

# The Home of True Life

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, welcome everyone. It's good to see you here today at our lunchtime service. Nice to be back with you. We have so many budding preachers now, I don't get much of a look in. So it's a while since I've been here on Wednesday, but it's good to be here. And you'll see from the sheets here that we're going to have a little series asking this question, what is the church? Very important question indeed. And we're going to seek our answers in Peter's first letter. So if you'd like to turn with me, we'll read from 1 Peter chapter 1. You'll find it on page 1014, 1014.

And we'll read from verse 21, where Peter says that God raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory so that your faith and hope are in God. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God. For all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you. So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good. As you come to him, a living stone, rejected by men, but in the sight of God, chosen and precious, you yourselves, like living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture, behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone, chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

So the honor is for you who believe. But for those who do not believe, the stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone and a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. They stumble because they disobey the word as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Keep the Bibles open and let's just pray together as we come to God's word. Heavenly Father, we come in the midst of this day, in the midst of a busy week, with so many thoughts and cares and concerns occupying our minds. We pray,

[ 3 : 1 9 ] Lord, that for these few moments now you would clear our minds of all of these things. Grant us, we pray, a peace of mind, a clarity of thought, and an open ear that we might hear the word that you have for us and that we might respond with the obedience of faith as you command us to do.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, what is the church? It's a very important question, but of course it's one that many people today are very confused about because, well, when many people think about the church, they think of all kinds of things that are not what the Bible is speaking about, but it speaks about the church.

Very often people are thinking, aren't they, about historic buildings. I wonder if you heard the obituaries this last week for the actor Donald Sinden. Remember, he had such a marvelous gravelly voice, didn't he? And as I was reading one of the obituaries, I discovered, I was very surprised, that apparently not only was he an actor, but he was, quote, an expert in ecclesiology, things to do with the church. Well, I was very intrigued by that, so I looked it up online, and I discovered what, in fact, that meant. What it meant was Donald Sinden was a lover of church architecture, and he even wrote a book called *The English Country Church*. Well, he may have had a great knowledge of architecture of buildings, but unless he understood what writers like the Apostle Peter here are teaching us about the real church, then he is not an expert in ecclesiology, I'm afraid, nor, for that matter, necessarily is anybody who can tell you all about institutions and traditions and ecclesiastical order and matters of clergy and matters of church government and all these other sort of tedious things that people seem to like to talk about, but which the Bible never seems to talk about. Neither is somebody like that an expert in matters about the church.

No doubt all these things do have a place, but the truth is, thankfully, that the New Testament is largely uninterested in these things. The New Testament's focus is far more fundamental.

What the New Testament is interested in when it teaches about the church and what the Apostle Peter focuses on in this letter in front of us is something that is living, something that is everlasting.

[ 5 : 54 ] He's talking about the household of God himself, which is the place of true life, the place of true love, the place of true worship, the place of true witness.

Now, Peter has no interest whatsoever, I'm glad to say, in institutions or structures or denominations or any of these things. And the only building that he is interested in is the one he talks about in chapter 2 verse 5. Do you see? A spiritual house made up of living stones and built by God into a people of living worship and witness. That's what Peter's interested in. And that is what he is talking about and tells us is the authentic church of Jesus Christ. He's talking about the universal church, the fellowship of all of Christ's people worldwide and on earth and in heaven.

The church that finds true expression in any place and indeed in every place where there is a gathering, a congregation, a gathering together of a believing community of real people who are living under the lordship of Jesus Christ, who are living under the control and the authority of the one who is himself the chief cornerstone. So let me ask the question, what is the church and where will we find the church? Unless we find these things that Peter marks out as the essential marks of a church, then it doesn't matter of which. If we have structure and order and government and buildings and anything else we might have, it will never be the authentic church of Jesus Christ in the biblical sense of that word.

So that means you can have, of course, a very historic institution, ever so classical buildings, all sorts of paraphernalia, but unless you have what Peter is talking about here, that will never, ever be a real Christian church. Without the people of Christ and without the gospel of Christ, it can only be an empty shell. It can only be an architectural monument. And sadly, of course, our land today is littered with just such architectural monuments, but they are not churches.

