

The Inheritance

1 Peter 1:1-9

About a year ago, we looked together at Jesus' night-time visit from Nicodemus (**John 3**). Jesus told him that he needed to be 'born again', and we saw that the word 'born' was really even more radical than a child being born. It actually means 'conceived' or 'fathered' and, in today's language, we could see that Jesus was telling Nicodemus that he needed to be 're-fathered', that his whole spiritual DNA needed to be re-written.

We looked at later events in Nicodemus' life which showed some evidence that a real change had taken place in his life. Instead of lining himself up with the scepticism and opposition to Jesus shown by his fellow Pharisees, he spoke up for Jesus before the chief priests and Pharisees (**John 7**) and later helped Joseph of Arimathea bury Jesus' body after the crucifixion (**John 19**).

Many years had passed between those events and Peter writing this letter. After the day of Pentecost, as the church in Jerusalem grew, most likely Nicodemus was involved. The believers were all Jews to start with. After Stephen was stoned to death (**Acts 6&7**), some fled to escape persecution, spreading out into other parts of Judea and also into that despised area nearby, Samaria. Philip (one of Stephen's fellow-servants to the church) went there too, and started proclaiming the good news of Jesus to the people there (**Acts 8**). Many believed and received the Holy Spirit. Not long after that, (**Acts 10**) the Lord directed Peter to visit the Roman centurion Cornelius, and he and many of his friends received the gift of the Holy Spirit, just like the original Twelve and the 3,000 at Pentecost (**Acts 3**).

While all this was happening, another significant Pharisee had an encounter with Jesus – Saul of Tarsus – and his life was changed beyond all recognition (**Acts 9**). Paul (as he later called himself ¹) realised that the Lord had given him a special commission to take the Good News to non-Jews ². Much of the book of **Acts** tells us about Paul and his companions taking the Gospel to what is now present-day Turkey as well as to Greece and Macedonia, telling those who put their trust in Jesus (Jews and non-Jews) that they were now part of God's chosen people, that they had inherited God's promises to Abraham which had been fulfilled in Jesus ³.

Peter had been at the forefront of the message reaching the Jews, and God had also chosen him to be the first to take the Gospel to non-Jews. Although both he and Paul delivered the message to both Jews and non-Jews, it seems that Peter 'specialised' in Jews and Paul in non-Jews.

But here in this letter, we see Peter writing to Jews and non-Jews in exactly the same areas where Paul had travelled and seen people come to faith in Jesus – areas of modern-day Turkey! Why is Peter getting involved there?

Scholars believe that Peter wrote this letter after Paul had been imprisoned in Rome, and probably after he had been killed by Nero. So Peter isn't intruding into Paul's work, he is seeking to support those whom Paul had seen come to Christ now that Paul was out of action. So what does Peter write about?

Very much the same as Paul has taught these people:–

- 1) He tells them that they are chosen by God the Father, that the Holy Spirit is changing their lives and that they have forgiveness through the blood of Jesus shed for them.
- 2) He wants them to experience the grace and peace of God in abundance – the fullest measure!

¹ The name 'Saul' in Hebrew means 'desired' and was a great name, the name of the Jews' first king. 'Paul' (Greek *Paulos*) comes from the Latin *Paulus*, meaning 'small'. Paul kept himself humble!

² **Galatians 1:16, Galatians 2:7, Acts 9:15** (' . . . and the sons of Israel').

³ For example, see **Galatians 3:6-14, Ephesians 1:5, 11, 13-14**

3) He writes about God's mercy as well as his grace, which reminds me of the old saying: "God shows us his mercy in not giving us what we deserve, and his grace by giving us what we do not deserve."

4) He remembers what Jesus said to Nicodemus and reminds his readers that both he and they have been **re-fathered** into two things:

i) into a living hope through being joined to the resurrection of Jesus. Paul had said very much the same in **Romans 8:11** and other passages.

ii) into an **inheritance** 'that can never perish, spoil or fade' which is kept (literally, 'reserved') in the heavens for the reborn ones, 'ready to be revealed in the last time'.

This is more than being included in the promises to Abraham which we just looked at. Paul also wrote about this glorious revelation which is coming, in **Romans 8:18-25**. Like Peter, Paul writes about suffering in the meanwhile, but look at the wonderful inheritance which will come 'in the last time' . . .

*"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing
with the glory that will be revealed in us.*

For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.

*For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice,
but by the will of the one who subjected it,*

*in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay
and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.*

*We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth
right up to the present time.*

*Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit,
groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship,
the redemption of our bodies.*

For in this hope we were saved.

But hope that is seen is no hope at all.

Who hopes for what they already have?

But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently."

That phrase 'children of God' is actually '**sons** of God' in this passage. 'Sons' here means heirs and includes both men and women. A time is coming when all who belong to God by being reborn into his family through faith in Jesus will share in this 'revealing of the sons of God', and the whole of creation – placed under human control at the beginning of the world (and therefore held in bondage because of mankind's rebellion against God) – will be released from decay and brought into 'the freedom and glory of the sons of God'.

What an inheritance! And that's just the beginning! Right now, it's reserved in the heavens for those who have been reborn, 're-fathered' by the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, springing from personal trust into the Lord Jesus.

" . . . to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

No wonder Jesus said those words to Nicodemus all those years before: "You **must** be born again."

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