

“A GRACIOUS AND GLORIOUS SALVATION”

HOLINESS

Dr. Bruce Bickel

July 18, 2014

Bruce: Well, good morning, men!

Men: Good morning!

Bruce: Before I ask Don to set the tone for us, I want to explain one thing for us. Many of you have heard about the Servant’s Fund that I started several years ago. Now let me explain what it is, and what it is not. It is not a fund that has a corpus of money waiting to be given away. I designed it so that if you wanted to help somebody else, it’s something by which you could help somebody, not me. Now, I’m getting all kinds of requests. Will you pay my mortgage? Will you pay my car payment? Can you send my son to college? Right now, the fund has \$450 in it. That’s all it is. The design of it is not for me to help somebody. If the Lord has moved you to want to help somebody, this is a mechanism where you can do it.

And here’s the way that it works. Let’s just say that you have a friend, Joe Smith, who needs some financial assistance. You can fill out the little one-sheet form for the Servant’s Fund. Let’s say you want to give \$100 to Joe Smith. Now, by law, I can take \$90 of that and give it to Joe Smith. The other \$10 must go into a pool that goes to support other people, to enlarge the pool of people who benefit from the fund. It is not a fund where I help people. It’s a fund designed for you to help somebody if you want to, and that means that you have to contribute to the fund, and then you can designate how much of that money you want to go to that person. You see how that works?

But I’m getting all kinds of things. That’s why I don’t want it to be put on the Web page, because this is not just something that’s public. People have heard about it, and I’ve gotten three letters this week. Will you pay my mortgage? Will you pay the college tuition for my son? Will you buy me a car?

Now that’s not the spirit of it. The spirit of it is, if the Lord moves in your heart to help somebody, that’s the mechanism with which to do it. So do you understand that? All you need to do is text me or let me know. Sig will have an application. It’s just a simple application. If we are ever audited by the IRS, I can show that it’s legitimate. This is established by the IRS. You will get a \$100 tax receipt for your total gift. You can designate up to as much as 90 per cent of that gift to go to the person you want, but you’ll get credit for 100 per cent of your gift to the Servant’s Fund. It’s a public charity set up by the IRS for tax purposes. It’s a mechanism (*unclear*) where you could help somebody if you really wanted to do it. It’s not for me to help somebody. It’s for you to help somebody by contributing to the fund. Do you understand how that works?

Participant: Yes.

Bruce: Great. Thank you. Don? (*Music.*)

Bruce: Blessed Jesus, blessed Jesus, indeed, You are blessed! Father, we thank You for Your mercy and Your grace. Father, we come with great anticipation, that once again Your Holy Spirit, who is in our midst, will guide us into all truth, that we might behold

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You more seriously, more gloriously, and more clearly, for Jesus’ sake. May it be so. Amen.

Men: Amen.

Bruce: Let’s turn in your bibles, please, to 1 Peter, chapter one. Last week we went through a study of the man Peter, why Peter was the one whom the Holy Spirit was pleased to have penned this particular book. If you remember, the themes of the book of 1 Peter are three: grace in salvation, grace in submission, and grace in suffering. Now last time, we saw the man Peter and all the illustrations of his life. He’s very much just like you and me.

And now we want to look at the message of Peter. And so I call your attention to chapter 1, verses 1-2. “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect, exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in the sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ, and for sprinkling with His blood. May grace and peace be multiplied to you.” May God be pleased to open our eyes, that we might behold Him more clearly, for Jesus’ sake. Amen. Paul is the apostle of faith. Read the book of Romans. We’re justified by faith alone. Paul is the apostle of faith. John is the apostle of love. “God is love.” “Love one another, as I have loved you.” And Peter is the apostle of hope, because once you understand the gracious and glorious salvation, you will see that one of the effects of the gospel is creating hope within us.

Now there are many more effects of the gospel than just the edification of knowing that we have eternal life. One of the things we’ll see in a couple of weeks will be that the effects of the gospel are fourfold in a person’s life, and they are manifested by the character qualities of a redeemed believer, and those would be hope, holiness, hallowedness or reverence, and harmony. We’ll see that in a couple of weeks, but I want you to understand the basis of hope that Peter is so profound in illustrating for us in this particular passage.

The highest conception of the Greek and Hebrew literature was the idea of blessedness because of hope. Now notice that Peter is writing to two groups of people. He is writing to both Gentile believers and Hebrew believers. That is who he is referring to when he says “the elect exiles of the Dispersion.” He’s writing to both Greeks and Hebrews.

