

A DOXOLOGY ABOUT SALVATION

1 PETER 1:1-5

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A doxology is simply a short hymn of praise to God, traditionally spoken at the beginning of a worship service. A benediction is a blessing, traditionally pronounced at the end of a worship service. There are several doxologies and benedictions recorded in the Bible that are often quoted during worship services.

I personally like to quote doxologies and benedictions at the beginning and end of worship services. However, I do admit that doing so week after week can cause these beautiful passages of scripture to become nothing more than trite words that bounce off the eardrums of the worshipper rather than touching his mind and warming his heart. For many people, hearing doxologies and benedictions recited week after week does nothing more than to signal the beginning or the end of the service. "It's the benediction. That means church is over...time to leave."

Realizing that often-repeated phrases can lose the impact they were originally intended to have, I believe it is good, from time to time, to take a closer look at benedictions and doxologies in their context so we can better appreciate what they meant when they were first written. Today I have chosen for our consideration a doxology recorded in 1 PETER 1:3-5. This is a doxology that is immediately preceded by a benediction.

The benediction or blessing that the apostle Peter wishes upon those who have been scattered throughout Asia Minor as a result of persecution is recorded at the end of verse 2, and it is simple. He wishes upon them the blessings of grace and peace. These were people who had decided to follow Jesus Christ, and their decision resulted in great trial and tribulation. They had become like aliens residing in a foreign country. These were people whose outward circumstances were not good by any human measure. They were people who desperately needed to experience grace and peace.

There are times in our lives when it is impossible to understand why God allows certain things to happen to us. During such times we must rely on the facts about God that are recorded in the Bible, and not our circumstances, to bring us peace. The blessings of grace and peace are virtually impossible to experience

unless we are able to embrace these facts. God's will is not something we can always understand, but we can be certain that his motive is always good. We can't always understand why He allows certain things to happen, but we can be sure that He has chosen us to experience everything that happens in our lives for a reason that is intended for good. Everything God does is meant to help us know Him and obey him more than we do now.

Last week my five-year-old daughter told me she didn't want to go to school anymore because some of her classmates were making fun of her. I told her to use the opportunity to love them in return and that would help them to know Jesus. "But Dad," she said, "they already know Jesus." "Yes," I replied, "but you can help them to know Jesus even more."

Even people who know Jesus can know Him more, and everything that happens to us, good or bad, can be used to help either ourselves or others know and obey God more than we or they presently know and obey Him. I believe this to be true, because the Bible tells me that we have been chosen by God to do good works. This is a fact about God upon which I can rely.

When the hard times come, we desperately need grace and peace. But the only way we are going to receive these blessings is by clinging on to the facts about God recorded in the Bible and proven to be true through the experiences of thousands of saints who have walked this road before us. The Apostle Peter wished peace and grace upon a group of Christians who were undergoing trials in their lives, and then he gave them a doxology, declaring certain truths about God.

Let's now take a brief look at the doxology recorded in 1 PETER 1:3-5. It begins by praising God for the salvation He has provided through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and it ends by proclaiming the personal benefits given to those who have received a new birth. When we look at this doxology closely, we are able to notice three movements.

First, we have words focusing on the mercy of God in providing a new birth or salvation to people. Salvation is the central theme of this doxology.

Second, there is a celebration of the resurrection as the channel through which God provides salvation. Of course, we know it was the death of Jesus on the cross that makes mercy even possible. But the resurrection provided a channel through which mercy could flow. The resurrection was the completion of what took place on the cross. Whenever Jesus spoke about the cross, the last thing He talked about was always the resurrection. The relationship between the cross and the resurrection is a theme worth taking a whole sermon to consider.

And then, in the third movement of this doxology, we see a proclamation of the benefits given to those who receive salvation. The words, “into a living hope” and “into an inheritance” define for us the benefits of salvation.

Let’s go over these movements once again. First of all, we have the declaration of salvation. The fact that God has provided us with a new birth now becomes the foundation for any real and lasting peace that we can ever hope to experience upon this earth. I have heard people say that we should rejoice in our sufferings. But it does not make sense to say that suffering should cause us to experience peace and joy. Our peace and joy should come from our salvation, not our suffering. We should be able to rejoice in our salvation in the midst of suffering.

Just an hour or so ago Michael Yao was baptized in this auditorium along with four other people. Last Wednesday he sent me an e-mail that I will now read to you.

“Dear Pastor Andy,
...I want to share with you the good news that I am going to be baptized this weekend. It is really a reborn moment (time of rebirth) for me. I am so excited about it.”

