

Hope in God!

The New Birth Part 8

1 Peter 1:13 5-20-2012

Summary: Hope is when you turn your attention from some small bad news to some big good news. It is central to the Christian life and it is a Christian duty (with grace comes responsibility). But it is hard to do. It requires rolling up the sleeves of your mind (get your mind moving) and being sober (restrain your mind from acting on impulses like a drunk). Think about heaven, which will be a non-cursed version of this earth (check your mirrors).

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1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." 17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.

Introduction

Setting your Heart on a Better Hope

Imagine for a moment that you are a volunteer for a political campaign. You have never really been all that into politics before, you have certainly never worked on a campaign, but this particular man who is running for president just really has you fired up. You agree with him right down the line on every important issue. He is an outspoken believer, and he has an amazing ability to persuade and make the truth of God's Word clear and appealing to people. There is no doubt in your mind that if he were president, he could have a major impact not only politically, but morally on our whole country.

And so you do something you never dreamed you would do. You believe in this so much, you quit your job to volunteer full time for this campaign. You are convinced that not only would he make

a great president, but the opposing candidate would be an absolute train wreck for the country that we may never recover from. So for two years you put everything you have into helping his campaign full time.

Election Day arrives, and you stay up late to watch the results, and to the shock of all the pollsters your guy wins in the biggest landslide victory ever – fifty states to zero. On his coattails, his party also won the House and the Senate with big majorities, so nothing stands in his way - this is going to turn our country around.

The next weekend after Election Day you head straight from church down to see the Broncos play the Raiders. You are a big Broncos fan and so you splurge on expensive tickets, and you are all excited to take in the big game. By the end of the first quarter the Broncos are down by three touchdowns and it gets worse from there.

Like I said, you are a huge Bronco fan, so the next day every time you think of the game you start to get depressed. But each time that happens you just forget about the game and turn your attention to the fact that we are going to have this amazing president for the next four years (and no doubt four more after that). And that immediately wipes out your depression, because the presidency is so much more important in your heart than sports (because of how much you invested yourself into it).

Now, maybe you don't care about politics or sports, but whatever you care about and do not care about, everyone in this room knows what it is like to make yourself feel better after a disappointment by taking your attention away from some small bad news and focusing on some big good news. Maybe the small bad news is your dinner plans didn't work out, and the big good news is you finally found a great job. Turning your attention away from little bad news to much bigger good news is what it means to set your hope on something.

And what Peter instructs us to do in this passage is to set our hope *fully* on the things he has been telling us about for the past twelve verses. Not on a job, not on an election, but on **the grace that is to be revealed** at the Second Coming.

Definition

Now, if you have not been here the previous weeks you need to understand that the biblical word translated **hope** is not like our word hope. The most accurate translation of the biblical word would be our word, "expect." Hope in God is when there is such a strong expectation that He will fulfill what He has promised, and what He has promised is so delightful to you, that it makes you happy. So there are two ingredients. First, you have to really be convinced the good thing is going to happen. And second, the good thing has to be something you strongly desire. If you know for sure something is going to happen tomorrow, but you have no idea what it will be like, that will not give you any joy. If you know something is really, really fun, but you are not sure if it is going to happen or not, that will not bring you joy either. But if you know for sure it is going to happen, *and* you have to know for sure you are going to like it, that is hope.

And we must have hope. It is like your spiritual blood sugar. When you get discouraged or depressed, it is because your spiritual blood sugar is low and you need some heavy doses of hope.

The Duty (Hope is Huge)

Importance

This is the first command in the book of 1 Peter – the command to hope in the coming grace. Peter makes that his first command because it is fundamental to everything else he is going to say. The purpose of commanding this goes way beyond just helping you get out of a funk or giving you a little emotional boost. Hoping in God is right at the core of what Christianity is. Paul gave us the big three

in 1 Corinthians 13 – faith, hope and love. We tend to emphasize the faith and love – lots of books and sermons on faith and love, but without hope, there is no faith or love.

Colossians 1:4 we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love you have for all the saints-- 5 the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven

It is our hope of heaven that keeps both our faith and our love alive. If you doubt the importance of hope, just listen to Paul:

Colossians 1:21 Once you were alienated from God ... 22 But now he has reconciled you ... to present you holy in his sight ... 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope of the gospel.