In the Greek concept, the greatest blessedness was the understanding of grace, which is unmerited favor. That’s why he says, “Grace and peace be multiplied to you.” And to the Hebrews it was peace. And their understanding of the word “peace” was this. It meant peace with God, it meant peace with men, and it meant peace with a clear conscience.

In other words, when you were at peace with God, it meant that you could be in His presence, because for the Hebrews, that was their mindset. When you were at peace with God, you could be in His presence. Now we understand, through Romans five, that you have the peace of God, but you have to have peace with God before you have the peace of God. The Hebrews understood that, because their concept of peace was that you had a clear conscience, you were at peace with God, and you were at peace with all men, and therefore, you were able to participate in and to experience the joy of being in the

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presence of God. That’s why Peter starts off this particular passage by saying, “Grace and peace be multiplied to you,” because he is speaking to two groups of people, to the Greeks who understood grace, and to the Hebrews who understood peace. And so he is writing to both of those groups of people.

Three key words in the book of 1 Peter are grace, glory and suffering. Peter gives us great hope in the process of our becoming obedient to Christ and holy in our living. He gives us great hope at the beginning of our journey, to be obedient to Christ and holy in our living. A person who has hope can live a life of holiness, and can live a life of harmony in relationships. That’s because they have hope, because they’re not controlled by circumstances. And the person who is holy is harmonious. He is the one who is prepared to suffer for the glory of God. That’s the secret to this particular book. It’s going to be glory, it’s going to be submission, and it’s going to be suffering. So Peter is going to start off first of all to give a reason for our hope, and it’s because of our glorious and gracious salvation.

Now the process of holiness, Peter is going to tell us, starts with our reason for hope. And when you have hope, you have a reason to be holy. Hope comes from understanding our salvation. In other words, salvation leads to submission, and submission leads to suffering. Peter is going to teach us. Three divisions of the book—salvation, submission and suffering.

Here’s a way of outlining the book that is different from what you have in your outline, just another way of looking at it from the big picture. First of all, salvation is a living hope. In other words, what goes with our salvation? We want to look at that today. What goes with our salvation? If the basis of our hope is the understanding of our gracious and glorious salvation, what goes with, or what comes alongside our understanding of salvation?

Then we need to understand submission. That would be the pilgrim life. How do you live it? That would be chapter 2, verse 11 through chapter 4, verse 11.

And then lastly, suffering. That would be the fiery trial. How do we bear it? So Peter is basically going to say that salvation gives us what goes with it. Submission—how do you live it?, and suffering—how do you bear it? Those are the three divisions you’ll see in the book of 1 Peter.

So let’s take a look at our salvation today, our gracious and glorious salvation, as Peter describes it. First of all, there is a gracious birth in verses 2 and 3. There is a living hope in verses 3 and 4. There is a powerful protection in verse 5, and a great rejoicing in verses 6-12. Now that is an outline of the first twelve verses. He’s describing what comes along with our salvation.

Brothers, there is much more to our salvation and our understanding of that than just saying that you have eternal life. Sometimes we cheapen evangelistic efforts by only saying, “Would you like to have eternal life?” Why not say, “Would you like to have hope?” “Would you like to have holiness?” “Would you like to have harmony?” “Would you like to have hallowedness?” Why don’t we ask those questions? You see, the only thing we’re trying to do is basically to simplify salvation to the point of only offering eternal life. It’s a consequence, but it’s not the purpose. The purpose is to

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change the style of life. Evangelism is a style of living; it's not an activity you schedule. It's part of who we are. And when you give the gospel message, you are giving your life's message, which is, I have understood the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man. I understand repentance and faith, and I understand the person and work of Christ. You are giving your life's message away. That's pure evangelism.

So, the first thing that Peter is going to teach us today, is that we have to understand hope. One of the consequences of understanding our salvation is hope. That means, do we really understand our salvation? What comes along with our salvation? He gives us four insights: a gracious birth—(we'll look at that today in verses 2 and 3)—he'll teach us about a living hope in verses 3 and 4. He'll teach us about a powerful protection in verse 5, and a great rejoicing in verses 6-12. He says that those are the things that come along with our gracious and glorious salvation, and that is what gives us hope.

Hope is not wishful thinking, Biblically. Hope is an assured realization that it will happen. So let's take a look at our gracious birth.

Now we need to understand, first of all, as we see in our passage in verses 2-3, that the miracle of our new birth is all of God. It begins with God the Father. “. . . who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God.” You'll see that in verses 1 and 2. Now when did He choose? We're talking about election. When did He choose? Ephesians chapter 1, verses 3-4, says, “For He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him.”

