

FELLOW PILGRIMS

Peter Hay, prepared for Apostles' Fellowship, 23 May 2021
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Introduction

Over the past couple of weeks, we have been considering the adoption and how we obtain a resurrection body as sons and daughters of Abraham, through our fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

The apostles Paul and Peter described this process of the adoption as 'a pilgrimage'. As children of Abraham, we are citizens, already, of the heavenly city, and we have a participation, in our mortal bodies every day, in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Foundational to our pilgrimage as children of Abraham, a person who is living this way is receiving, and walking in, *the gospel of sonship*.

Jesus proclaimed to the disciples the gospel that He proclaimed to Abraham

What are the implications for us in terms of how we hear the word every time it comes, and what effect does it have on the way in which we walk each day?

When we first began looking at the life of Abraham, we understood that Paul taught that he preached no other gospel but the gospel of sonship. He said that this gospel was first proclaimed to Abram. 'Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.' Gen 15:1.

Jesus, before He commenced His offering journey, proclaimed this same message to His disciples. 'Let not your heart be troubled [that is the same as 'do not be afraid']; you believe in God, believe also in Me.' Joh 14:1.

We know that believing is the evidence that we have received faith – that is, 'I am your shield of faith'.

'In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you [in Myself].' Joh 14:2. This is, 'I am your exceedingly great reward.'

Jesus proclaimed to the disciples the gospel that He proclaimed to Abraham. 'And where I go you know, and the way you know.' Joh 14:4.

The gospel is *connecting us to a pathway*.

In the book of Revelation, we read that the apostle John testified of walking in the pathway that was revealed by this very gospel proclamation.

The one word of the gospel spoken

We will look at these verses today, in the light of the adoption. John wrote, 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, saying, "I am the *Alpha* and the *Omega*, the First and the Last," and, "What you see, write in a book and send it to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea."

'Then I turned to see the Voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band.' Rev 1:10-14.

'And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid".' Rev 1:17.

That's what He said to Abraham.

That's what He said to the disciples.

He came again with this same message to John, who obviously had first heard that first message about not being afraid.

Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. This refers to the Author and Perfector of your faith – I am your faith.

'I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.' I am your exceedingly great reward' – that is the life that is coming out of death.

The keys of Hades and of Death is the One who is bringing an end to something. He's giving access to those out of Hades and Death, who are being made alive with Him.

This is the gospel that John heard through the right hand of Christ, who was lifting him up out of death. He fell down at His feet as though dead.

The word that is being proclaimed to us, to cause us to walk in a new way, is the same gospel that the Lord addressed Abraham with, and gave to the disciples before He commenced His offering journey.

Things which you have seen, things which are, and things which will take place after this

Then He said, 'Write these things which you have seen, and the things which *are*, and the things which *will take place after this*.' Rev 1:19.

The things which are *seen* is the Gospel of John.

The things which *are*, is the message that he proclaimed through his three letters to the churches.

And then, the things which *will take place after this*, of course, are speaking about the book of Revelation. He gave John 'a work to do'.

A pilgrim on the pathway to inheritance

This passage gives to us some very helpful instruction on what it means to be a pilgrim who is on the pathway to obtaining the inheritance that is promised in the adoption.

The first thing to note is that John 'was in the Spirit on the Lord's day'.

'The Lord's day' was not a Sunday; nor was it a Saturday, as some denominations argue, although it could have been. The point is that the Lord's day is not a particular day of the week.

The Lord's day is *the day of the Lord's offering*.

John was saying that, by the Spirit, he was joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. It wasn't that he was not already walking in that way. 'In the Spirit' on the Lord's day is how we are to be *every day*.

We know that he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day because John had already introduced himself to his readers as 'your brother and companion in the tribulation, and kingdom, and patience of Jesus Christ'.

He was explaining that this was the context in which he lived. He said that he was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

We see that being joined to the fellowship of Christ's offering is both *the fellowship of His sufferings*, being conformed to His death – where

something is being put to death and taken away from us – as well as *the testimony of Jesus Christ*, which is His life in me that I am now living by and expressing.

Jesus was speaking to John because he was *already* a pilgrim. He did not say it to arrest him because, somehow, John was deviant or aberrant. He was already a pilgrim. In fact, that is the reason why John heard the Voice.

He certainly did *repent*. He certainly did *turn*, but he heard the Voice because he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day. He was already in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

Hearing the Voice behind us

The implication, of course, is that if we do not discern the Lord's body, we will not be able to *hear* the Voice behind us.