The only way to make it to heaven is to not be moved from the hope of the gospel. And it is hope that causes you to persevere to the end.

1 Thessalonians 1:3 We continually remember the work of your faith, the labor of your love, and the endurance of your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith and love get you working, and hope keeps you working. Paul says that the entire Bible was written for the purpose of hope.

Romans 15:4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

You can summarize the whole life of faith with those three words – “hope in God.” That is how you live for God. That is how Peter describes the holy women of the past in chapter 3 – they were the ones who put their hope in God (1Pe.3:5). Hope is huge.

Hope is Required

And so it is no surprise at all that the first command in the book of 1 Peter is a command to hope. And even more striking is the fact that before giving it, Peter feels like he needs to take twelve verses just to lay the foundation. It is an incredibly important command, and yet very often we do not think of hope as being in the realm of duty. We think of fighting against sinful habits as a duty. We feel a responsibility to get control of our tongue, or to increase self-control. Those kinds of things feel like duties to us, but I am afraid not very many people think of hope that way – something God requires. But make no mistake – hope is commanded, and failure to hope in God is a sin that must be confessed and repented of. If you are fighting hard against gluttony or sexual sin or anger or sinful speech, but you are not fighting hard to increase your hope, you are shooting yourself in the foot. Hope is just as much a command as those other things, and it is the key to success in those other areas. Hope is huge.

Response to Grace

And I realize all this talk about duty and responsibility and requirement makes some people uneasy. Some people teach that grace and duty are opposites. So lots of grace means not much duty. That is not even close to right. Grace does not diminish responsibility – just the opposite – grace always increases responsibility. From whom much is given, much is required. Like we just sang in the hymn - “Love so amazing, so divine, *demand*s my soul, my life, my all.” Grace always demands duty. You see it over and over again in Paul’s books – the first half of the book is all the grace we have been given, then a big “therefore,” then the second half is all the commands. With great grace comes great responsibility, and it is no different here in 1 Peter. The twelve verses are about grace, the rest of the chapter gives us commands, and what is in between? What is the first word in verse 13? **Therefore.** Since God has given this amazing grace, we must respond by placing our hope fully in that grace. And if we don’t, we miss the gift. God’s whole purpose in telling us about this grace is to generate hope in Him. So if you do not have the hope, you have not received what God is wanting to give you.

The Preparation (Hope is Hard)

OK, so we understand – hope is huge. It is commanded, it is required, it is central to the Christian life, it is essential for glorifying God. But we cannot stop here because at this point we are missing something very important. If you just walk out of here right now and try to obey this command to place your hope fully in the coming grace, you will fail if you do not have the necessary preparation. It will be like trying to run a marathon without any training – it will not work because hope is hard. Hope is huge – it is crucially important, but it is also hard.

Some of you may have been wondering why I keep saying the first command in the book is to place our hope in the coming grace, because in your Bible it looks like the first command is to prepare your mind for action. The second command is to be sober or self-controlled. And the third command is to hope. But the literal translation is this: **“Therefore, having prepared your mind for action, and being sober, set your hope full on the grace...”** Those first two are preparation for the command. There is only one command: hope. But in order to be able to do that, you must first get your mind ready in two ways. You have to prepare it for action, and you have to sober it up.

Prepare Your Mind for Action

Let’s take them one at a time. First you have to prepare your mind for action. The old King James phrase is “gird up the loins of your mind.”¹ That word “gird” refers to a belt. The people wore long robes that were not very conducive for running. So if they needed to run or do some rigorous, physical activity, they would pull the bottom of the cloak up between their legs and tuck it into their belt. That is the ancient Hebrew equivalent of gym shorts. We have a figure of speech that is almost identical in meaning. We say, “Roll up your sleeves.” Roll up your sleeves means get ready for some hard work, which is exactly what this phrase means. That is why the NIV translates it, **“Prepare your minds for action.”** Before you even try to place your hope fully in the coming grace, you are going to have to roll up the sleeves of your brain because this is not going to be easy.