Now how did God choose? He chose with that word “foreknowledge.” Notice, that's what it says. “According to the foreknowledge of God the Father.” Now, let me tell you what that does *not* mean. It does not mean that God would know that you're going to do something in advance, and then make sure that you do it. It does not mean that. It means to know with a peculiar regard and affection and love for a person. That's what it means. Foreknowledge means a peculiar love and affection for a person. In other words, He sets His love upon a person in a personal way. That is what it means to have foreknowledge. Foreknowledge does not mean that God knew ahead of time that we would choose Him and believe, and therefore He chose us. It does not mean that. It means that, in eternity past, before the foundation of the world, He assigned a special affection and love for you as an individual.

Now, can I understand and explain that? No. You just have to trust that. That's what the Scripture says. Remember, this is not something that is logical. We're talking about something that is revelationally supernatural. We're talking about the grace of God in foreknowledge. And let me tell you what it doesn't mean, again. It doesn't mean that God knew, at some time in history, that you would choose Him in the future, and therefore He chose you. It does not mean that. It means that, in eternity past, for reasons only known in the council and wisdom of God Himself, He designed and had a special affection personally for you, and He assigned a love for you that was strictly coming from His heart. So what you begin to see, brothers, is that the origin of our salvation starts with what the Father ordained, the Son accomplished, and the Spirit applied.

Now, do you understand the definition of that word foreknowledge? What does it not mean?

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Participant: Foreseeing.

Bruce: It doesn't mean foreseeing. He did not foresee that you would choose Him. That's not what it means. What does it mean?

Participant: Affection.

Bruce: It means affection. He set His peculiar and special love on you personally, before the foundation of the world. That's totally different than saying, “I know you will choose Me. Therefore I'm going to choose you.” You've got to understand that. That's the glorious and gracious part of our salvation.

It starts with God the Father. You and I have a Trinitarian salvation. What the Father ordained, the Son accomplished, and the Holy Spirit applies.

So what is it, then? You ask yourself the question, what is it that made you decide for Christ? If you say, “Well, I've logically figured it all out,” then you've created for yourself a work, and you take credit for it. That's not what he's saying. We are saying that He chose you in eternity past before the foundation of the world by setting His special love and affection upon you before you were ever born.

Notice Amos chapter 3, verse 2. It's talking about the nation of Israel. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” In other words, there was a peculiar, set-upon love for the nation of Israel that God had in the Old Testament. It was part of His covenantal relationship with the people of God. It started with the nation of Israel. And He says that, (*paraphrase*), “I have known you peculiarly above all the other nations.”

How about 1 Corinthians chapter 8, verse 3? “The man who loves God is known by God.”

John chapter 10, verse 14. “I am the good Shepherd. I know My sheep, and My sheep know Me, just as My Father knows me, and I know the Father.”

Now take a look at that, chapter 10, verse 14 of John. Jesus is saying this. (*Paraphrase.*) “I know you, and therefore, you know Me. And the depth with which I know you, and the depth with which you know Me, is the exact same depth with which the Father knows Me and I know the Father.” Do you understand that? In other words, let me say that again. “The depth with which I know you, and the depth with which you know Me, is exactly the same as the depth with which the Father knows me and I know the Father.” Let me read that again. John chapter 10, verse 14. “I am the good Shepherd. I know My sheep, and My sheep know Me, just as My Father knows Me, and I know the Father.” It's an incredible statement! The magnificence of the relationship that you have with the Lord Jesus Christ mirrors the relationship that God the Son has with God the Father. It's that same intimacy!

And why is that? It's because of the word *foreknowledge*! It's because, in eternity past, in the electing heart of God, He showered a special love and affection on you personally, so that you will know Him and He will know you.

Oftentimes, people say, “Do you know Christ?” Do you know what the more important question is?

Men: Does He know you?

Bruce: Does Christ know you? That's the real question. Does Christ know me? You see, Peter is saying that this is the basis of our glorious salvation. And that is what is the

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stimulation for, and the foundation of your hope. Your hope is this: that Christ knows me! He knows me! And I know Him! And I know Him with the same depth that the Father knows the Son and the Son knows the Father, because He knows me, and I know Him.

So John 10 is a wonderful passage that we’ll study one day, because it will give us the marks of people who know the Shepherd. “I am the good Shepherd.” (*Paraphrase*.) “I know them. They know Me.” One of the marks is this: they recognize His voice.