That is the reason why people grow weak and sick, and fall asleep, spiritually. That falling asleep is under the judgement of God. It is not the sleep, or the death, of one who is conformed to Christ's death.

Hearing, turning, receiving a work in fellowship

John was already a pilgrim, and that is the reason why he heard the voice behind Him. With the word, came a call to do a *work*.

He said, 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard a voice behind me ... saying [introducing Himself] ... and then, "What you see, write in a book".'

The word came, called to John, and gave him a work to do.

John's first response was not, 'All that You say, I will do.' Rather, he heard a voice behind, and his first response was to *turn*; to *look for* the Voice. He was looking for *fellowship*. He turned to have fellowship with the One who spoke to him.

There is a distinction between the response of faith that comes by hearing, and the response that trusts in our own capacity to 'do' the word.

Turning in repentance today

The Voice, like the sound of a trumpet, was behind John so, when he turned to the Voice that was behind Him, this was a point of *repentance*. In fact, that is the most basic definition of repentance. Repentance means, simply, to turn.

As John was turning, he was looking a particular way. Being in the Spirit on the Lord's day, in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings, he was walking, and was oriented in a particular way, and he heard the Voice behind him.

Turning to see that Voice was a point of repentance for John as he turned, from his own orientation and understanding, to receive what the Lord was illuminating to him, *today*. This was a 'today' word.

'Today if you hear His voice, do not harden your heart.' Now, John wasn't hardening his heart, as we have read.

However, when that word comes and we are oriented a particular way, the propensity for hardening comes.

The person whose heart is not hard is willing to turn. They want to see the Voice that is behind them.

Turning to the word that is spoken

When John turned, it doesn't say that he saw Jesus first. Rather, he *saw* the Voice. That's what he said. 'Then I turned to see the Voice.'

When we turn to the word, we actually turn to the Voice, or to the *word* that is being spoken. It's not that we look for a particular figure. We are actually, and simply, committed to turning to receive the Voice, or to see the Voice that speaks.

Blamelessness - hearing, repenting, illumination; walking worthily

'I turned to see the Voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw *seven golden lampstands* ... and One like the Son of Man in the midst of them.'

The Voice that he saw was Christ ministering as High Priest in the midst of seven golden lampstands.

Those three things - *hearing* the Voice behind him, his *repentance*, and the *illumination* to see the Voice speaking to him - is the way in which the word comes to every person who is walking blamelessly before the Lord.

John, when he said, 'I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day', could have said, 'I was walking blamelessly before the Lord.'

In fact, it is the implication of participating in a worthy manner in the *agape* meal that belongs to the Lord.

We are given fellowship in the agape meal; fellowship with the messengers He sends

Reading in Isaiah, 'And though the Lord *gives* you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be *moved into a corner* anymore, but your eyes shall *see your teachers*.' Isa 30:20-21.

Remember what happened! John was walking, heard a Voice behind him, and he turned to see the Voice.

The Lord *gives* us the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, which is our fellowship in a particular dimension of the *agape* meal. He *gives* it to us.

'Yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner, but your eyes shall *see your teachers*.' These are people who are *committed to fellowship with those who proclaim the word!*

Your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, '“This is the way, walk in it,” whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left.' That statement is saying, 'That is the way it will be for us if we are in the way that is established; by participation in the *agape* meal.'

That is what happened with John. He was not recalcitrant or going the wrong way because he heard the Voice behind him.

Rather, every time that the word is proclaimed, we need to *turn*. Otherwise, we would be the *source* of it.

Every time that the word is spoken, we turn, and we hear that voice, so that we can walk in the way that *He* has prepared for us.

Our teachers 'moved into a corner'

What about the point about our teachers being 'moved into a corner'? How does that happen?

Our teachers are moved into a corner *when we do not turn to the word* that speaks to us from behind, today.

Why is that? We *do* hear the word, but we *add* the word to our existing religious or theological framework.

We have a body of understanding, and we continue to hear the word. However, instead of turning to it, we take that word and we add it to

our understanding and comprehension – to our knowledge.

The more that we ‘know’, the less we hear and receive what the messenger says.

Do you see the point? We still *hear* the word but, because we have a body of understanding, we become very confident in our knowledge and understanding. Instead of turning to the word, we become appraisers of it.

