

When F. D. Roosevelt was President, the phone rang in the office of a Washington church. A voice asked, "Will the President be in his church Sunday morning?" The minister replied, "That I cannot promise. But I do know the Lord will be present, and that should be sufficient incentive for a reasonably large attendance." (Les Flynn, 12 Apostles)

There are lots of strange reasons as to why people choose the church they do. Some pick a church because of who's there. Others are influenced by the programs the church offers. And not a few in our day look for a church that offers services that will make them "feel" good.

How would God pick a church? He tells us in His Word. What are the marks of a successful church? That's the vital question we've been probing in our current series. There are three marks God commends over and over throughout the New Testament. He commended the church in Colossee for them, as we saw two weeks ago. The same marks elicited His approval for the church in Thessalonica, as we discovered last week. As we finish our series this morning, I'd like to leave Paul's writings and see another New Testament writer acclaim the same three virtues.

The writer is Peter, and the text is his first epistle.

Review: Marks of Successful Church (21-22)

Peter writes in 1 Pet 1:21-22, "Who by Him do believe in God, who raised Him up from the dead and gave Him glory, that your faith and hope might be in God. Seeing that ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth...see that you love one another with a pure heart fervently." What is it that Peter says God expects to see in His people? 3 marks...

1. *Faith in God*
2. *Hope in God*
3. *Love for one another*

Please don't miss this. Being a successful church has little to do with the size of the building or the quality of the music or the eloquence of the pastor (if it did, we would have to write off the estimated 50 million, persecuted believers in China today meeting in house churches). No, God measures success by a different standard than we often do. What is a successful church? A church where people are known for having faith in God, hope in God, and love for each other.

What does that mean in practical terms. In the past two weeks, we've done some soul-searching on two of the marks, faith and love. Now we come to the third.

God has called us to be a people of hope. How can we be known as a people of hope? We'll find the answer in 1 Peter. The word "hope" appears four times in Peter's first epistle (1:3, 13, 21; 3:15). This morning we are going to engage in a topical, rather than expositional study of 1 Peter. We want to discover what Peter has to say about being a people of hope (and we'll draw on other support texts from other portions of Scripture).

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

Proposition: According to 1 Peter 1:3-4, and other relevant texts, if we are to be a people of hope, we must be able to answer three questions.

Review: Marks of Successful Church (21-22)

1. Faith in God
 2. Hope in God
 3. Love for one another
- I. What are the characteristics of our hope? (3)
- A. It comes from God.
 1. We hope in God's Name.
 2. We hope in God's Word.
 3. We hope in God's Work.
 4. We hope in God's Son.
 - B. It belongs to those who are born again.
 - C. It is alive.
 - D. It is linked to the resurrection of Christ.
- II. What is the content of our hope?
- A. We hope for an inheritance (4).
 - B. We hope for a Person (8).
 - C. We hope for ultimate deliverance (9).
 1. We will be delivered from sin.
 2. We will be delivered from Satan.
 3. We will be delivered from death.
- III. What are the consequences of our hope?
- A. It produces joy (6).
 - B. It produces endurance (13).
 - C. It produces godly living (3:15).
 1. We must claim what we have.
 2. We must share what we have.

I. What are the characteristics of our hope? (3)

Frankly, hope is the key to faith and love, as we learn in Col 1:5 (NIV), "The faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven, and that you have already heard about in the word of truth."

If anyone needed to be reminded about hope, Peter's readers did. The year was A.D. 65, and the church was under attack by hostile critics and even aggressive antagonists. Some of the church members had lost their jobs, their homes, and eventually would lose their lives for Christ. How do you encourage someone going through tough times? The same way Peter did. He reminded them about hope.

What are the characteristics of hope? I see four in the text of v 3.

A. It comes from God.

Following his introductory remarks in vv 1-2, Peter launches into a magnificent blessing, a doxology, that runs from v 3 to v 12. Notice v 3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again unto a LIVING HOPE by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." What is the source of hope? Hope comes from God.

Think of this. What counsel does Peter give to hurting, victimized people? Here's where he started. Learn to bless God. Learn to get your eyes off of what's happening to you, and put them on what God. What will that do? It will give us hope because hope comes from God--"Blessed be God."

How specifically do we find hope in God? If you use a concordance, and so a word-search of hope, you will find hope grounded in four areas.

1. We hope in God's Name.

The Psalmist testified in Ps 52:9 (NIV), "I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good." And Psalm 9:10 reveals (NIV), "Those who know Your name will trust in You, for You Lord have never forsaken those who seek You."