But by contrast, wherever you have a gathering of believers in the name of Christ committed to him and therefore equally committed to one another in love and in obedience, there is the church of Jesus Christ. And there you will find the spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ dwelling in the midst.

[ 8 : 39 ] So we're going to spend the next few Wednesdays making sure that we're clear about what the authentic church really looks like and really is, according to Peter's description here in the passage we read.

And he gives us in this passage four pictures, I think, of the church as the home of true life, as the family of true love, as the temple of true worship, and as the people of true witness.

And today, we want to look at verses 22 to 25 of chapter 1, where the picture is on this church as the home of true life. Now, in the first part of chapter 1, Peter is focusing on the believer's true hope. Look at chapter 1, verse 3. We're born again, he says, into a living hope through Jesus' resurrection from the dead. That is, into life everlasting. And our hope and our life is the salvation, which verse 5 says, is going to be revealed to us, do you see, at the last time.

That is, as verse 7 says, at the revelation of Jesus Christ, when Jesus comes again to reign. And Peter says that we are therefore to set our hope fully on that day. Do you see verse 13? That's what he says. Set your hope on the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Jesus.

So, in verse 21 there, which we read, he says, we are to set our hope on that day because our faith and our hope is in God, the God who raised Jesus from the dead and gave him glory. Because he is the one who has promised that likewise he will on that day raise us from the dead and give us the glory of everlasting life in his presence. And so, every Christian, says Peter, has been born anew into that living hope, the hope of life everlasting. That's the believer's new hope. And therefore, we share that hope, don't we, with every other believer who has that hope in Jesus Christ. We've been brought into living fellowship with God himself in that hope. And therefore, we've been brought into living fellowship with one another. That's Peter's point. There can't be authentic salvation without creating the authentic church of all of those who share that hope of glory. Now, our new and true hope has brought us into a new and true home. Therefore, we belong in the home of true and lasting life. That is the church of Jesus Christ. And that's why you'll see that from verse 13 onwards in chapter 1, there is so much family language. Did you notice that? Verse 14, we're God's children. Verse 17, we call God Father. And therefore, as we read in verse 22, we must call ourselves, each other, one another, brothers. Verse 22, with brotherly love. As you'll see, as we read on in chapter 2, he talks about babies growing up and all being built together into this glorious household. It's all household language. And the first focus, as you'll see in verses 22 to 25, is on the wonderful truth that this household. So what is then the nature of this life? And how do you become part of this home of true life that is everlasting? That's a very important question, isn't it?

[ 12 : 27 ] You might know that the apostle Paul likes to use the language of adoption. We are adopted into this family home of God. But Peter's language here, can you see, is even more graphic than that, isn't it? He says that we are born anew or we are begotten anew by God's own seed.

Chapter 1, verse 3, he says, he has caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus. Well, verse 23 here says, we have been born again, well, better, we've been begotten of imperishable seed. So Peter describes this new life as the planting of living imperishable seed. And he says that comes about through the preaching of the living, enduring word.

So let's think about each of these in turn. First, the planting of a living imperishable seed. We are born, he says, or better, we are begotten anew into this eternal life. It is like a conception and birth process. Now, John puts it rather similarly, doesn't he, in the beginning of his gospel in chapter 1. He says, we are born not by the will of the flesh, nor by the will of man, but born of God.

And that's what verse 3 of 1 Peter 1 reminds us. It's all God's doing. God fathers us. It is according to his great mercy that he has caused us to be born again into a living hope. God has fathered us with his own seed. And his seed, says Peter, is not like the seed of human life, which is perishable.

That's the sad truth, isn't it? We know anybody here who has fathered children. We know that we have passed on to them the gift of life. But we've also passed on to them, haven't we, the sentence of death. Our DNA is what codes their life and all sorts of things that will shape our children's lives, their looks, their attitudes, all kinds of things we don't even understand. It's quite frightening, really, when you think about it. But that DNA might also carry the predisposition to disease, to deformity of all kinds. And with certainty, we know that what we pass on to our children in the very seed of their life also carries the inevitability of their death. Because our seed can impart life, but only life that is perishable. But look at verse 23. God's seed is imperishable.

