’s judgment exposes sinners not simply to the lidless eyes of other sinners, but to the all-seeing gaze of God himself. Yet Sartre reminds us how desperately we need hope.

“Peter writes a letter of *hope*. The hope he proclaims is not what we call a ‘fond hope.’ ... Peter writes of a sure hope... The resurrection of Jesus was a life-changing reality for Peter.” [43-44] *That* is hope in the Bible, the sure conviction of better things, far better things yet to come because of Christ’s conquest of sin and death on behalf of those who trust in him.

v.5 “Inheritance” is another way of expressing that “living hope.” We have an inheritance that will someday be ours. It is guaranteed both by the victory of Christ and the power of God. How different one’s life must be who knows that he is an heir to a stupendous fortune! But it comes, this inheritance, only to those who have faith. God guards our inheritance through our faith.

In verses 3-6 we are given a magnificent account of the salvation that God in his grace, mercy, and power bestows on his people. We already read, in v. 2, that this salvation is brought to pass by the cross of Christ and the purifying work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of those who are being saved and leads to their life of obedience to Christ and to the forgiveness of their sins. Here in vv. 3-6, that purification by the Holy Spirit is identified as the new birth, what Paul calls the “new

creation,” the grand new beginning of a person’s life that the Holy Spirit brings to pass when he calls a sinner out of darkness into light, when he breaks the soul’s bondage to sin and death, illuminates the mind with the truth and turns the will to God and Christ. The result of all of that is a life of hope – a life that is pointed to a magnificent future, grand beyond our power to describe, the future that lies on the other side of death and the resurrection, a hope which Christ made certain by his own resurrection. What is more, this new life in Christ, which the Spirit has led us into, is a life that God himself oversees, protects, and nurtures to ensure that we who have come to life in Christ will remain in that life until we are safely in the presence of God in heaven.

It is a brief, but splendid description of salvation, like a number of others that you can read in the New Testament. Peter doesn’t mention everything, of course, he gives us only a summary. But it is a memorable summary! This salvation is a personal transformation worked at the deepest level of the human heart, a transformation so radical that it can be likened to starting one’s life all over again. It is deliverance from the despair of this world, from the physical and spiritual death that looms over this world on account of sin. Salvation is a new life that is certain to become ever more wonderful and never to end because God himself takes charge to protect us in our salvation and lead us from this world to the next. *We could go on at great length to describe this salvation, but that pretty well sums up the main points, doesn't it?*

But, then we have that jolt in v. 6: “In this you greatly rejoice...” Well, there is nothing surprising about that. Who would not rejoice over deliverance and eternal life and the protection of God himself? But, there is more. *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.”* Now, it is not too much to say that, at least to a Christian novice, or to one investigating the Christian faith, v. 6 comes as a surprise, even a disappointment.

The Holy Spirit has come into our lives and transformed them. We have the living hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ. In this world, as we wait for and walk toward the next world, we have the promise of God's own personal protection. All of this has come to us because of God's mercy, his love, his compassion. In other words, Christianity proclaims a salvation that results from the combination of divine compassion and divine power. God is willing and God, of course, is able to give us everything we need for life and happiness and eternal joy. That much is clear. Peter says that much.

But, if so, why then does any Christian have to “suffer grief in all kinds of trials”? Where is the mercy of God now? Where is his power to protect his people now? Experienced readers of the Bible may not be surprised at this, but it is worth remembering how un-obvious this is; how contrary to natural expectation. That this is surprising to many people, after all, is something the Bible frequently admits. We find any number of saints in the Bible itself wondering aloud why their lives are so painful and so difficult in many ways. If God has truly loved them as he says he has, has really given them so complete a transformation of nature and character as the gospel says he has, and if God is truly present to protect and care for them as he promises to be, why so much trouble, disappointment, and frustration? Over and again the Bible takes up this question: why does the life of God’s children have so much in it that, at first glance, would seem to suggest that God is *not* caring for them or protecting them or, even worse, that they have *not* been given a completely

new life?

It is the strength of such language in verses like 1 Pet. 1:3-6 that still confuses Christians today. Many believers still seem to think that the Christian life *ought to be* a life of triumphant success and perpetual happiness, precisely because the Bible describes our salvation in such exalted terms: it is deliverance, a new life, a new heart, a new creation; the old things have passed away, behold all things have become new; faith is the victory that overcomes the world, we are being transformed from glory into glory, and so on. It does not seem to them that one can do justice to language like *that* and still expect to see Christians suffering trials, tramping wearily through the desert of this world, gasping for some air from that world to come which has been promised them but, frankly, often seems to them as far away as ever.

