

SNAPSHOTS OF THE ALMIGHTY
1 Peter 1:13-21

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When I say “God,” what images come to your mind? There are more than a million answers to that question, perhaps, for God wears almost every hat under the sun.

As we continue our sermon series in 1 Peter, we need to remember that Peter is writing to a predominantly Gentile audience (1:18). The Jews already knew about God, about Yahweh. All they needed to do was to understand that this rabbi by the name of Jesus was His Messiah, the Holy One of Israel, the Anointed One.

But when you’re teaching Gentiles, you have to begin by telling them about God. Before you tell them about the Son, you have to tell them about the Father (1:14, ignorance).

In our first sermon in the series on 1 Peter, we learned that the people of God had inherited eternal life – a salvation which began when they were born again and is finally fully fulfilled at the return of Christ. We learned that our inheritance of salvation is (a) death-proof, (b) sin-proof, (c) time-proof, and (d) reach-proof. Death cannot take away our salvation. Our salvation will not fade away like the morning flower at the noon-day sun. Our salvation is not nullified by our sin, for it is based upon the character of Christ. And it is in the realm of heaven, where the catastrophes on earth cannot alter the promises of God.

Look at 1 Peter 1:4

...to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable (that means it’s death-proof) and undefiled (that is, it’s sin-proof) and will not fade away (it’s time-proof), reserved in heaven for you (that is, it is reach-proof, beyond earth).

Peter declares in verse 9 that we will eventually obtain the salvation of our souls. And we rejoice (v. 8) with joy inexpressible and full glory, because of the inheritance we have as God’s children.

Vs. 10-12.

Today we pick up in verse 13. We begin with the word “therefore.” Because you have an inheritance which cannot be taken away, which is the salvation of your souls, because you have a joy unspeakable, “therefore, gird your minds for action.”

The image here is of a person beginning a journey on foot. They gather up the long, flowing garment – the robe – at the waist. Today we might say, “Roll up your sleeves,” or “Pull yourself together.” Discipleship calls for discipline. Now that you are a child of God, he says, “Gird your minds for action, keep sober in spirit.”

In biblical language, the image of being drunk or being asleep or being ignorant is a way of describing a person who is caught up in the pleasures of this world. So, in the New Testament, we hear calls for sobriety, for being awake, and for turning from a life of ignorance (v. 14).

Having rolled up their sleeves and being sober in spirit, they are to ground their hope (1:3; 1:13, 21) on the grace of God they will receive at the second coming of Christ. He's already told them (1 Peter 1:3), that "the mercy we've received has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." Their hope extends beyond His resurrection to His glorious return.

This first Sunday of Advent is the Sunday of "Hope." Three times in this first chapter of 1 Peter, a book written for those in the midst of trials and tribulations, suffering and uncertainty, is the word "hope." The persecuted readers of 1 Peter needed hope.

But you can't discover hope until you've at least glimpsed despair. Look at 1:6. They had been "distressed by various trials." Hope is not something to be trivialized.

Hope brings the future into the present. Hope looks at the end and says, "The end is more important than the now, so I can make it through the now."

Advent hope is eschatological. It is based upon both the first coming of the Christ and the second. Look at verse 13. "Hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Wherever we're going, however far away it seems, or how impossible it is to get there, Jesus is coming to meet us. The future is coming to the now – both with the Bethlehem birth and then at the ultimate return of the cosmic Christ.

You see, the reality of scripture is that no one ever gets to finish his own story.

Culture, the changes we constantly face mean our story never comes to a place of completeness. Jesus will come and meet us before we are finished.

The coming of the Christ reminds us of a childhood backyard game of bygone days. "Ready or not, here I come," Christ declares at Christmas.

Nothing bad lasts forever. It may last a long time, even a lifetime. But it doesn't go into eternity. The present is limited. Pain has parameters. The future is eternal. The present is flawed; the future is beyond bounds for those who call Jesus "Lord." The future is bigger than the present.

Yes, it is possible to say, "I wonder if this illness will ever end." It's also possible to say, without being trite or superficial, "I know it will end. It may last for the rest of my life, but it won't last forever." Everything that is incomplete or unfulfilled in your life, Christ will meet and transform and gather into the kingdom. Nothing is beyond redemption. That is Advent Hope.

The Gentile believers facing persecution were called upon to face it with hope based in the resurrection and return of the Christ.

In verse 14, he calls them children. And in a moment, he's going to tell us about the Father.