[ 15 : 22 ] It carries not only new life, but a wholly new kind of life. Life that is true life. Life which has been purified of everything that pertains to the perishable. And life that has been energized with that which is imperishable. And notice that Peter speaks both of a negative and a positive here.

Look at verse 22. He speaks about purifying your soul, purifying your life. That's the negative. When somebody has blood cancer, sometimes they have a bone marrow transplant, don't they? And what happens is that their marrow, the marrow that produces blood cells in their body, is purified by powerful chemotherapy. So that all the disease-producing marrow is destroyed.

And then the transfusion takes place of new life-producing marrow. And that's put back into the body to make new blood cells. Well, that's what happens, in a manner of speaking, Peter says, when God's Spirit affects change in the human heart. There's the putting away of the old through the forgiveness of our sins, through the cleansing that God affects in us, that he declares us to be right again with him. That's what the word justified means. We're declared to be right with God. But when that happens, just as the judge, when he declares the prisoner at the bar no longer to be guilty, not guilty is the verdict. The moment that verdict is made, the door of the bar is opened and the prisoner walks free out into a new life of freedom, no longer back into the cells.

And that's what it means, says Peter, to be a Christian believer. The Lord declares you to be forgiven, cleansed, purified, and he plants his new life in you, his seed, which is the source of a holy new kind of life, life which is everlasting, because his seed is imperishable.

Because the corrupted marrow, if you like, of our sin has been transplanted with a life-giving marrow of God's own Son. That's the positive.

[ 17 : 54 ] In 2 Peter, his second letter, chapter 1, verse 4, Peter says that through the wonderful promise of the gospel of Jesus, we become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. And John, in the same way, in his first letter, speaks of how the Son of God appeared to destroy the works of the devil, and he says that no one now who is born of God any longer makes a practice of sinning. Why? Because God's seed abides in him, and he has been born of God.

We belong to the home of true life, life which is imperishable, because this is an everlasting work of God's creative power that he has done in us. That's why Peter quotes here in verses 24 and 25 from the prophet Isaiah. Do you see? All flesh is like grass. Its glory is perishable. The beautiful flowers that are born from earthly seeds, well, they'll eventually fade, won't they? Isn't it depressing at this time of year when you go out in your garden and all the pots that you had planted for summer are just beginning to fade and hardly any of the flowers are left? That's the way it is with mine anyway.

My geraniums have done well this year. Have yours? I think it's all the sun. They're still there, keeping me cheery. Just about everything else is gone. Isn't it depressing? Or those lovely red roses that I bought for my wife this last week. They're all brown already.

I really haven't had my money's worth in romantic payback from those this year. Peter says, just like the flowers, we too are perishable. Frail as summer's flowers, we flourish.

Blows the wind, and it is gone. But, the hymn goes on, but while mortals rise and perish, God endures unchanging on.

[ 20 : 00 ] And so shall we, says Peter. And so must we, because we are born, we are begotten of imperishable seed, God's own seed. For the word of the Lord, he says, remains forever.

And that brings us to the second thing that we must be clear about. We come to belong, says Peter, to this home of true life, by the planting of the living, imperishable seed of God in us.

But that comes about through the preaching of the living and enduring word. Verse 23. We are born against us, Peter, through the living and enduring word of God.

You see how Peter virtually identifies the imperishable seed of God's life-giving life with the word of the Lord. That's not odd. That is quite normal for the New Testament.

Listen to James. James chapter 1. Of his own will, God brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be the firstfruits of his creatures.

[ 21 : 13 ] We are brought forth. We're begotten. We're born by the word of truth, by the living and abiding word. Now, people are sometimes confused a little bit by this language because they associate, understandably, the new birth with the Holy Spirit.

They think of John chapter 3, where Jesus speaks to Nicodemus. And he says, you must be born from above if you are to enter the kingdom. You must be born of the Spirit, he says.

