

Look Up and Expect Great Things

Aim: to encourage the listeners to fix their eyes on the prize that is set before them.

Main Idea: If we walk by faith, we shall receive the blessings of a new birth and a true joy.

Passage: 1 Peter 1:3-12

INTRODUCTION

We all want something to look forward to. It might a week vacation in the Bahamas Beach. It might a honey moon for those who are getting married soon. It might be a new job with a better compensation and working environment. Most of our hope rest in this life and in the things of this world. How often do we look forward to the things that are in a distant future, let's say in the next life? Many don't look forward to it, because we doubt, we cannot see. As Christians, we do see, through our faith. This morning, we will study the passage in 1 Peter 1:3-12. We will look particularly in the blessings that come from our faith. So my title for today's message is "**Look Up and Expect Great Things**". My outline is simple, only two main points, not three. My first point is that "our faith brings us a new birth", and the second point is "our faith brings us a true joy".

MAIN BODY

I. Faith brings us a New Birth. (v.3-5)

In v.3, we read, "*In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*"

If we take the prepositional phrase "*into the living hope*" out for now, we would read "*he has given us new birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.*"

The Meaning of New Birth

We are born again through the resurrection of Christ. Our Lord is often referred to as "the first born from the dead" (**Rev. 1:5 and Acts 13:33**).

Look Up and Expect Great Things

- His resurrection is called a birth. Our union with this resurrected Christ who is now sitting at the right-hand of the Father also brings us a new birth, a new life.
- We are participating in a new life that Christ has brought upon on our behalf.

Olympic Example: how many of you have watched the Olympic opening ceremony? It was spectacular. It is amazing to see how they coordinate massive thousands of people in synchronized dance or martial arts. China was my homeland. I am a Chinese and many of you are aware. I don't know how many of you heard of my testimony, for a long time I was not proud of my heritage. I didn't want myself to be called Chinese. I find a great pride when someone says, "no, he is not Chinese, he is an American." Or "he is banana, yellow on the outside, but white in the inside". The reason for that was that in the past I have been oppressed as a Chinese. In high school, other Asians like Japanese and Koreans (some but not all 😊) looked down on me because I was a Chinese. For the early 10 years of my life in America, I rarely talked to any Chinese.

But things changed over the years of China's fast growth in economy and international social relation, and particularly after watching this spectacular Olympic event, I felt like the China-spirit in me is renewed. I am a still Chinese. But the Chinese I am now is different than the Chinese I was before. I felt like I have been upgraded, a newer version of Chinese. The thing is that I didn't do anything. It is the similar kind of concept when we participate in Christ's resurrection. We didn't do anything. But because He died and rose, we through Him received this new birth. Our new life is a sharing of Christ's resurrection life.

The Character of New Birth

This new birth is characterized by regeneration, "renewal in the Holy Spirit" in Titus 3:5.

- The words "renewal in the Holy Spirit" tell us that regeneration involves not only purification from sin but also a spiritual renewal which is brought upon in us by the Spirit and it continues in the process of sanctification.

Regeneration, in other words, brings about a radical change in our nature.

Look Up and Expect Great Things

- At the moment of regeneration, the dead sinner becomes virtually alive, the resistance to God is changed to non-resistance, hatred turned to love.
- Regeneration involves the whole person. It means giving a new heart. The heart stands for the core of the person, the center of all activities: thinking, feeling, willing, believing, praying, praising, and so on. It does not mean removal of all sinful tendencies. Though regenerated person is new, but not perfect.

Regeneration is a supernatural event.

- It takes a place at our subconscious level. That is why it called the "mercy of God" in v.3. It is a gift of God. Dr. Heokema in his book "Saved by Grace" explained that, *"regeneration is a radical change from spiritual death to spiritual life, brought about is us by the Holy Spirit - a change we are completely passive. This change involves an inner renewal of our nature, is a fruit of God's sovereign grace, and takes place in union with Christ."* (p.101)
- You might ask, what is there for me to do then? The answer is simple: focus on walking by faith. We do our part, God does His.

The Experience of New Birth

For many, their best experience in life is the "new birth" or "born again" experience.

- Nothing can be so drastic as the initial stage of transformation.
- The transition for many was huge. It was astonishing. All a sudden one began to see his/her own struggles in sin's deceitfulness, and its captivity that had been taking hold of him/her for so long. Now one is free through the union with the resurrected Christ.

Transition: This new birth brings into "a living hope", "an inheritance", and "a Salvation."

New Birth Results in a Living Hope (v.3)

Look Up and Expect Great Things

We have discussed about this living Hope in our studies yesterday. However significant it is, I am not going to say a whole lot about it, just recap some of the points we have covered.