When I get a suicidal call from someone, I am so thankful I can share the truth of Romans 15:13, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." What's the verse saying? There is hope, no matter how bad our situation may be. Why? What is God? He is the "God of hope." We can hope in His Name.

2. We hope in God's Word.

Again the Psalmist writes (119:74, NIV), "May those who fear you rejoice when they see me, for I have put my hope in your word." Ps 130:5 ought to be our constant declaration, "I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in His word do I hope."

Living by hope is not living in fantasy, nor is it living a life of denial. It is practicing the truth. Biblical hope has a firm foundation and that is the Word of God.

Do you have a daily quiet time in the Word of God? I don't know any person who is prospering in the Christian life who is not consistently, personally taking in the Word of God. If you struggle in this area, seek help. There are many materials available.

3. We hope in God's Work.

The prophet Jeremiah applies this truth in Jer 14:22 (NIV), "Do any of the worthless idols of the nations bring rain? Do the skies themselves send down showers? No, it is You, O LORD our God. Therefore, our hope is in You, for You are the one who does all this." We can hope in God's work, as our Creator, as our Redeemer.

4. We hope in God's Son.

Colossians 1:27 identifies Christ as "the hope of glory." 1 Timothy 4:10 says that as Christians, "we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe."

The point is this. Hope comes from God--from His name, word, work, and Son.

B. It belongs to those who are born again.

Notice what Peter says (3), "Blessed be the God and Father...who...hath begotten us again unto a living hope." Stop there. Who possesses hope? Those whom God has begotten, that is, those who have been born again. How does that happen? Drop down to v 23, "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God."

Don't miss the significance of this. A lot of people are clinging to an ungrounded hope, a "hope so" approach to eternity, that when they die, they'll go to heaven because they've been good. Not so. To have a living hope, we must be regenerated.

C. It is alive.

Peter says we have been born again to a "living hope" (3). What does that mean? Peter is making a contrast between Christians and non-Christians, namely those who follow pagan religious systems. We have a living hope. They have hopelessness.

By the way, why are we often intimidated by unsaved people? People of hope are not. People of hope don't walk around like we're missing out on all the fun in life!

When someone says, "Well, I couldn't become a Christian. I have too much to give up." Ask him, "Really? Do you realize what you are giving up by NOT becoming a Christian? You are giving up a hope that can look at death's door with confidence."

We have a hope that is alive! It's living! Hope is an attitude. It's not a wish, but an attitude of certainty concerning the future. It's an expectation. Ask yourself, "Do I really expect God to work in my life today?" There are several things I can be sure of, according to the Bible. One, God will never leave me (Heb 13:5), which means I can enjoy His peace and joy. Another, God will meet my needs (Phil 4:19).

We know this, but many of us choose to live as "practical atheists." God is not in our thoughts. We live as though God did not exist, or at least as though He doesn't really care about us. We have forgotten that our hope is living!

D. It is linked to the resurrection of Christ.

Don't miss the prepositions in v 3, particularly this key one, "Hath begotten us again unto a living hope BY the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." True, the world offers a "hope," but the world's hope is string's attached and conditional. Ours is living. Ours is linked to what Christ has done. The only undetermined factor for us is TIME. We know what the future holds. What God says will happen. The question is not IF, but WHEN.

How do we know? Because of what Jesus did one Sunday morning when He conquered death! Christianity rests on this truth--We serve a Risen Savior. We can't see the future, but we know Who can. Because He lives, we too shall live (1 Cor 15:20).

Those are the characteristics of our hope--it's from God, belongs to those who have been born again, is alive, and is linked to the resurrection of Christ. But what really is our hope? That's the second question.

II. What is the content of our hope?

There are three things for which Peter says we hope.

A. We hope for an inheritance (4).

What kind of inheritance? Notice four descriptions in v 4, "To an inheritance incorruptible (undecaying; can't be destroyed by hostile forces), and undefiled (it won't spoil like over-ripened fruit), and that fadeth not away (it's not like carpet that loses its color as the sun hits it), reserved in heaven for you (our inheritance is in a bank account in heaven!)."

I marvel at the constant challenge of keeping vehicles on the road. The shiny car we bought new in 1985 has been through over ten mufflers. Cars don't last. Material things don't last. But listen. We hope for an inheritance which will last for eternity!

Don't miss this. Our hope is linked to our inheritance. We ought to think more about our inheritance NOW. Why do family members fight with each other over who gets the old rocking chair when mom dies, when it won't last anyway? We need to ask ourselves, "Am I living for things which will matter for eternity? Am I hoping for my inheritance?"