It does us good to hear someone who is excited about their salvation, that is to hear someone who considers his salvation to be more important than how he is doing in school or how he is doing in his work or the physical condition of his body. We should all be so excited about our salvation that everything else seems insignificant in comparison. Unfortunately, for many of us, the theme of salvation can become like the benediction or doxology we hear repeated week after week. It can become nothing more than a faint reminder that we are Christians who are obliged to attend a lot of meetings.

The greatest thing that can happen to Tiffany and the others who were baptized today will be for them to never forget that their salvation is the greatest thing that ever happened to them. If Tiffany can praise God for giving her a new birth 30 years from now with the same excitement she has today, then she will be truly blessed and will really know what it means to experience the grace and peace of God. The Apostle Peter understood this truth. This is why he began his letter with a doxology that praises God for the new birth.

The second movement of the doxology celebrates the resurrection as the channel through which mercy is received. This movement deserves a whole sermon. Today I will just introduce a thought that I can hopefully develop another day. The

thought is this: On the cross absolute evil and absolute holiness were united in a way that we will never completely understand. But in the hour of resurrection we come to the culmination of the cross. It is the ending of sin, the breaking of its power, the freedom from its bondage, and the quenching of its fires. Both Cross and Resurrection were needed for mercy to flow.

And, the person who receives this mercy resulting in salvation must also have a “cross and resurrection” experience in his own life. Those who seek mercy without any intention of experiencing a life free from the bondage of sin will find nothing but wrath. This is why we, at CCCNJ, prefer to use the mode of immersion when we baptize people with water. We use this mode, not because the Bible says complete immersion into the water is the only way a person can be baptized. Rather, we use it because it symbolizes a believer’s participation in both the cross and resurrection. When people go under the water back first, it symbolizes dying to sin. And when they rise out from the water, it symbolizes being resurrected to a new life where progress toward holiness can be made, because sin no longer has power to rule. We will talk more about the relationship between the cross and resurrection on another day, but now we must move on to the third theme recorded in this doxology.

This theme deals with the benefits given to those who receive salvation. Listed here are two, “a living hope,” and “an inheritance.” The hope we receive when we are born again can refer to the hope that sins committed in the past are now forgiven and we will not be punished for them. It can also refer to the hope we have to resist temptation and become holy people as we live in the present. And then again, it could refer to the hope of going to heaven in the future.

New hope should spring up in a person who receives a new birth. If there is no hope at all, a person has to wonder whether or not a new birth has really taken place. I have discovered that, in the process of experiencing salvation, the three kinds of hope I just mentioned do not necessarily come at the same moment. When I was a small child, I turned to Jesus because I wanted to receive forgiveness of the wrong things I had done. At an early age, I experienced hope that Jesus would forgive me of my sins. Later, as a teenager, I felt a desperate need for Jesus to give me strength to overcome temptation and get my life in order. So I turned to Jesus for salvation, and the hope that I can go on improving in character and conduct until the day I die became a reality and filled me with joy. And then, a few years ago, I had my first real encounter with the thought that I might die in the very near future. As I sought God to help me with my emotions, He replaced the fear of dying with the hope of going to heaven. The three-fold hope we receive with the new birth is what the abundant life is all about. It is a living hope.

Every human being needs to have hope of being free from the penalty, power, and presence of sin. The Apostle Peter knew this. But the Peter was particularly concerned about the Christians living in Asia Minor when he wrote this letter. They were facing the kind of persecution that often resulted in death. Of the three hopes I just mentioned, what they needed the most was the hope of heaven. They needed it to help them overcome their fear of death, and they needed it to help them replace the loss they were feeling after being driven from their homes and forced to become like aliens in a foreign land. I believe that is why Peter, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, especially emphasized the benefit of receiving an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away. This is a description of what they will find in heaven, and these people needed to be reminded of this benefit at that particular time in their lives.

Talking about heaven usually only appeals to the elderly or those who have suffered serious illness or great loss. Here in the United States, a long period of time has passed where a relatively small percent of the population has felt a great need for this particular benefit. The topic of heaven or hell has not been a serious consideration for a majority of people until recently. Things are no longer as secure as they used to be. Many people who felt very secure about the future are now being plagued with new fears. Even people who live in big mansions are now having trouble sleeping at nights. We now live during a time where the hope of heaven needs to be preached with greater emphasis.

Jesus once told Peter that he would come under Satanic attack and would deny him three times. But, in LUKE 22:32, Jesus also gave Peter a command. He told him that after he had recovered from his backsliding and turned back again, that he should work to strengthen his brothers. The words Peter wrote in this doxology are words that would indeed strengthen the brothers and sisters. They needed to cling to the hope of heaven given to all those who experience new birth through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. These are the facts that would bring them the grace and peace in the midst of their trials. And, these are also the facts that so many of us need today.