Example: I find that visitation is a great way to learn about our faith, particularly to the hospital. We have visited a few brothers and sisters who were sick. We usually go and listen, and find opportunities to encourage them. Each one of us wants something we can place our hope in. This is where we begin to see how firm the foundation of our hope is. A sister kept commenting and evaluating the expertise of the doctor and her impression of him. She kept rehearsing the words that the doctor has said to her, and hope to find some comforting thoughts from it. But all in all, this kind of hope is so fickle, so powerless. It imposes no resistance to fear, anxiety and uncertainty.

I also had friends who suffered great depression. They had hopes, but they shattered. Now they don't know what to hope for. What they need is a living hope.

1. A Living Hope is true and certain, it is grounded on present and future reality.

- It is not a dead and vain hope which is uncertain and comes to nothing at the end.
- It is not an empty wish which has no basis of present and future validity. Ex: I hope this will happen.
- It is not an insertion in the face of despair. Ex: people would worship anything.

2. A Living Hope is vigorous and firm.

- It instils the soul.
- It renews the inner being.
- It perpetuates forever.

All people need this living hope. This is the blessing we have as we walk by faith.

New Birth Results in an Inheritance. (v.4)

Look Up and Expect Great Things

This concept of "inheritance" is picked up in the OT where Abraham was promised an inheritance, the land of Canaan.

- Peter used it here to refer to our heavenly inheritance. The reward is far better than an earthly land and far more lasting.
- Although the Scripture did not specify the exact content of this inheritance, but we know it is the kingdom of God which the gospels refer to quite often.
- In that kingdom, we will marvel, adore, praise and even enjoy the presence of our Lord.
- I imagine apart from enjoying God alone, we also have access to everything that belongs to God.

Peter used three adjectives to describe this inheritance.

1. It is "imperishable".

- It is permanent, unlike the things of this age it will not rot or decay. (1 Cor. 9:25; 15:52) The earth is going to pass away, and the heavens will disappear. Our body decays and dies. Ex: It is unfathomable to think that the body we have will never decay. I am thinking now maybe a few years back, my body was at the prime. Just imagine it will never decay, always remain the same. But the resurrected body is far better and "glorious".
- This signifies purity and perfection.

2. It is "undefiled".

- It indicates that it is morally and religiously pure (Heb. 7:26; 13:4; Jas. 1:27)
- While retaining an earthly inheritance might require some moral or religious compromise, but not the heavenly inheritance.
- Everything that is existing on earth is defiled and stained with many defects, because of our sin.

Look Up and Expect Great Things

- i. The question is, “since everything on earth is defiled and stained with sin, why do we still work so hard to obtain and retain it?”
- ii. There is an unspoiled inheritance waiting for us ahead.

3. It is “unfading”.

- The term is unique to Peter, indicating that unlike flowers that wither and have to be tossed away, this inheritance is eternal and will never wither or become old.
- No more air pollution. No more complaints about coming to China to compete in Olympic events. No more tears. No more sorrow. No more worries and fears.
- Another concept of unfading is that, our joy, praises, and glory will retain forever as well.

This inheritance is safely preserved for us.

- In v.4 says, for it is "kept/guarded/reserved in heaven for you".

We receive this inheritance simply "through faith" that is through committing ourselves in trust and obedience to God.

New birth Results in a Salvation

The meaning of Salvation (Two parts)

First part: to be freed from those miseries to which we are subject through our guilt. We are set free.

- From the curse of the law and the wrath of God, from everlasting death.
- From all kinds of mortality and decaying.
- From all the power and stain of sin.
- From all temptation.
- From all the grief's and afflictions of this life.

Second part: to have the fullness of Christ's holiness and perfection of Christ's grace.

The Process of Salvation (Three stages)

Look Up and Expect Great Things

Salvation is both a present reality also a future consummation. Today we only have a glimpse of that fullness of salvation in the future. The process of Salvation consists of three stages:

1. Justification - the beginning of salvation is justification. We first believed and confessed our sins, we are delivered from the curse of the law, the wrath of God, the eternal death. There is a renewal of our inner nature evidenced by our regeneration.
2. Sanctification - the continuation of Salvation. Philippians 2:12 -"*continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling*".
3. Glorification - the completion of Salvation.

The Salvation Ready

v.5 refers to the fullness/completion of the salvation which is ready and waiting ahead for us.

- It tells us that God started and He will finish.
- He has already prepared it for us, as the meal is before the call to the marriage feast in Matt. 22:8. Every preparation for the final unveiling of this salvation is completed. The curtain is about to go up. Only the final signal is awaited.
- But this does not mean that we should do nothing on our part. Philippians 2:12 reminded us that we need to continue to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. This means that we need to constantly and seriously examine whether the assurance we have is genuine.