But, the fact is, *this is Christianity and this is Christian experience*: both the tremendous transformation and deliverance *and* the griefs and the trials. It is never anything else but those two things together. There is much to be said, the Bible says much in explanation of the fact that there are these two sides of salvation – the light and the dark, the happy and the sad, the invigorating and the wearying, the inspiring and the confusing or discouraging – Peter will give one explanation in the very next verse, v. 7.

But, this evening I am interested more in the juxtaposition of these two realities, their being set side by side in every Christian's experience as they are in vv. 3-6 – the glorious transformation of life and living hope in Christ, on the one hand, *and*, on the other, the enduring of punishing trials – I say, I am more interested in the simple fact that both are part of the Christian life than I am interested in explaining why it should be so. The day will come when the transformation and the triumph of hope will be complete and all that will remain is joy and prosperity in the fullness of human life in the presence of God, but until then, the grand things of salvation are experienced in a context of troubles, disappointment, even fear; light and shadow are found together in Christian experience. *They are for all of you, they always have been for every Christian.* It is as if when God comes to transform every one of his chosen ones he says to each one what he told Ananias to say to the newly converted Apostle Paul: "Tell him, tell that most fortunate and happy man, how much he must suffer for my name!"

As you listen to me at this moment, I suspect that many of you are thinking of how this is true in your own case and how you could describe and demonstrate the truth of it if you were asked to do so. You know what trials you have suffered even as you are sure that God has given you an inheritance that can never fade away and even as you live your life in the knowledge of God's constant care. Tonight I thought I would illustrate this salvation which Peter has described by telling one person's story. My purpose is simply to assure you that this admixture of triumph and tragedy in your own life is and must be the norm, the experience of every true believer in Jesus.

I came across this story again just recently, and it was fresh in my mind and it seemed perfectly to encapsulate Peter's double-sided account of our salvation. You have heard me speak often enough of Samuel Rutherford's *Letters*. The collection was first published in 1664, after Rutherford's death, the first edition a somewhat smaller collection of letters than would be the case as other

letters were found and added to later editions. The first edition was published by a student and later a secretary of Rutherford's, Robert M'Ward. The book was printed in Rotterdam, not in Great Britain, because the British monarch, Charles II, wanted Rutherford dead and had already burned other books by him.

Books of the class of Rutherford's *Letters* are very rare. There are only a few books in all the world that compare to this one: Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, and Augustine's *Confessions*, chief among them. Spurgeon said that he considered Rutherford's *Letters* the nearest thing to inspiration which can be found in all the writings of mere men. Richard Baxter, no mean author of great spiritual books himself, told a friend, "[Excepting] the Bible, such a book as Mr. Rutherford's *Letters* the world never saw the like." [In Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, 75.] The original edition of the *Letters* bore the subtitle "Joshua Redivivus," or "Joshua Alive Again." Joshua, remember, was one of the spies sent to bring back a report of the Promised Land, and he brought back a good report. And that is what M'Ward thought everyone would find in his master's letters, a very good report of the Promised Land for those still living in the wilderness.

You don't read very far in the *Letters* before you come across Rutherford's letters to Lady Kenmure, one Jane Campbell, wife of the Viscount of Kenmure, and in that there hangs a tale. Lady Kenmure was a devout Christian, a woman in whom the Spirit of God was present to an usual degree. She was a woman of faith and of love, and of Christian action. We know the quality of her heart and the fruitfulness of her Christian service in part from things that Rutherford says about her and from the esteem in which he held her. He dedicated his great work, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* to her. She had been given the new birth, had become a new woman in Jesus Christ, her life had been transformed by the hope of eternal life in the world of joy. But, as Peter said she would, she had her trials.