What do you listen to? What gets your attention? Last night I had a terrible, terrible, terrible night of sleep. I don’t know what it was. It was just horrific! It might be because of my dementia setting in; who knows? I don’t know. But I just got to thinking, and I couldn’t think of a good friend’s last name. I wrestled with that. I got out of bed, and looked in the phone book, and I couldn’t find it. I mean, it was ridiculous! I was just so consumed by it! “I’ve just got to find out his last name, because I want to show that I don’t have dementia!” (*Laughter*.) For an hour and a half I was looking through files and phone books and on my computer, at three in the morning, trying to find out this friend’s last name! It was ridiculous!

And finally, I had to say, “Lord, remove those thoughts from my mind! I’m going crazy!” And the only thing I could do was to quote Scripture. I got up and read the book of Ephesians. I just read the book of Ephesians. And then I started singing “Amazing Grace.” And I said, “Lord, I’ve got to replace that stuff in my mind with something that I know is true, because therein lies my hope!” And so I must have sung the first verse of “Amazing Grace” about ten times, just in my sleep. And finally, I went to sleep. But it was a real fight, guys! It was a real fight, because, in my mind, I was just being controlled. I couldn’t figure out his last name! And I figured it out. (*Laughter*) I finally did it, but it had nothing to do with my phone book or the computer.

Participant: What is it?

Bruce: I forgot. (*Laughter*.) His name was Jim Buchanan, a friend of mine from church. But my point is this. What gives you hope? You see, in the midst of that struggle, I said that the only hope I have is to listen to His voice. That’s one of the marks of saying that you know Jesus. He knows Me and I know Him. John 10 says, (*paraphrase*), “You know My voice.” You don’t listen to other things. I had to fight off the other things, and listen to His voice. And the only thing I needed to do was to sing hymns and read the Scripture, because that is where I got His voice! And that’s where clarity came in. That is where my hope was. I’ve got hope in this situation, as I get older, because the hope is that I know Him, and He knows me. But I’ve got to listen to His voice.

You see, the Christian life, guys, is not a panacea. It’s not Polyanish. It’s a fight, and sometimes the fight is right in your mind! You’ve got to get rid of those thoughts! And I had to say, “Lord, get rid of those thoughts, because if I pursue this, I’m going to go goofy! I’ve already been up an hour and a half!”

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So there's hope, you see, brothers. There's hope when you understand this. God foreknew you, and He gave you a special love and affection for you personally, before the creation of time. That's your basis of hope, men; do you see that? It's not in the circumstances of this world. Happiness is a result of happenings. Hope is the result of God's foreknowledge, in our gracious and glorious salvation.

So why did God choose? I don't know, and neither do you. We don't know that. It's just in the counsel of His own will. That's the answer. Now somebody will say, "Well, that's not good enough for me." It's going to be good enough for you, because, if it's good enough for Him to reveal that to us, it's good enough for us to listen to it. I don't know the reason He chose. I can't give Him a reason for saying He chose me at all. All I can do is rejoice in it, and have what? Hope! I have hope, because I know that He did something that I could not do myself.

It's based solely upon His grace. It's not based on anything God saw that I would do. He didn't say, "Well, when you were at the Naval Academy in 1964, you did this." That's not the basis of it. It wasn't based on anything He knew that I would do. It was strictly based upon His grace and His love. And I can't explain it, but the one thing I can do is what? I can rejoice in it! Do you see that? I can't explain that! I don't try to explain it, but I can absolutely rejoice, and celebrate that, and say, "Hallelujah!" He did something that I could never do myself. And therein lies your hope! That's why we say that Peter is the apostle of hope, based upon the understanding of our salvation.

So we see that is ordained by the Father. God the Father ordained it, God the Son accomplished it, and God the Holy Spirit applied it. Look at verse 3-b. It's accomplished by God the Son. Christ had to die and be resurrected to accomplish the salvation that God planned.

We have a Trinitarian salvation, men. If you really understand the gospel, and somebody says, "When did you become a Christian?", you've got three answers. The first one is this: "When God chose me from before the foundation of the world." That's the first time I became a Christian, in God's heart and in God's mind. Now can I explain that? No! But I rejoice in it, and therein lies my hope, because I know it was nothing of me! It was all of Him! There's your hope! It's all of Him!

And then when did I become a Christian? At the cross, when Christ died for my sins, and paid for the penalty of my sins, and I was redeemed by the blood of the cross. He accomplished what the Father ordained.