The Anticipation of Salvation

This salvation is not a product of Christian experience, but rather a fulfillment of an expectation of pre-Christian Judaism.

- Many OT prophets longed to look into it, trying to find out the exact time and details. Many hoped that the occasion would dawn in their own age. V.10 tells us that they "investigated and searched diligently".

In v.11, the spirit of Christ in them led them to predict the suffering and resurrection of Christ.

- The Spirit of Christ simply means that the Spirit of God that testifies about the Christ's coming suffering and resurrection.

Look Up and Expect Great Things

- Though they spoke of the grace and of salvation, but the deliverance prophesied did not belong to them. They knew they were serving us, not themselves.
 - i. We, Christians, received special favor from God through the final revelation of Jesus Christ.
 - ii. We stand in the position that even the greatest of the ancient prophets did not have.

Transition: Our faith brings us a new birth, results in a Living Hope, an imperishable, undefiled, unfading inheritance, and a fullness of Salvation ready for us.

II. Faith brings us a True Joy.

A true joy is real. (v.6)

- It is based on a living hope, based on a present and future reality.
- Illustration: I heard a preacher several years ago in the radio. She was trying to encourage people to be joyful in all occasions. This is what she said, "next time you pass by the shop, and you see the cloths you really want to buy and don't have any money. Don't say to yourself that you don't have the money, just say that I have all the money and I just don't want to buy it." There can not be a real joy in this.
- A true joy is real. It is powerful.

A true joy is exalting, inexpressible, and glorious. (v.8)

- In v. 6, "In this" refers to the inheritance and salvation we were talking about. We greatly rejoice. In V.8, it is described as "inexpressible and glorious". In **John 20:20**, *"After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord."* **1 Peter 4:13** *"But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."*
- Illustration: When you exchange glance with the person you are so emotionally drawn in, and she glanced at you with a gentle reciprocal affectionate smile, that

Look Up and Expect Great Things

just enlightens your day. You are filled with a tremendous joy and energy. I am sure that many of you had this experience.

- The joy we will have at the summation will be so much greater. It is inexpressible and glorious. When we look ahead, we also have a glimpse of that joy today. That joy is also our present possession but in a lesser degree.

A true joy is enduring. (v.6-7)

- The theme of being joyful in the mist of trials is very common in the NT.
- It is this kind of true joy that gives us endurance, firmness, confidence, conviction, and hope.
- It is this kind of true joy that gives us freedom and refuge even in the mist of chaos and uncertainty.
 - i. *“When calamity comes, the wicked are brought down, but even in death the righteous have a refuge.” (Proverb 14:32)*
 - ii. *“A happy heart makes the face cheerful, but heartache crushes the spirit.” (Proverbs 15:13)*
 - iii. *“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” (Proverbs 17:22)*
- The joy the world provides is fleeting and temporal.
 - i. It is empty and has no power.
 - ii. Let’s not envy this worldly joy. *“But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. 3 For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. 4 They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. 5 They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills.” (Psalms 73:2-5)*
 - iii. We all have seen people whom we think are ungodly, but they seem happy and proud in living in their sins. It seems as if the world has so much to offer and we are missing out by denying ourselves. We are tempted to walk away from our faith.

Look Up and Expect Great Things

- iv. That is all a lie. Their joy is not real, not based on truth; not glorious because it has no power; not enduring because it is short-lived.

A true joy is a living evidence that our faith is genuine. (v.7)

A true joy assures us that our praise, honor, and glory are indeed awaiting ahead. (v.7)

Transition: Our faith in Christ brings us a new person, a regenerated person. In this new person, we have a living hope that is genuine and firm, we also have an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading, and a Salvation ready for us. As we look ahead, we have a great joy that is inexpressible, glorious and even enduring the time of trouble. I want to conclude this message with this story I have heard.

CONCLUSION

In 1952, a young woman by the name of Florence Chadwick at Catalina Island and into the water, determined to swim to the shore of mainland California. She already an experienced long-distance swimmer: she was the first woman to swim the English Channel both ways. The weather was foggy and chilly on the day she set out; she could scarcely see the boats that would accompany her. For 15 hours, he swam. She begged to be taken out, but her trainer urged persistence, telling her again and again that she could make it, that the shore was not far away. Physically and emotionally exhausted, she finally stopped swimming and she was pulled out. The boats made for the shore, and she discovered it was a mere half-mile away. The next day in the news conference, she says, "I think that if I could have seen the shore I would I have made it. Two months later she proved her point. On a bright and clear day, she plunged back into the sea, and swam the distance."

- Fix our eyes on the prize at all time, so that we can finish the race well.