In Acts chapter 2, when Peter's preaching, he says, repent and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And so we think of the new birth as being birthed by the Holy Spirit.

And, of course, it is. Because it must be the work of God's supernatural power through his Spirit to regenerate, to bring rebirth, life everlasting.

But if you read through the book of Acts, and I would encourage you to do so, you'll see that Peter equates receiving the Holy Spirit with receiving the word of God.

[ 22 : 21 ] Read the end of Acts 10 and the beginning of Acts 11 later on, and you'll see he says those two are exactly the same thing. And, of course, that is right, isn't it? Because you can't ever separate the word of God from the Spirit of God.

The word of God is the instrument by which the Spirit does his work. Ephesians 6, verse 17. Take the sword of the Spirit, says Paul, which is the word of God.

And that is exactly Peter's emphasis here, do you see? Look at verse 22. You are purified through obedience to the truth. That's God's word. Verse 23.

You are begotten, born again of God by his imperishable seed, born of the Holy Spirit of God, as John would put it. The planting of God's own life in your soul through the living and abiding word.

That's how everlasting life, that's how the imperishable life of God himself is implanted in human beings, through the living and abiding word of God, which is the sword.

[ 23 : 38 ] It's the instrument of the Holy Spirit of God in salvation. And that is how the church is born. And quite literally, what Peter is describing here is church planting. Not taking people from one building and putting them in another building and saying that's church planting, but planting new life in the hearts of dead human beings who are mortal and bringing them into their true home, which is the church of the Lord Jesus Christ, the home of life, the home where all who share that life belong.

But notice that for that to happen, for God's sovereign life-giving begetting and new birth to take place, the living and the enduring word that Peter talks about here must be both proclaimed and obeyed.

Verse 25. Do you see? This is the good news that was preached to you. It was proclaimed. But verse 22. Do you see? Your souls were purified by obedience to the truth.

It is only when the living and abiding word of the true gospel is proclaimed and received with obedience that that new and abiding life is begotten and born.

So when there is proclamation of the living word of the gospel, the true biblical apostolic gospel that Peter is preaching about here, not anything else, without that there can be no seed of life implanted, because that's how it is planted.

[ 25 : 18 ] There can be no begetting of everlasting life in human hearts. There can be no planting or nurturing of the church, which is the home of that life.

It's very, very simple. You can pretend that you're planting or that you're preserving a church. You can have a building. You can have a structure. You can have an organization. You can even have people.

You can have anything you like. But if there is no gospel, there is no planting of life, and there is no planting or nurturing of church. So it's worth asking, isn't it, the question, is what I call my church really a church at all?

Is there that life of the Spirit of God? Is there that proclamation of the word of God, producing that life of the Spirit of God, which builds the church? But even if you have an orthodox gospel, even if that word is heard, but it's not obeyed, if there's just lip service to that living and abiding word, if you're a hearer and not a doer, as James says, then you only deceive yourself.

No, says James, you must receive with meekness the implanted word that is able to save your souls. James 1 verse 21. Just the same as what Peter's saying here.

[ 26 : 40 ] Because that and that alone is how you become part of God's church, the home of true and everlasting life. He plants his imperishable seed in you to beget you as a child of his own.

You can't beget yourself. That's quite impossible. None of you birthed yourself. It's the Spirit of God who brings new birth, to whom he will. But you must obey the truth, says Peter.

Unless there is surrender to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, there is no purifying of your soul. There is no forgiveness. And therefore there can be no imperishable life.

So I hope you know that you belong in the church of Jesus Christ, that you belong to this home of true life. But if not, well, you know what to do.

Obey the truth of the gospel. And you know how to bring others, don't you, into this home of everlasting life. God plants his imperishable seed of life as we proclaim his living and abiding word of life.

[ 27 : 54 ] Well, let's pray together. Heavenly Father, help us, we pray, to cherish your life and so to cherish and obey your word.

Grant us, we pray, a place in your home of everlasting life for the glory of Jesus our Savior. Amen. Amen. Amen.