She suffered some typical trials. That is, her griefs and her trials were the kind we find often mentioned in the Bible and frequently referred to in Christian history. They were trials with which we are ourselves familiar. For example, she suffered the death of loved ones. One of Rutherford's most poignant letters to her concerned the death of her infant daughter. He comforted her, concerning her child:

"She is only sent on before, like unto a star, which, going out of our sight, doth not die and vanish, but still shineth in another hemisphere. What she wanted of time she hath gotten of eternity, and you have now some plenishing [furnishing for your house] up in heaven. Build your nest upon no tree here, for God hath sold the whole forest to death." [IV]

And, like every Christian, she suffered the exquisite trial of her own continuing sinfulness, the shame, the weariness, the disgust, the long battles with temptation only sometimes won, the sense of discouragement, and the anger with oneself that a holy heart is filled with because it continues to sin. Rutherford wrote to her about that as well.

"I find you complaining of yourself, and it becometh a sinner so to do. I am not

against you in that. The more sense, the more life. The more sense of sin, the less sin.” [CVI]

“I thought it had been an easy thing to be a Christian, and that to seek God had been at the next door; but, oh, the windings, the turnings, the ups and downs He hath led me through.” [CIV]

“Never believe that your tender-hearted Savior will mix your cup with one drachm-weight of poison. Drink, then, with the patience of the saints: wrestle, fight, go forward, watch, fear, believe, pray, and then you have all the infallible symptoms of one of the elect of Christ within you.” [III]

But, then, Lady Kenmure also suffered the trial of bearing with a world that despised the things of God and her own faith and yet a world from which she could not escape. Indeed, in her case, that world came right into her own home and her own bed in the form of her husband. This was, without a doubt, the heaviest cross she had to carry, at least for some years of her life. Her health was not good all her days, but that was nothing compared to her marriage. She was an Abigail married to a Nabal.

How a woman of the quality of Jane Campbell came to marry a man like John Gordon remains a mystery. We do not know the story. But he was no match for her. He had posed as a friend of the Reformation and a convinced Presbyterian. But when a choice had to be made between his convictions and the prestige of his position as a nobleman he always chose for the latter. One modern scholar dismisses him as simply “lukewarm.” [Coffee, *Politics, Religion, and the British Revolutions*, 101] It was of men like Kenmure, who had called Rutherford to pastor the parish of Anwoth, of which Kenmure was the patron, that Rutherford declared that such men were trying “to climb to heaven with the clay of the world on their backs. They were treating Christ like a ‘pack-horse’ who would carry their clay, their lusts, and their baronies.” [Coffee, 234] In any case, Lady Jane Campbell was too clever and too high-minded a woman not to have discovered very soon the fatal mistake she had made in marrying him. No wonder Rutherford's letters to her are often headed, “To Lady Kenmure, under illness and depression of mind.” [Whyte, *Rutherford*, 29-30.]

Kenmure was a man who cared for this world more than for the honor of Christ all the while keeping up the pretense of being a church-going Christian. He spent his days, like the man in the Gospel, tearing down barns and building bigger ones. He was a nobleman – King Charles I, seeking to curry the favor of the Scottish nobility, had made him a Viscount – so he had a seat in the Scottish parliament in those days of religious turmoil and the struggle for the reformation in Scotland. He went to Edinburgh to sit in Parliament in 1633, but soon realized that the Parliament was set to take actions the King would disapprove of and so, wanting to preserve the King's favor in hopes of further reward and advancement for himself but not wanting to face the disapproval of the reformation party, he feigned an illness and left for home.

Alexander Whyte wonders out loud about what *that* was like for a principled Christian woman and ardent defender of the Reformation like Lady Jane.

“Think of having to nurse your humbug of a husband through a shammed illness. Think of having to take a hand in sending in a sham doctor’s certificate because your husband was too much of a time-server to go to Edinburgh to give his vote for a persecuted church. Think of having to wear the title and decoration your husband had purchased for you at the cost of his truth and honour and manhood.” [31]

And so it was that Rutherford wrote such things to this good woman in such terrible grief and shame as this:

“Therefore, madam, herein have comfort, that he who seeth perfectly through all your evils, and who knoweth the frame and constitution of your nature, and what is most healthful for your soul, holdeth every cup of affliction to your head with his own gracious hand.” [III]

“Your ladyship goeth on laughing and putting on a good countenance before the world, and yet you carry heaviness about with you. You do well, madam, not to make them witnesses of your grief who cannot be curers of it.” [XX]

“Madam, tire not, weary not, for...when you are got up thither and have cast your eyes to view the golden city and the fair and never-withering Tree of Life that beareth twelve manner of fruits every month, you shall then say, ‘Four-and-twenty hours’ abode in this place is worth threescore and ten years’ sorrow upon earth.’” [XIX]

It is all there, the new birth, the living hope, the care and constant support and protection of Almighty God, though in the midst of grief and trial, and disappointment, embarrassment, and frustration, just as Peter said. But the Lord does not leave himself without a witness. The story has an ending that must be told, an ending that answers for us the great question: which is the lasting part of salvation – the transformation, the new life, the hope of splendor to come, or the trials, the disappointments and the discouragements?