And when was it applied? The Holy Spirit applied it to my life when I heard the gospel, and I repented and believed. My father read to me Romans chapter 5, verse 10, which says, "If we were God's enemies." And I said, "Father, I don't want to be an enemy anymore." That's when the Holy Spirit took the foreknowledge of God that Christ

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had accomplished at the cross, and He applied it to my life. The Holy Spirit did that, guiding us into all truth.

So we have a Trinitarian salvation, and that’s what gives us our hope, because you realize that it’s nothing of my own works. It’s all about grace, unmerited favor.

Why did God choose us? It’s only known to the heart of God. Let it be there, brothers. Let it be a mystery, because therein lies your hope, and the great ability to rejoice. It’s not based on anything we had done, because I wasn’t even around at the time, so it didn’t have anything to do with what I had done. It’s not based on anything that God saw we would do. It’s based solely upon His grace and His love. It was accomplished by the Son at the cross.

So our birth is by God. God planned it. God accomplished it. And God applies it. The Father chose us, the Son purchased us, and the Holy Spirit set us apart. He saves us.

Participant: Bruce?

Bruce: Yes?

Sig: Do we know that God did not choose everybody?

(Bruce sighs. Laughter.) First of all, people say that, if He chose some people, that means God sent the rest to hell. No. Nowhere in the Scripture does it ever say that God sent anybody to hell. You need to understand the great impact of the Fall. Brothers, we are all guilty! We presume innocence. We presume that we’re all innocent. We are not the accused awaiting trial. We are the convicted, awaiting execution! We are all guilty! If you take a look at the mass of humanity, we’re all guilty! If God chose one person, you would have to say what? It’s an act of mercy if He chose one person, because everybody is guilty! That’s the result of the Fall. You need to understand that. Now next week, we’re going to have some teaching by Jim on the effects of the Fall. I want you to understand that. If you don’t understand the effects of the Fall, you’re not going to understand what we’re talking about, because we have the presumption that everybody is innocent, and that we make ourselves bad. No, the real issue is that you’re guilty already. That’s what the word “redeemed” means. It means rescued through the payment of a price. If you were innocent, you wouldn’t need to be rescued. But because you’re guilty, you need to be what? Rescued! You need to be redeemed. You’ve got to understand that.

So we shouldn’t even probe the depths of that question, saying that God sends people to hell. There’s nothing that ever says that. They’re already on their way! Everybody born is on their way! God rescues some. And why is that? It’s only known by the counsel of His own will. But He sends no one to hell. Everybody is guilty, and on their way. He just rescues people. Yes, Don?

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Don: Okay, Bruce, may I put a fly in the ointment a little bit?

Bruce: Absolutely.

Don: All right. Jesus said, (*paraphrase*, “Don’t be afraid of the one who can kill the body and not the soul, but be afraid of the One who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” So, is there a sense in which God does execute the sentence? We’re on our way to hell, that’s true, but God does execute the sentence.

Bruce: God executes the sentence, either by passing over some, and letting them go to hell, and by redeeming others, so they don’t go to hell. He executes the sentence two ways, redemption, and retribution. Two ways.

Don: And then, also, about Sig’s question about God choosing everybody. When we get to chapter 2 of 1 Peter, in verse 8, it does say, “a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. They stumble, being disobedient to the Word, to which they also were appointed.”

Bruce: Correct.

Don: That seems to me to answer the question. In His wisdom, in His infinite wisdom, for the manifestation of His justice, no, He does not choose everybody.

Bruce: That’s correct. Now we just have to accept that.

Don: Yes.

Bruce: Don’t look at this logically! This is not logical. The Scripture is very logical; that’s not what I’m saying. But I’m saying that, when we put our finite minds into the counsel and heart of God, we get into trouble. That’s what faith is, guys, that’s what faith is! You just believe, and you can’t believe, unless the Holy Spirit redeems you. That’s what Peter is telling us. The gracious, glorious salvation we have is that God the Father planned it, the Son accomplished it, and the Holy Spirit applies it. Therein lies your hope.

Now, if you don’t understand this, as Charles Spurgeon said, you don’t take people to the university of predestination and election until they have graduated from the college of repentance and faith. You’ve got to start with repentance and faith. We’ve been meeting now for seventeen years, and we’re just now talking about this in depth. We didn’t talk about this the very first day.

You’ve got to understand that the real issue is this. Many times, people will ask you the question, Does God send people to hell? I need to be gracious. It’s basically a smoke screen. You turn that around, and say, “Look! Let me ask you another question. What have you done with the Person and work of Christ?” Ask them that question, because,

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until that is resolved, all the other issues will be unresolved. So don't start with the unresolved. Start with that which can be resolved, and that is this: What is my response to the gospel of Christ? What am I doing with the Person and work of Christ? Start with that, and things will happen. Yes, Tom?

