

DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

SEPT 2023 | 1 PETER 1:3-9

*Blessed be the God and
Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ! According
to his great mercy, he
has caused us to be born
again to a living hope
through the resurrection
of Jesus Christ from the
dead...*

1 Peter 1:3

INDESTRUCTIBLE HOPE

Our whole society is suffering from a hopelessness that produces worry, fear, depression, and suicide. The plague of loneliness in our culture is so obvious that the federal government is creating a new department to try to remedy it. We desperately need a word from God for a meaningful solution. *There is good news!* We have that word. It has been here all along. While much of the institutional church has tried in vain to be relevant to a society with no recognizable foundations, the word has been there all along, standing as a beacon of hope.

Sadly, many of the talking heads in “Christian” media are promoting a

pessimistic view of the future, either because they are intentionally ignorant of the Bible narrative or because they have misinterpreted it. The public continues to buy books that are more fiction than truth that feature fantastical portraits of coming catastrophes, even though the promised cataclysmic event never happens. On the other hand, many Christians consider the future too controversial to consider, and therefore catalog any discussion of eschatology in the “non-essential” category. So, we are left with jumbled up conclusions about the foundations of life now and in the future and the nature of the hope of the Gospel. The apostle Peter, however, left no doubt as to what

Jesus has done to give us living hope:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

1 Peter 1:3-9, ESV

Jonathan Edwards, in his sermon on Christian happiness, emphasized three pillars upon which unshakable hope

lies. If you know Christ, you can and do know in your inner heart that: (1) **Your bad things will turn for your good.** (2) **Your good things can never be taken away.** (3) **The best is yet to come.**

Our great salvation did not start with us. Long before we arrived and needed a savior, God had acted in His sovereign grace and provided all that we would ever need. Since He started it all, He has assured us that He will sustain what He caused to begin, and He will conclude it according to His glorious plan. He has always been intent upon revealing His mercy. If mercy is to be revealed, there must be a mess that can only be fixed by mercy. In the Garden of Eden with all its perfection, there was a serpent who deceived the crown of God's creation - man and woman. They were rendered alienated, alone, shamed, guilty, and afraid. God began His long story of revealing mercy. The story concludes with God Himself taking on the effects of sin and killing it by His own death: Mercy in its highest form.

All through the story we see instances of the mess that sin causes, with the glory of mercy invading it. It is always a good news story. The great exodus from Egypt was one of those events. The descendants of Abraham were being oppressed by the evil power of

Egypt, when God demonstrated His great mercy by delivering them. When Saul proved to be a weak king of Israel, God picked David. When Israel went into exile, God brought them out by mercy. But the fulfillment and conclusion of it all was when Jesus on the cross looked like a total failure. It was the worst day in history with the worst evil imaginable apparently in charge. It was then and there that ultimate good overcame ultimate evil. **God turns our bad to our good because He is true to His own nature.**

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good...
Romans 8:28, ESV

It is a mystery how God gives us the privilege of agency yet retains the control over all things to bring about His original purpose to fulfillment on time. If you know Him, it is because He knew you and gave you new birth into His special kingdom. He is always working to bring about His desired end. Your enemy is telling you that you and others have messed up beyond recovery. There is no mess that is bigger than His mercy.

God is not so much trying to make us models of morality. Instead, He loves to hold us up as trophies of grace.

All His people have been in a mess and have been rescued. Their story is not one of personal success and integrity, but of deception and bondage. He is the hero. Grace gets the glory.

Your good things are secure. Nothing God gives you can be taken away. It is possible to neglect His inheritance. We can buy the lie that we haven't earned it fully yet. We are tempted to believe that our faithlessness can cancel what His faithfulness secured, but the truth is that there is no power great enough to rob us of the inheritance we have in Christ. He caused us to be born again. We are sons by His initiative. We shall always be sons. Remember the story Jesus told about the prodigal son. Though he made bad choices and found himself in a hog pen hungry for slop, the father still saw him as a son. When he finally came home and wanted to be a servant, the father reminded him that he had no need of more servants, but he had room for his son. He always does.

He forgave us before we repented, even before we sinned. It was the blood of Jesus that forgave us - not our sincerity, remorse, or promise to do better. We can choose to live as if we are not forgiven, thereby trying to pay some on the debt, but this is foolish. His blood did all that needs to be done.

You are forgiven. Nothing can take that away.

He gave us a new heart. It beats to the same rhythm as His. We love as He loves. We love to give as He does. We forgive as He does. When for some reason we act contrary to our new heart, we grieve inside and the misery ultimately drives us home.

Finally, the best is yet to come.

Because of the resurrection, we are assured that everything sin tainted, grace restored. The time will come on earth when He will make every wrong right. He will make all sad things untrue. His judgment is sure. Nothing will escape His gavel. We who know Christ have already received the verdict. Our Judge was judged in our stead. Our future is filled with vindication. Every injustice will bow to justice. Every accusation will be exposed as a lie. We will rejoice in the judgment. All of creation that was affected by sin will be cleansed and restored to divine design. The earth will join our celebration as it is liberated from the consequences of the fall. His blessings will extend to wherever the curse of sin is found. The best is yet to come.

These pillars are sure. We can depend on them because they are all based on what God has done in His faithfulness. Our fickleness is not the issue. We move with a living hope. It cannot be destroyed because it is kept by the power of heaven. Let's move forward in the path of His already won victory.



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