In this way, we put our teachers in a corner. To us, their voice becomes less and less pertinent to the way in which we understand ourselves and our lives, and how to live. The more we know, the less we hear and receive. This body of knowledge becomes the basis for our appraisal of the word.

The word is coming in our flesh; not by knowledge

We do not simply accumulate a theological body of knowledge. That is not the purpose of the proclamation of the word. Neither is it the purpose for teaching.

Rather, the word, which is Spirit and life, is *coming in our flesh*. We are *becoming* what we are *hearing*, which is why we are able to *speak* from testimony.

We do not speak from the body of knowledge that we have accumulated. We are able to speak because that word has become flesh in us.

Becoming sons of light

Another way of saying it is that we are *becoming the light*, remembering that we are to be ‘sons of light’.

We are becoming the light that we are receiving – the word is a light – and that we are walking in.

John turned to see the Voice. He was looking for *fellowship in the light*.

Expressing the word in relationship; knowing Christ

I was thinking about messengers – those who are called to be messengers. A person is not a messenger because of their body of knowledge. This is how the world operates.

In natural terms, a person is qualified to be a proclaimer of the word because they have obtained a body of knowledge, and because an authority has said, ‘Yes, you have a sufficient gathering of knowledge, and a capacity to work with that knowledge and to express it, for you to

be a messenger.’ That would be self-righteousness. The expression of the word would be on the basis of what we *know*.

No-one knew the Scriptures better than Paul. He said, ‘I was the very top in my generation.’ But he said, ‘I counted that all as loss for the purpose of *knowing Christ*.’

He was referring to a *relationship*. He said that ‘The power of His resurrection, the fellowship of His sufferings being conformed to His death, if by any means the *exanastasis* life might come in me,’ is my expression – not a body of knowledge.

Given to hearing the word

Messengers are those who are *given*. They are those who have given their ear to the word.

This does not mean that *anyone* can be a messenger, even if they don’t know anything.

While we do not live by the basis of a body of knowledge, it doesn’t mean that we are not hearing the word. A messenger – who will be all of us in the places where the Lord has put us – is a person who has *given their ear to the word*. This is the wisdom of God.

They have given their ear, and have lifted up their voice for understanding, in fellowship. Pro 2:2-3.

That means that what they are hearing is becoming *the culture of their life*. They proclaim what has become their life according to their unique *sanctification*.

That is what it means to be a messenger. That is what it means for one who is committed to hearing the Voice behind them, turning to that Voice, so that the way in which they are walking does not deviate to the right or to the left.

Growing and walking in the new way

We *grow* as a son of God in the fellowship of Christ’s offering and sufferings because we acknowledge the need to turn to the word behind us, every time that it is spoken.

The *new way* in which we walk is a point of *rejoicing* for us; and this was true also for the apostle Paul. Paul was called directly by Jesus. He said, ‘I have been separated from my mother’s womb, by God, for this purpose of being a messenger. I received the gospel directly from Jesus.’

With Paul, it even hurt how much he was going to suffer for the gospel. Paul testified that he spent three times praying to the Lord to be delivered from a thorn in the flesh.

He said, 'Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me [the 'thorn' – the buffeting of Satan]. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness".' 2Co 12:8-10.

He heard something *new*. That didn't change the fact that he was a messenger. In fact, he understood that this word was the word that he would exemplify as a testimony.

He was not despondent because he heard something new and it was not what he had thought before.

Rather, he said, '[No; now, in the light of this word] Therefore I gladly boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in my infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.'

He constantly turned to the word from behind him, which said, 'Walk *this way*, Paul.' Then he exemplified it.

Being poor in spirit; joined to the fellowship of His offering and sufferings

The illumination that comes from hearing and seeing the Voice caused John to fall at the feet of Christ, as though he was dead.

This demonstrated that John was *poor in spirit*.

This was the same experience that Abraham had when he asked, by faith, 'How will I know I will inherit?' Recently, we understood that, having received faith, and having believed that his children would become the citizens of the new heavens and earth, and that he would be one of those as well, he asked, 'How will I know I will inherit?'

We contrasted that question with the statement, 'All that You say, I will do'.

Clearly, he did not presume, in himself, to have the capacity to bring that to pass. He asked the question, by the faith that he received, 'How will I know I will inherit?'

In response, the Lord figuratively *joined* him to the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings. The Scriptures record that 'a deep sleep fell upon Abram'.

Now, that deep sleep was like John falling at Christ's feet 'like a dead man'.