Tom: Wouldn't you say that God is not only just, but He is also loving in sending people to hell, because sin or rebellion or treason is rejecting Him. So, if I reject the light, I should get darkness. If I reject joy, which is life in God, I should get weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Bruce: The gospel is an act of obedience. Bishop Rodgers?

Bishop Rodgers: It would not be a joyful thing for people who do not love God to have to live in heaven with Him.

Bruce: Absolutely. Say that again; that's powerful.

Bishop Rodgers: It would not be a joyful thing for those who reject and do not love God to have to live in closeness to (*unclear*) His grace in heaven.

Bruce: Amen. One of the Puritan writers said this. “It is God's presence that makes heaven for one person, and hell for another.” Yes, Ted?

Ted: I believe your teaching is indeed rational and logical. I think that it all depends on the presuppositions you start with.

Bruce: Correct.

Ted: Everything else flows from that. I was in a conversation with an academic about two weeks ago, and he thought that the whole gospel message was a great myth, and he went on and on about it. But he did have faith, because he had some assumptions about reality.

Bruce: Correct. Right.

Ted: And I did not agree with his assumptions. For us, the faith is very logical. Election is very logical, based on the assumptions you start with.

Bruce: Exactly right. That's why I say that if you don't understand the consequences of the Fall, you'll have a false assumption. And that false assumption is this: we're innocent. That's a false assumption. But if you start with that logically, you'll come to the conclusion that God is mean, or God is unjust, or God is not fair, or God is not loving. You'll come to that conclusion, but it starts with that assumption, and it assumes that we're innocent. You've got to understand the ramifications of the Fall, which means that we're all guilty, and you're being redeemed; you're being rescued, and that is because

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God has sent His special love upon you in eternity past. You see, that’s the understanding. Yes, sir?

Participant: If you do a word search on “elect,” or “chosen,” in Scripture, you’ll discover that it always means “a group chosen out of a larger group, unto a newborn entity, which is the church. But it never means just everybody.

Bruce: That’s correct. That’s why the three words that describe God’s chosen people, from day one to the day the Lord returns, are *remnant*. That means it’s not everyone. Secondly, it’s *persecution*. That remnant will be persecuted by the system of this world, which is anti- or opposed to everything we represent. So *remnant*, *persecution*, and the third word is *warfare*. We’re involved in spiritual warfare. I was involved in spiritual warfare last night. That was a spiritual battle that I had to overcome. You don’t sit back and say, “I’m just going to yield myself to God.”

You see, we’ve made this concept of yielding something that is just a panacea for everything. “Oh, Bruce, you just need to yield.” What in the world does that mean? I have no idea what that means. All I know is that I was in a fight last night, and it was a struggle. And the only thing I could do was to listen to His word, because I knew this: I know Jesus, and He knows me. I need to listen to His words. Where do I find His words? I’m going to find them in good hymns that are theologically correct, and I’m going to find them in reading the Scripture. That’s where I went, because I needed to listen to His word. That’s when I need to do that.

Well, this is the basis of our hope, brothers. It’s our understanding of our gracious and glorious salvation. Now, if you look at Matthew chapter 29,--

Participant: Matthew chapter 29?

Bruce: Or Matthew 19, verses 21-26. We’re told that salvation is of God. Look at the book of Jonah. The summary statement of the book of Jonah is that salvation is of God.

Now look at 1 Peter chapter 1, verse 23. This is verse 22: “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth, for sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly with a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” Two things that we have in common, men, as brothers in Christ. One is this. We all have the same heavenly Father. That determines everything. The assumption that we go with is that Karl and I have the same heavenly Father. It has nothing to do with the color of his skin or the color of my skin, his background or my background. It has to do with one thing that we have in common, which permits me to love him dearly from the heart, and for him to reciprocate and love me dearly with his sincere heart, and that is this. He knows that I have the same heavenly Father, and I know he has the same heavenly Father. It starts with that.

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And the second thing is this. You and I have been reborn by the same seed. Look at verse 23. You’ve been reborn by imperishable seed. What does a seed do? A seed produces life! What gave you life was the imperishable word of God, through the gospel of Christ, when the Holy Spirit applied that to you, and you were impregnated with the same seed that the next person is, who has the same heavenly Father. And that means that there are going to be very similar expressions of life.