Shallow Thinking

And that is tough for us because I don’t know if there has ever been a culture that thinks as shallowly as ours. It always amazes me when I read sermons from one hundred years ago – the depth and complexity of thought people used to be able to follow. Our culture has been hugely affected by TV. A TV show comes on and it jumps from scene to scene every couple minutes. Commercials come on and it is just one image after another every few seconds. The news comes on and it is just a series of unrelated, sensational headlines with no rhyme or reason. A robbery, a car accident, the weather, the economy, something about Afghanistan, the Colorado Rockies. Once in a while the anchor will come on and say, “In depth tonight...,” and proceed to spend a full three minutes on some story. That has affected the way we think. Even worship songs are affected. It is getting harder and harder to find a worship song that does not just jump randomly from topic to topic from one verse to the next. We live in a sound-byte, bumper-sticker culture that trains us to have micro-attention spans so we never really focus on a single subject for more than a couple minutes at a time. I just laugh when some poor kid is singled out as having ADD – our entire culture has ADD.

Very few people think deeply about anything. When is the last time you walked away from a conversation thinking, “Wow, he has obviously thought deeply about that”? Ninety-five percent of our conversation is chit-chat. We do not think in depth about much of anything – when would we? We

¹ One thing we are going to see here again and again and again is Peter will keep referring to the Exodus, when God rescued the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. And this is one of those references. That phrase “gird up your loins” comes from the night before they left Egypt. God told them, “I want you to eat a big feast, and eat it with your loins girded up and your sandals on and your staff in your hand.” In other words, wear your gym shorts and running shoes. There was going to be a very short window of time that they had to escape, and they need to be ready to run. And Peter takes that same phrase and applies it to the mind.

surround ourselves with distractions every waking moment. From the second we wake up either the radio is on, or the TV, or music going somewhere. Waiting rooms, elevators, jogging, walking - if it is ever silent for more than two minutes it means a battery is dead. This is not a culture where we think hard. We just let the people in Hollywood, Madison Avenue, and Nashville do our thinking for us, which is scary, because they are not exactly plumbing the depths of anything.

This is a problem even in academia. All the way through school, if I ever turned in something that had original thinking, the professor would say, "This doesn't have enough footnotes - redo it." So then I would just gather a bunch of things that other people wrote and arrange it all into a paper where every other sentence was something from some source, and they would give me an A, even though the paper was nothing but a worthless, mindless repeating of what others already said. The very place where you would expect might be the one segment of culture where deep thinking would be encouraged actually discourages it.

So when Peter says we need to roll up the sleeves of our minds and be sober - that goes double for us. We live in a culture of mental couch potatoes which means the norm of our culture is incompatible with Christianity.

Can you think of an area of your life in which opportunities to think are being squandered? How about in the shower? Driving. Waiting in lines. Eating. For most people it is probably time spent in front of some kind of screen - TV, movies, Internet, video games. How serious are you about rolling up the sleeves of your mind? Are you willing to replace secular music with worship music? Are you willing to replace some entertainment with listening to good sermons? Replace time spent reading fiction books or magazines or daydreaming with studying Scripture? Replace sports or your hobby or talk radio with memorizing God's Word? If we want this hope we are going to have to roll up our sleeves, because hope is hard.

Being Sober

The other preparation that we have to do before being able to obey this command is to be **sober** (NIV **self-controlled**), which addresses it from another angle. Preparing your mind for action means to get your mind moving. Being sober means restraining your mind from moving too much. When a person gets drunk, the restraints fall off. They just speak and act on whatever impulse pops up. They are governed by whim instead of wisdom. Then when they sober up, they regain control of their words and actions. But so many of us, while we are sober in our words and actions, are drunk in our thought life. We put restraints on our physical impulses, but we let our minds just run with whatever impulses come along. There is very little self-control in the thought life.

If that is you, then you are never going to be able to set your hope fully on the coming grace because hope is hard. Setting your hope on something requires spending a lot of time thinking about that thing, and that will never happen if your mind is governed by impulse, because no one has continual impulses to think about heaven. Think about it - how often do you just have a sudden, overwhelming urge to daydream about your eternal inheritance? It does not happen because heaven is fascinating, but it is not amusing. It is interesting, but it is not entertaining and the impulses of the flesh always prefer that which is amusing and entertaining over that which is profound and rich.