B. We hope for a Person (8).

Here's the reason our inheritance is so great, because of a Person we've never seen. In v 8, Peter (who had seen Christ) writes to those who hadn't, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy

unspeakable and full of glory." We have a living hope because it's based on a Living Person. It's not what we know, but who we know.

Last month, we vacationed in Washington D.C. and enjoyed the sights. We contacted our representative, and were thrilled that an intern from his office was available to give us a private tour of the Capitol building. When we came to the House and Senate chambers, both were in session. It was amazing to see the security, and the long lines of people waiting to be checked so they could enter. Our aid said, "Follow me," and we walked right past the long lines, and into the sessions. All because we were with a person who had the right credentials.

Hope beyond the grave is available to those who know the right Person.

C. We hope for ultimate deliverance (9).

V 9 says, "Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." Usually, we think of salvation as past tense (Eph 2:8), but here it is a future hope. The day is coming when we will experience ultimate deliverance over three foes.

1. *We will be delivered from sin.*
2. *We will be delivered from Satan.*
3. *We will be delivered from death.*

Here's what the "Name it, claim it" folks miss. Has God blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Christ? Yes (Eph 1:3), but can we enjoy all the blessings now? Is it God's will that we all be healthy and wealthy? No. The day is coming, but now we hope.

Have you ever heard the comment, "Oh, Christians are so heavenly minded, they're no earthly good"? That may be true for some, but the opposite also holds for a lot of others. They're so earthly minded that they're no heavenly good! Which raises question 3.

III. What are the consequences of our hope?

True heavenly hope produces a lot of earthly good, and Peter identifies 3 consequences (or by-products) of hope. Let's touch on them briefly.

A. It produces joy (6).

Before reading v 6, notice it flows out of the doxology began in v 3. V 6 says, "In this (In what? Our hope of our coming salvation--see v 5) ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold trials." Hope produces joy.

B. It produces endurance (13).

V 13 "Wherefore, gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and HOPE to the end." The God Who promises to bless us in the future will sustain us in the present.

C. It produces godly living (3:15).

The fourth appearance of "hope" in 1 Peter is found in 3:15, "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts (here's our first responsibility--make sure it's clear who's #1 in our lives), and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the HOPE that is in you..." Hope produces godly living.

Which brings us to the punch line. What must we do if we are going to be known as a people of hope? We must make two commitments.

1. *We must claim what we have.* If we have hope, we need to live like it!
2. *We must share what we have.*

Why? Because there are people all around us who don't have hope. The following story (from John MacArthur's "Grace to You" letter, 8/15/94) communicates a needed reminder for us: "On a dangerous sea coast where shipwrecks often occur there was once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut and had only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea. With no thought for themselves, they went out every day and night, tirelessly searching for shipwreck victims. Many lives were saved by this wonderful little life-saving station, and so it became famous.

"Some of those who were saved and various others in the surrounding area wanted to become associated with the station and give their time, money, and effort for the support of its work. New life boats were bought and new life-saving crews were trained. The little life-saving station grew. Some of the members of the life-saving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt a little more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those who were saved from drowning. So they replaced the emergency cots and the emergency beds and put in better furniture. Now the life-saving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely because they used it as a sort of social club.

"Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on life-saving missions so they hired lifeboat crews to do the work. The life-saving motif still prevailed in the club's decoration and there was a liturgical lifeboat in the room where the club met.

"About this time a large ship was wrecked off the coast and the hired crews brought in loads of cold, wet, half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick and some of them had black skin, and some had yellow skin. The beautiful new club was considerably messed up, so the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where the victims of the shipwrecks could be cleaned up before coming inside.

"At the next meeting there was a split in the club membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the life-saving activity because it was unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted on life-saving operations as the primary purpose and pointed out they were still called a life-saving station. But they were voted down and told if they wanted to save the lives of shipwreck victims in those waters, they could begin their own life-saving station down the coast. Which they did.

"And as the years went by, the new station experiences the same changes that occurred in the old and it evolved into a club and yet another life-saving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself. And if you visit the coast today you find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, and most of the people drown."

Do you see the point of the story? We are a people of hope. But hope is not to be hoarded--it is to be shared with people who need hope.

People ought to be asking us for reasons for the hope they see in us. Are they asking? If they're not asking, is it because they're not seeing?

I know of one teen who when asked if he wanted to become a Christian replied, "Why should I? That's what my parents have done, and it sure doesn't seem to be making much of a difference in their lives." What was he saying? He didn't see any hope in their

lives. What do people see in your life? Are you a person of hope? Are you claiming what you have in Christ? Is Christ real in your life? Are you sharing what you have with others? God didn't call us to be a social club, but a lighthouse. May the Lord help us to take seriously our responsibility to be a people of hope.