As children, they are to live in accordance with the commands of their father. They are not to be conformed to their former desires – desires which they had in ignorance. Rather, they are to be holy (verse 15), like the Holy One, because it is written (verse 16), "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

The "Holy One" is a well-known designation for God in scripture (Hosea 11:9; Habakkuk 1:12; Mark 1:24; 1 John 2:20). In fact, Isaiah's most favorite designation was to call God "the Holy One of Israel"

The words “to be holy because I am holy” occur three times in Leviticus – in 11:24, in 19:2, and in 20:26.

Peter then begins to paint a picture of God to these Gentile believers who are pressing their faces against the glass, looking for hope. Of course, he can't say everything he knows about God, for to say one is going to teach about God is to say one is going to explore the bottomless ocean or the limitless cosmos. So he limits himself on this occasion and in this passage to three very powerful images of God.

I. The first image we have is that of Father.

“And if you address as Father....” We're so familiar with calling God “Father” that we've missed the power of the image. Sometimes in the Old Testament, God is called “Father,” although infrequently (Psalm 89:26; Isaiah 63:16; 64:8). But Jesus, as the Son of God, initiated a new way to address God by calling Him “Father” and teaching His followers to do the same.

In Matthew 6, in Jesus' most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, in verse 9 He teaches His disciples to pray this way: “Our Father – that is our Abba – who art in heaven. Holy (or hallowed) be Thy name.”

It seems so assuming to call the creator of the heavens and the earth “Father.” But because of the command of Christ, the children of God now can look to the creator of all that exists and say, “My Father, who is in heaven.”

Not only Jesus, but Paul taught that calling God “Father” was one of the most extraordinary benefits of the Christian life. In Romans 8:15-16, he writes that we have been adopted as the sons of God and we can cry out, “Abba! Father.” Because we have the presence of God's Spirit, we can actually say to God, “You are my Father,” – my Abba in Aramaic.

It is a remarkable thing, then and now, that we can call God our Father. But don't make the mistake of over-familiarity with God. Just because we're family with God, His children, it doesn't mean that we should be assumingly familiar with the Father. Always we should have a sense of reverence with that name “Father” – a sense of respect and a sense of obedience as children to God our Father.

I grew up with a wonderful demonstration of what it meant to honor one's father. I watched both my father and my mother show tremendous respect to their fathers. Even as my parents were senior adults themselves, grandparents themselves, I heard each of my parents address his or her father with great respect. I can hear my daddy saying to my grandfather, “Yes sir. Yes sir” – even as my own father was in his late 50s. I can hear my mother say “Yes sir” to my Papa Howard, from whom I bear my name. It didn't matter how old or wise my parents were, they still had a relationship that showed respect to and deference to their father.

The book, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee, has been in print for over a half-century. There is a moving scene in the movie version that brings tears every time I see it.

The book is about relationships. There is a widowed father, Atticus, who has two children, Jean Louise and Jem. Jem is the older brother and Jean Louise is the younger sister. The setting is Maycomb, Alabama. The time is the Great Depression. Atticus, the father, is a prominent lawyer who is asked to take a case for the state in which he defends an African-American, Tom Robinson. Tom has been accused of attacking a woman, which he did not do. Atticus's children find themselves in scuffles on the playground because their father has taken the side of the African-American. When the case finally goes to trial, the whole community shows up because nothing any bigger had ever happened in Maycomb County.

Atticus has a carefully planned defense, and by the end he shows, beyond any question, that Tom Robinson had not attacked Mayella Ewell. Despite his perfect presiding in the defense, the jury had their mind made up before the case began and they give the verdict of “guilty as charged.”

Atticus packs up his papers, already planning for an appeal – trying to be upbeat with Tom. But also, himself, disappointed, Atticus packs up his papers, turns and begins to walk from the courtroom.

His own children, Jean Louise and Jem have been watching the trial from the balcony, because there was no room on the floor below. The balcony was the place where African-Americans were relegated to watch the trial. They couldn’t mingle with the white folk below.

The balcony is packed with African-Americans pulling for Atticus and for the defense of Tom Robinson. They’ve just heard the guilty verdict like everyone else and are stunned in disbelief. But they know that Atticus has given his all, has risked his own reputation, and has stood with them in the face of prejudice and partiality.

In this powerful scene, as Atticus begins to leave the courtroom, the African-Americans stand up in his honor, for the brave fight he has fought for Tom Robinson’s defense. One by one in the movie, you watch the folk in the balcony stand up in reverence and awe of the fine job Atticus has done for Tom Robinson.