So many Christians miss out on hope because they have couch potato minds. They never roll up their sleeves. Their minds are just laying on the couch all day saying, "Amuse me! Amuse me!" There are people who, if you took away all their amusements - TV, movies, music, fiction books, web surfing, games, chit chat with friends - take all that away and they would go insane with boredom because they have no idea how to go more than an inch deep into anything. They do not have the willingness to roll up the sleeves of their mind, nor do they have the impulse control to say "no" to junk food thinking.

Hope is Hard

So what does all this tell you? When Peter says, “OK, before I give you the first command in the book, you need to know that you are going to have to really roll up your mental sleeves and sober up in your thinking” – what does that say about setting your hope fully on the coming grace? It tells you hope is hard. It requires effort.

Do not ever let anyone tell you that hard work is of the flesh. The “Let go and let God” crowd will tell you that working hard is a sign that you are operating in the flesh. Nowhere does the Bible teach that. The sign that you are operating in the flesh is sin. If there is no sin, then you are walking in the Spirit, not the flesh. You are in the flesh when you are running hard after something other than God. But you are in the Spirit when you are running hard after God. And running hard after God includes running hard after hope.

The Object (Hope is for Heaven)

“OK, fine – I’ll think hard. But what is it, exactly, that I’m supposed to think?”

13 ... set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Grace is a Gift Showing Favor

How do you think hard about that? Just repeating the word “grace” in your head is not going to do anything. What is grace? The word “grace” means *gift*. And not just a gift, but a gift designed to express God’s favor. Not all gifts express favor. You might give a dollar to a panhandler as a gift, but that does not necessarily indicate any special approval for that person. You might even have disdain in your heart toward him. But when Jacob gave Joseph the coat of many colors, that was a gift that said, “I have a special love for you.” That is what grace is. Grace is not just an undeserved gift. God’s grace is when He gives you a gift that means, “I approve of you.”

What We Already Receive is the Tip of the Iceberg

So what is the gift? God has already given us new birth, the forgiveness of sins, the Holy Spirit, adoption as sons, and countless other blessings. But Peter is not talking about that here – he is talking about the future.

13 ... set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

What is that? Heaven. The gifts we have already received from God are the tip of the iceberg.

1 John 3:2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

That is one part of the iceberg of this grace that is still hidden under the water – the way in which our relationship with God will be closer than that of sons and daughters.

The Glory of God

There are a lot of aspects to the iceberg of our inheritance. But if you want to sum it all up in one word, it is nothing less than the very glory of God. That is our hope – the glory of God.

Romans 5:2 ...we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

The glory of God is the source of everything that is good. Everything beautiful, pleasing, delightful, admirable, desirable – all of it comes from God’s glory. That is why you can describe hell simply as a place devoid of the glory of God. There is nothing good in hell – nothing happy, nothing desirable, nothing pleasing, nothing satisfying. Why? Because there is no glory there.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 [those who do not obey the gospel] will be ... shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power

Can you imagine saying goodbye to the glory of God forever?

Everything bad about hell is due to the lack of God's glory there. And everything that is great about heaven is due to the glory of God. And that is our hope. That is why it is OK to be excited about *anything* in heaven. Whether it is the mansions or the rewards or the streets of gold – some people try to be pious and say, “I don't care about any of that – I just want to see God.” What that person does not understand is that in heaven there will not be a distinction between enjoying God and enjoying God's gifts. Enjoying God's gifts will always be an enjoyment of God Himself because there will be no idolatry in heaven. Our hearts will not even have that capacity anymore. Everything up there is fair game to desire because it is all the expression of God's glory.

What will it be Like?

So what is up there? Is it even possible to imagine heaven? Some say “no”. They say heaven is a spiritual realm, and there is nothing physical there. I can tell you for sure that is wrong because Jesus is in heaven. Jesus rose with a literal flesh and bone body (Lk.24:37-39). Now let me ask you this – where is that body now? Would you agree that it is *somewhere*? Didn't the disciples watch His physical body ascend up to heaven in Acts 1:9? If it is a physical body that means it occupies space – what space is it occupying right now? Space in heaven. If you went to heaven right now in your current physical body, would you see anything?