A year after his cowardly avoidance of his duty at Parliament in Edinburgh, Kenmure fell ill. This was the real thing, not the sham illness of a year before. And in that illness, he was overcome with the fear of death and of the judgment of God, and through the ministry of Rutherford and several others, Christ met him in a most wonderful and dramatic manner. Indeed, the record of his dying days and of the tremendous change that the Spirit of God made in that man, of his new birth to a new life so shortly before he left this world, is one of the classics of Reformed spiritual literature. It was published by Rutherford and entitled, *The Last and Heavenly Speeches of Viscount Kenmure*. It is the account of a man beginning his life all over again almost at the very moment he must give up his life in this world.

There was first a terrible period of conviction of sin and of the wrath of God against him on account of his sins. “I’ve been too late coming to God,” he said. And to the very end, even after the

joy of God's forgiveness had flooded his soul, he was mourning his sins and repenting of them before others, telling others what he had done and how shameful his behavior had been. On one occasion he said to a nobleman friend who had come to see him on his sickbed,

“I ever found you faithful and kind to me in my life; therefore I must now give you a charge, which you shall deliver to all noblemen you are acquainted with; go through them, and show them from me, that I have found the weight of the wrath of God for not giving testimony for the Lord, when I had occasion once in my life at the last parliament. For this fault how fierce have I found the wrath of the Lord! ...I have been grieved at the remembrance of it. Tell them that they will be as I am now: encourage my friends that stood for the Lord; tell them that failed, if they would wish to have mercy when they are as I am now, they must repent, and crave mercy of the Lord. For all the earth I would not do as I have done.” [Howie, *Scots Worthies*, 159]

And over and again he told those who came to see them of the love of Christ that he had found, of the forgiveness of his terrible sins, and warned those he knew were as he had been – time servers and the lukewarm – not to continue in that delusion that had so spoiled his own life. *There was a man transformed; a man born again to a living hope.*

And what of his hope? He spoke of that a great deal those last days and spoke with others about it, including his ministers. On one morning a bishop who had much less understanding of salvation than Kenmure did now, asked him how he was. The Viscount answered, “I thank God, as well as a saved man hastening to heaven can be.” And to others he said, “I would not exchange my life with any of you all; I seem to feel the savour of the place whither I am going.” And on the morning of his death he said, “This night I must sup with Jesus Christ in paradise.” [All the above from Howie, 159-164.]

And what of his wife – this good woman, this fine woman, this principled woman – who had put up with so much that grieved her so terribly? Well, he praised her to all who came to see him, her holiness, her goodness, her kindness to him. He craved her forgiveness for every way he had failed and wronged her. And he looked forward, he said, to the day when they would be reunited at the throne of God himself. Trials? Oh yes! Disappointment, shame, and death? Absolutely. But, with them transformation and new life and the sure and certain hope of everlasting joy in the world to come. Oh, yes! The deep and abiding joy, even now, one hundred times as much as the grief. As Rutherford, the wise counselor, wrote once to Lady Kenmure, before her husband became also, for that short while, her brother in Christ and joint-heir of the grace of life:

“Those who can take the crabbed tree of the cross [he means the trials the Lord sees fit to appoint for us and take us through] handsomely upon their backs and fasten it on cannily shall find it such a burden as...wings are to a bird or...sails to a ship.”
[LXIX]

Such is salvation and its two sides and the one side, the happy side, that is far more the true salvation and the lasting part of salvation than the other. Pray and believe that you may know it to

be so and feel it to be so and delight that it is so in days to come. As Rutherford wrote to Lady Jane on another occasion, when she was grieving over her trials:

"I have heard your Ladyship complain of deadness, and want of the bestirring power of the life of God. But courage! He who walked in the garden, and made a noise that made Adam hear His voice, will also at some times walk in your soul, and make you hear a more sweet word.... Ye are, at such a time, like Jacob mourning the supposed death of Joseph, when Joseph was living." [III]