We read about Abram, 'Behold horror and great darkness fell upon him.' Remember, that horror and great darkness was Abram being joined to Christ; he was co-crucified with Christ.

It was the horror when, from twelve o'clock to three o'clock, there was great darkness over the whole earth. This is when Jesus descended to the lowest part, even lower than the lowest part of the earth.

The poor in spirit are not those who come to the end of themselves simply through the fatigue of being weak and sick, and *falling asleep*.

There are two 'sleeps' here. One is the sleep of *being conformed to Christ's death*.

And the other is the sleep of *being under the judgement of God*.

The poor in spirit are not those who simply come to the end of themselves, are almost expired, and cry out, 'Oh, my goodness; Lord, help me.' They are under the judgement of God.

Rather, their fatigue should cause them to *cry out for illumination and forgiveness* and to *join the offering and sufferings of Christ* where they will hear the word, behind them. Then they are able to be in the Spirit on the Lord's day, discerning His body.

Poor in spirit - walking blamelessly

What does 'poor in spirit' mean?

'Poor in spirit' describes those who are walking blamelessly before the Lord. That is, by the Spirit, they participate daily in the Lord's day.

They accept that they are *not the source* of the word and, therefore, they are not the source of God's will for their life.

They are actually *joined to Christ* where, in the fellowship of His prayer, they are being delivered from the presumption that their own will can be the will of God.

Poor in spirit - a blessing received

The next point that I want to make about being poor in spirit, which we sometimes forget, is that being poor in spirit is a *blessing*.

This means that it is a virtue of Christ, or an excellency, or a possession, a quality of Christ's life, that belongs to the poor in spirit.

They have *received* it.

It is not the case that we become poor in spirit every time that life gets difficult. Rather, we are poor in spirit *because Christ lives in us*. It is a quality, or an excellency, or a virtue, of Christ.

It is a blessing. It *belongs* to you.

It is not the corollary of ineptness where, by that means, we walk in our own way, and eventually become poor in spirit. That never happens.

Rather, when we fall asleep spiritually, something else grows up. It is called 'a root of bitterness'. That is not being poor in spirit.

Poor in spirit – walking in the light of the world

A person who is poor in spirit *walks in the light* of the word, as they hear it behind them and they turn to it.

In that *fellowship* to see the Voice, they say, 'How shall I know I will inherit today, as I'm walking, today, daily in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings?'

Poor in spirit – the expression of faith by grace

It is *the expression of faith*.

Poor in spirit is the articulation of faith that comes by hearing that word. It is an expression of faith that grants an introduction into the grace in which we stand.

Paul, in this regard, said, 'Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord that it be taken away from me, but the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you for my strength is made perfect in your weakness".'

That is *the grace in which we stand*, as those who are poor in spirit.

It is the grace in which we stand, as citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem. How do we know that? Jesus said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' It is the most basic

characteristic of someone who has a heavenly body that is growing more glorious through their participation in the fellowship of Christ's finished work.

Poor in spirit – receiving illumination in the word

John fell asleep, or was 'dead', at the feet of Jesus, and the Son of Man laid his hand on him. This is the hand that held the seven stars, which are the *aggelos* presbyteries of the seven lampstand churches.

I find it amazing that the answer for John – the one who received this revelation – was to receive the word of the *aggelos*.

Poor in spirit – receiving faith

Through the ministry of the right hand, Christ said to John, 'Do not be afraid, I am your faith. I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives and was dead and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Hades and of Death.'

Not only did John receive illumination, but also he received *faith*. When Jesus said, 'I am the First and the Last, the Author and Finisher of your faith', John *received faith* for his unique participation in the fellowship of Christ's offering and sufferings.

What was that to do? It was to write what you've *seen*, to write what *is*, and to write what is *to come*.

John's experience is the same for every presbyter and, indeed, for every believer who remains committed to walking in the steps of the faith of Abraham. These steps are our daily fellowship in the offering and sufferings of Christ.

We learnt last week that, through Christ's offering, all the days were written for us, when as yet there were none of them.

The point is that every presbyter is to be engaged in this process, as every believer is. There is no distinction here. The expression is unique according to our name and to the works that have been prepared for us.

As we turn in repentance each day, we are obtaining the blessing that belongs to the poor in spirit. That is, we are children of Abraham, and citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We are able to walk in the illumination that Christ is granting to us through the ministry of His word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.