“That's impossible – our current bodies could never go there.”

Yes, they could. Paul was taken up to the third heaven and in 2 Corinthians 12:2 he said he may have been in his body. He wasn't sure, but the fact that he offers that as a possibility shows that Paul did not think it was impossible. So if you were taken up to heaven right now, would you see anything physical? Yes, you would see Jesus' body. And you would no doubt also see Enoch, whose body was translated to heaven. Hebrews 11:5 says his body was never found – because it was taken to heaven.

What else? Do you suppose it is just Jesus and Enoch floating in empty space? Jesus told the thief on the cross that that very day the thief would be with Jesus in paradise. That word originally meant *garden or park*. In John 14 Jesus described it as being like a giant house with many rooms where He was going to prepare a place for us and then come back to earth to get us and bring us there. Heaven is a literal place that is like a garden paradise where there are literal, physical bodies and a house with rooms that are under construction.

That is the way heaven is now – what about in the eternal state? What does the Bible say about the place where the redeemed are going to live forever and ever? Is that something we can imagine? Yes – it will also be a paradise.

Revelation 2:7 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

It is the same word Jesus used with the thief on the cross. What will that paradise be like?

Psalm 16:11 You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

So the place of our eternal dwelling with God will involve joy and pleasures. What kind of pleasures? Will God's love be expressed in tangible ways like it is now? Right now I see God's power in the stars and in the mountains and rivers. I see His beauty in the trees and flowers and clouds. I enjoy His kindness through food and drink and all the various pleasures of this world He created. That is what it is like now – what will it be like then?

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth

The place where you and I will live forever and ever will be an earth. What does that mean? In what sense will it be an earth? It will be this same place – just redeemed.

Romans 8:20 For the creation was subjected to frustration ...in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

The current earth is not going to be annihilated. It will be laid bare in total devastation at the judgment, and then renewed and restored to a condition even better than before the fall. If you think of the eternal state as some kind of ethereal, non-physical, ghostly existence where there is no matter or substance – that would not be a new earth. That would be a non-earth. If you are picturing a place with no canyons, no clouds, no forests or lakes or meadows or waterfalls or mountains – that would be a non-earth. God did not promise to create a new heaven and a non-earth. It will be a new *earth*. So if you can look around and see this earth, and if you can smell and hear and touch and feel – then you can imagine our eternal home.

“But wait a minute – I thought we were going to live in heaven forever – with God.”

Which is it? Are we going to live in heaven with God, or on earth? Well, what is heaven? Heaven is the dwelling place of God, right? But you know what happens when God creates the new earth where there is no sin or evil?

Revelation 21:1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them.

Heaven is wherever God dwells. So when God comes down and makes the new earth His dwelling place, at that point heaven and earth will be the same place.

What other ways will the new earth be like this present earth? Well, there will be cities and countries and kingdoms. There will be houses. When Scripture speaks of our eternal state it speaks of trees and animals and rivers and riches and banquets and travel and wealth and friends. Pretty much every delightful thing that exists in this world will exist in the new earth – minus all the problems.

You can imagine heaven. In fact, you *must* imagine heaven. Otherwise it will never produce hope. Just thinking the word “heaven” or “grace” will not do anything – you have to immerse yourself in imagination of what it actually is. If you tell your kids you are taking them to Disneyland, if they have never heard of the place, they will not be excited about going unless you can point to something they do know and compare it.

“Disneyland? What in the world is that?”

“It’s like Elitches, but better.”

“Elitches! Wow! When do we leave?”

That is what we need to do with this world.

Check Your Mirrors

So, how do we put all this together? Exactly what is Peter telling us to do? He is telling us to transfer our hope from the game to the election. Just like the guy who overcomes his depression about losing the big game by turning his attention to some much bigger good news – winning the election, so when the suffering of this life starts to weigh us down we turn our attention not to the weekend, not to our next vacation or getting married or retirement, but we turn our attention to the grace to be revealed when Jesus returns. That is not easy. You are going to have to roll up the sleeves of your mind and sober up in your thinking – become disciplined in your thought life so you can use everything in this world to excite your heart about the next world.