As he walks from the front of the courtroom to the rear exit, all are standing in the balcony – standing for this defeated man. The black minister says to the lone person still seated in the balcony, the one person not showing respect – Atticus’s young daughter, Jean Louise – “Miss Jean Louise, stand up. Miss Jean Louise, stand up. Your father is passing.”

“Jean Louise, stand up. Your father’s passing.”

If that can be said for a mere mortal man to his child, his daughter, how much more will be said to us, the children of God. “Stand up. Your Father is passing – God the Father.” Reverence.

In fact, Peter’s next image of God calls us away from that familiarity to a point of fear.

1 Peter 1:17

And if you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each man’s work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth.

II. The next image of God, after Father, is the image of Judge.

It may seem strange to us to put together the image of the Father, which seems so warm, with the image of judge, which can seem so cold. But judgment from God is not a contradiction of His fatherly love but, rather, a function of His love. What kind of father would place no moral demands upon his children? So just in case the word “Abba” sounded a bit soft and permissive, Peter is saying to the newly baptized believers, the Gentile converts, “You have to remember that though He is your Father, He will judge impartially based upon your works” (see Acts 10:34; Romans 2:11).

The fact that God judges according to our works is good news to anyone worried that God is going to have a double standard. In fact, the language here is “God does not look at the face.” It’s the image of 1 Samuel 16, when we’re told that God chooses a king not based upon the face but, rather, based upon the heart.

But the fact that God is an impartial judge is also discomfoting to those who somehow thought they were insiders and would be measured by a different standard. Though our salvation is never in question, as he

has already told us in verse 7, we are, indeed, judged by our works. And our rewards will be based upon what we have done with our inheritance of salvation. We'll be with God in heaven, for our salvation is based upon Him and not upon us. But what will be our reward?

Because he says He will judge each of us, we see how individual God's evaluation is going to be. It's a solemn reality that God will judge each one of us in our works. The faithful or unfaithful work of the saints will make a difference both here and in the hereafter.

III. The third image of God is that of Redeemer.

1 Peter 1:18-21

...knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

I like the past tense here. "You were redeemed already." It means our salvation is not in question. Our redemption is fully accomplished by the death of Jesus on the cross. How are we redeemed? Not by gold or silver. Rather, by the precious blood of the Lamb.

The idea of redeemed plays upon the idea of paying a ransom – liking paying for the freedom of a prisoner of war, paying the ransom. Paying for the freedom of a slave. Paying the price. When God delivered the Israelites from their Egyptian bondage, from their slavery, it is spoken of as redemption (Exodus 6:6; 15:13). And God is spoken of as their redeemer (Psalm 78:35).

The ransom involved Christ's sacrificial suffering and death as it satisfied God's holiness and righteous governing of the cosmos. Because Jesus substituted Himself for the sinner, God can be both just – that is a just judge, and the justifier – the one who says "welcome" to us into His kingdom because we have faith in Jesus.

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming in the very first chapter of John, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the earth." A Lamb, without blemish or spot, sacrificed once and for all on my behalf and your behalf.

His death was no accident (verse 20). It was the foreknown plan of God. The men – the Romans and the Jews – thought they were in control, but they were not. God was absolutely in control of it all. The Christ has appeared in these last times on our behalf, and God raised Him from the dead (verse 21) so that we can have our faith and our hope in God.

When you think about God, think about God as loving Abba, loving Father. Think about God as an impartial Judge who doesn't judge according to the face but, rather, the heart, according to the deeds done by the heart.

And think about God as Redeemer – the one who sent His only Son to die on the cross in our place that He could be both just, as His nature demands, and yet call us into His kingdom.

Father. Judge. Redeemer.

A God who allows us to have hope in the death and the resurrection and the return of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Where are you this morning? Are you a child of God? Can you really call Him “Father”? Are you working for the kingdom in such a way as to please the Judge who judges each one of us according to our deeds? Are you thankful for the spilt blood of Jesus who paid the ransom for your soul?

God the Father. God the Judge. God the Redeemer. The God who calls you into His kingdom. The God of Christmas Hope (v. 21). Your faith and your hope are in God.

Some ideas on Advent taken from Sam Wells, “Coming, Ready or Not: The Character of Advent Hope,” *Journal for Preachers*, Vol. XLV, No. 1, Advent 2021.