Peter is going to tell us, later on in this chapter, that the four expressions of the manifestation of the implantation and impregnation of the holy word of God are these. It’s going to be holiness. It’s going to be harmony. It’s going to be hallowedness. It’s going to be hope. You see, those are the fruits of the imperishable seed that is implanted in your life, and brothers, that’s what you and I have. You and I have the same impregnated seed implanted into us through the gospel of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, they are going to have similar expressions of life, because it’s the same seed. There ought to be some evidence that we’re the same.

That doesn’t mean that we’re all in unity, in the sense that we’re microcosms of one another. I’m not saying that. All I’m saying is that there are certain character qualities that we’re all going to have in the resembling of the same seed. And so the two things that we all have in common are that we have the same heavenly Father, and we have the same seed, the impregnation of the imperishable word of God. Do you see that?

It’s our responsibility to feed that seed, to water that seed and to make it grow. That’s part of our responsibility. God does the impregnation with the implantation of the seed into us, but it’s our responsibility to water it, and to make it grow. That’s our responsibility.

How about Acts chapter two? Go back to Acts chapter two, please. Acts chapter 2, verses 37-40. “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter, and to the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children, and for all who are afar off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.” And with many other words He bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his words were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.”

What was their responsibility? Repent and believe, and be baptized. You see, that is man’s responsibility. The gospel, brothers, is a command, not an option. And the reason that God takes the rejection of the gospel of Christ so seriously is because the rejection of the gospel is a rejection of Himself. It’s a rejection of Himself.

Can you imagine a recruit at the Marine Depot at Paris Island, South Carolina, when the drill sergeant says, “Right face!”, and the young recruit says, “Check with me

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later?” (*Laughter.*) Essentially, that’s the gospel. When somebody says “no” to the gospel of Christ, it’s an act of disobedience. It’s not a personal choice, it’s an act of disobedience. God takes that seriously, because it is a personal act of cosmic treason against the holiness of God, and it is a rejection of who He is and all of His Person. We need to take the understanding of the gospel as something that is a command, not an option.

You and I can talk about it in ways that, when we present the gospel, we don’t say, “I’m commanding you to obey.” I’m not saying that. It’s the Holy Spirit’s job to do that. We proclaim the gospel. We don’t demand that people respond.

I will tell you this story. I’ve told you this before, about Charles Spurgeon. He gave a particular sermon one day, and a woman was walking across the bridge and saw him, and said, “Pastor Spurgeon, you almost converted me today, and I almost believed.”

He said, “You must.”

She said, “I can’t.”

He said, “You must.”

She said, “I can’t.”

He said, “You must!”

She said, “I can’t!”

He said, “You must!”

She said, “God help me!”

He said, “You just did.” (*Laughter.*)

You see, that’s an understanding of the gospel as a command, not an option. Now I’m not saying that you and I are to go and command people to believe. I’m not saying that. The Holy Spirit will do that in Himself by the proclamation of a Biblical gospel. That will take care of itself. That’s the Holy Spirit’s job to do that. You and I can guide people into the truth by proclaiming the Word, but we don’t demand that they do anything. That is not in our control. God the Father ordained it, God the Son accomplished it, and God the Holy Spirit applies it. We just need to understand the seriousness of rejecting the gospel. It is a rejection of God when you reject the gospel of Christ.

Now the very first thing that gives us our hope is an understanding of the gracious birth that we have, which we have already seen. Do you understand the gracious birth

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that we have? I hope I’ve taught this to the point of understanding, that it’s all of God. It’s because of His foreknowledge. That’s the basis of it. Yes, sir?

Participant: Yes, without repentance and believing, there’s no way that I can even turn from my sin on my own strength.

Bruce: Absolutely. That’s something that the Holy Spirit does. Now what is the role of the Holy Spirit? First of all, to guide us into all truth, but practically and logically speaking, it’s this, by the proclamation of truth, through the gospel—the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith. The Holy Spirit will convince us of our sin. Then He will take that convincing and convict you of your sin. Then He will convert you from your sin, and then He will comfort you in your new way of life. That’s what the Holy Spirit does. He starts with convicting you of your sin, and then He convinces you of your sin, and He converts you from your sin, and then He offers you comfort in your new way of life. That’s the role of the Holy Spirit, and you’re right. You just can’t do that on your own.

That’s why it’s so important that we understand Paul’s writing in Romans chapter one. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it—“ What does the “it” refer to?

Participant: The gospel.