When my kids were little I used to tell them all the time, “Check your mirrors.” Every good thing in this world is a mirror that reflects something about God that we will enjoy forever in the next world. You can see into heaven from here. It requires a lot of mental heavy lifting and discipline, but if you train your mind to reject trivia and constant amusement, and you choose instead to continuously check your mirrors – look at the goodness and kindness and wisdom and beauty and power of God in everything in this world as a reflection of what living with Him will be like in eternity, you will know inexpressible and glorious joy even in the midst of any suffering.

Our problem is instead of looking at the reflection in the mirror, we focus our eyes on the glass itself. When you see a tree or a sunset or pristine beach – if all you see is those things the same way an unbeliever enjoys them, you are just looking at the glass. You are missing the reality that is being reflected. You are missing the whole point of a mirror. Use this world every hour to ignite your heart with the joy of hope in the grace that is to come on that Day. Luther: “I live for two days: this day and that Day.” Use that Day to ignite hope for this day. And strive to enjoy fellowship with God as much as possible in the present, so that anticipation of greater fellowship will fill you with hope to the glory of God.

Conclusion: Proverbs 4

Have you ever been lost in the mountains when it is starting to get dark? I have, and it is terrifying. Even before it starts getting dark – when that chill first starts to come and you know it means the sun is about to set and if you stay out all night you will almost certainly freeze to death. I have been in that position a couple times, and it really is a terrifying thing.

But I have also been out in the woods very early in the morning – before sunrise. Then it is just as dark, but it is not scary at all. Why? Because of hope.

Proverbs 4:18 The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day. 19 But the way of the wicked is like deep darkness; they do not know what makes them stumble.

The first gleam of dawn is a perfect picture of the effect of hope on the soul. I was camping once in the winter time and I did not have a warm enough sleeping bag so I had to get up and sit by the fire – all night long. It was below zero that night. I had to keep going out into the pitch black forest to find more firewood. It was one of the longest nights of my life. It seemed like that sun would never come up.

But then suddenly the temperature dropped, and it filled me with relief because that happens right before the sun begins to rise. Then, about fifteen minutes before the first gleam of sunlight colors the sky, the darkness begins to soften. Moment by moment, the blackness of the sky slowly gives way to a dim, but pregnant blue, and the plain, dark blanket of night that covers the earth begins to dissolve. Slowly the rocks become distinguishable from the ground, and the branches of trees can be seen against the sky's faint morning light.

Then, suddenly, the gloom of night in full retreat, the first edge of the sun breaks the plain of the horizon, and the clouds light up with the colors of the master artist. Now the pace quickens, and the whole, silent picture grows before your eyes as the seconds pass. The blue sky deepens. The subtle pink and purple tint of the clouds burst into brilliant oranges and reds, like a trumpet fanfare announcing the day. The earth comes alive like a beautiful woman waking from her sleep. The sweet melody of the birds eclipses the crickets' tiresome lyric, and the soft petals of the mountain Loral open and drink in the fresh, inviting sunlight. All the earth sings in the warmth of the new day.

The thing that is fascinating to me about that is the fact that just after sundown and just before sunrise there is the same amount of light. If you look around, it looks the same. But there is a world of difference. In the evening that amount of light terrified me, and in the morning that same amount of

light filled me with joy. You do not have to wait until high noon for the fear to go away. It is banished at the very first signs of dawn.

That is the difference between the believer and the unbeliever. On the surface it seems like we have the same amount of light. In fact, very often their lives are even a little brighter than ours. In the very short term, their outlook seems rosy compared to ours. But it is quite literally a night and day difference, because they are on their way to deep darkness, and the dimness of our lives is the dimness of the first gleam of dawn that guarantees before long we will enjoy the full light of day.

Benediction: Hebrews 6:18-20 God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged. 19 We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain, 20 where Jesus, who went before us, has entered on our behalf.

1:25 Questions

1. What times in your life could you begin making better use of for thinking on things above? What changes could you make to make that happen?
2. Ask each person in the group to list five things about this world that help them enjoy God's presence, marvel at His wisdom or beauty, or stand in awe of His power. Discuss how the redeemed version of these things will be better.