Bruce: The message. Not a program, not an event, not a scheduled activity. He’s talking about words that he said, known as the message. “For it is the power unto salvation for all who believe.”

You see, our greatest weapon, brothers, is our message. It’s not our methodology. It’s our message. Never lose sight of that. We need to be message-ology people, not methodology people. We should be about the holiness of God, the sinfulness of man, the Person and work of Christ, and repentance and faith.

So He gives us a living hope. Peter tells us that the very first thing that gives us hope is understanding our gracious and glorious salvation, that it is of God. What God the Father ordained, God the Son accomplished, and the Holy Spirit applies.

So let’s take a look at the words “living hope.” The word “living” means “having life in it, growing and becoming greater.” That means that the more mature you are in Christ, the more what should you have?

Participant: Hope.

Bruce: The more hope you should have, because it is a living hope. It’s not a one-time panacea, it’s not a cure-all, it’s not a medicine drop. It’s a living hope that expands, because it grows. The more you understand your gracious salvation, the more you understand the mercy and grace of God, the more you’re going to have a living hope.

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Time destroys matter, and time makes our hope more glorious because it produces life, not death.

Peter is telling us that it’s a living hope. Let me just give you some verses to help us to understand this.

Our spiritual hope, the source of it, comes from Romans chapter 15, verse 4. “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope.”

Now hope is something that is living, but it’s something that you and I have a responsibility to cultivate, and to mature, and to grow. Notice, “so that through the endurance and encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.” That’s the source of it. We are to abide in it. 1 Corinthians 13:13. “And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.” What are the three things that abide? Faith, hope and love. Why is that? Because you understand your gracious salvation, and you have a living hope that is growing and maturing.

We are to testify about our living hope. 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 15. “But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.” You see, when somebody says, “How in the world can you handle that situation you’re going through?”, you can speak about the message of your living hope, because you understand your gracious salvation. Yes, Don?

Don: I think the problem is that, in our vocabulary, hope so often means something that we want or wish would come to pass, but we don’t know if it will. I hope the Steelers win. I hope I get that raise, or whatever. I hope somebody gets better. But we don’t know if that’s going to happen. But this is certainty. This is a living hope. This is going to happen. We know it is, based on God’s word, and that’s what carries us through.

Bruce: Absolutely. Now understand the definition again. Yes, sir?

Participant: Hope is the fulfillment of His promise.

Bruce: Absolutely. It’s a fulfilling of Himself. Exactly. Hope does not mean wishful thinking. That is our English vernacular expression of it. It does not mean wishful thinking. It means this: confident expectation that it will occur. That’s the living hope that you and I have—a confident expectation that the promises of God will occur. And so we buy into that, because the basis of that is understanding our gracious and glorious salvation. That’s why Peter says that the first evidence of somebody who has been born again is that he has a living hope—confident expectation. You’re not living a Pollyannaish life. You’re living a life based on the promises of God. “Through the encouragement of the Scriptures, we have hope.”

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And then one more. Holiness. 1 John 3:3. “Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.” What does hope lead to? Purification, because it gets your mind right. What did I have to do last night? I went through a purification drill in my mind. That’s what I was fighting last night, because my mind was just all over the place. And the only way you can do that is to have the hope, the confident expectation of knowing that, when I hear His words, that is what’s going to feed my hope. And so, in the midst of all of that, there was great hope, because it’s a living hope.

And that’s what Peter is saying. One of the effects of the gospel is far more than just eternal life. It’s the understanding that you have a living hope, that is, the confident expectation that God will fulfill all the things that God said He would do in your life

This is not wishful thinking. Wishful thinking doesn’t give hope to anybody. All wishful thinking does is bring disappointment. And so what do people do when the Steelers don’t win? They burn couches and destroy cars. (*Laughter.*) That’s ridiculous. Did you see what happened when Brazil lost the World Cup? People destroyed the city. That’s because they were hopeless. There was no hope there, because they were wrapped up in a happening. That’s not what Peter is saying. Peter is saying that, when you understand your gracious and glorious salvation, one of the first evidences will be hope.

Let’s pray, and ask the Lord to teach us the rest of this next week. Father, we thank You for Your mercy, and the clarity of Your word. Father, again, we’ve been probing the depths of your heart, which is glorious and wonderful, but it’s also dangerous, because we have a tendency to read into what we think You should be, or should do, or should be about. Father, remove those thoughts from our minds, and let us replace those thoughts with thoughts that are consistent with who You are, in Your glory, Your majesty, and Your awe. And may it be so for Jesus’ sake. And the brave men said, “Amen!” Thank you much.