

1. A Living Hope

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- [0 : 0 0] Now let's pray together. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.
- Father, we live in an uncertain and difficult world. We live in a world where we never know whether our plans will succeed. We never know whether what we have intended will actually happen.
- We live in a world of vulnerability. We live in a world where we do not know what lies around the corner. And we realize that what is true of our individual lives is also true of our world.
- We live in times of great international crisis. There are many, many places in the world, sometimes on the screens often forgotten, where there is violence, where there is famine, where there is unjust and oppressive and harsh rule.
- There are places where people do not have the freedoms we enjoy and places where it is difficult in any sense of the word to live a full and meaningful life.
- [1 : 2 0] On the national level, we recognize we live in difficult times, economically difficult times, times when people are worried, times when people are perplexed.
- Above everything else, our lives are shadowed by death, that grim ogre, that grim spectre that never can be quite banished from our thinking.
- In these circumstances, we do indeed need a living hope. A living hope that is not simply whistling in the dark. A living hope that is not simply things will turn out all right.
- But a true and living hope that comes from the gospel. We thank you for these words that the Apostle Peter wrote centuries ago to people long gone and to people whom we never knew.
- And yet, the living words that come to us now come to us addressing our problems as they address their problems. Come to us addressing our situations as they address their situations.
- [2 : 2 7] Above all, coming to us as the living word of God, pointing us away from the frailties and vulnerabilities, calling us to come to him, the Lord Jesus Christ, one who has conquered death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.
- So as we pause for these few moments in the middle of our busy and often perplexing days, we ask indeed that you will speak to us. that these words will indeed be words of life to us.
- Words which will bring Christ to us. And words which will bring us to him. And we ask that in his name. Amen. Now, if you turn, please, to page 1014.
- Yes, 1014 in the Bibles. And we'll read our first passage from 1 Peter, which is verses 1 to 12. 1 Peter 1, verses 1 to 12.

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, according to the foreknowledge of God the Father in the sanctification of the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.

[4 : 02] May grace and peace be multiplied to you. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him, and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves, but you, in the things that have now been announced to you, through those who preach the good news to you, by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.

[5 : 53] Amen. That is the word of God. And may he bless it to our hearts and to our minds. You know, there's an awful lot of junk mail around these days and junk emails.

I'm forever getting offers of hotel rooms at half the price and cruises, all sorts of wonderful things, until you read the small print.

Then you usually discover the hotel room is at the very back of the hotel, a small noisy room next to the kitchen. You discover that the cruises and other things are not at times you can go.

In other words, you have to read the small print. Now, the Bible has no small print. The Bible is totally realistic.

The Bible never pretends the gospel, the Christian life is easy. The small print is all here in the big print. Come to him, which I've called this series.

[7 : 01] Now, sometimes, especially if you're young and have just come to the Lord, you feel everything is easy. And sometimes the Lord is very gracious to us, certain times in our Christian life, and we are shielded from pressures.

But then that time passes. And we swing from saying the Christian life is easy to saying it's impossible. Now, of course, neither is true.

The point is the Christian life is tough. It is difficult. It's marked by trials. It's marked by, as Peter says here, by various trials.

It's tested by fire. And it is the gospel of coming to one who suffered before entering his glory. The last in the series, we'll be looking at how our discipleship also follows the way of the cross.

Yet it's a sparkling letter. It's a bracing letter. It's like walking along the shore on a clear day, hearing, smelling the sea airs and listening to the cry of the gulls.

[8 : 06] This book has a smell about it. It's the smell of resurrection, of living hope. And yet, underneath the bright surface, there are trials.

Underneath it is the tread of the jackboot and the slam of the prison door. How do we keep going? That's what Peter is concerned. As he writes to these Christians, probably towards the end of his life, as he writes from Rome, he calls it here Babylon, the city of the world.

In the end of the letter, chapter 5, verse 13, she who is at Babylon, Babylon, almost certainly the city of Rome, representing the anti-God spirit of the time, and she, not an individual, but the church.

And the first thing he says is, we have a living hope. Now, just three quick questions about that. First of all, where does the hope come from? That's really verses 2 to 5.

This is not whistling in the dark. This is not saying everything's going to be just fine. This is a hope that is solidly built on two great realities.

[9 : 14] And the first reality is who God is. This is a great hymn of praise here. Peter is writing a letter, but he's writing it in the atmosphere of worship and of praise.

The foreknowledge of God. God the Trinity who have brought about our salvation. According to our knowledge of God the Father. Verse 2, who chose us before he made the worlds.

We matter to him. That's why in chapter 4 he's going to say casting all your anxieties on him because he cares for you.

Chose us before the foundation of the world. Sanctification, the holy life, which will be our subject next week, which is the life of the Spirit in us. Not our good works, but the life of the Spirit in us.

And for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling by his blood. We are saved by the blood of Jesus. So it's a true hope, it's a living hope, because it comes from the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[10 : 21] And this is why he bursts out into response in verse 3, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to his great mercy. And notice that phrase, the Lord Jesus Christ, is really a brief summary of the whole story.

Christ, the promised Messiah, the one whom the Old Testament prophet pointed to. Jesus, the one who came as a human being into the world, and the Lord to whom the future belongs.

There's a living hope because of who God is, and it's a living hope because of the second great reality, the resurrection, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead began an irresistible movement to the new creation. It's not just we have the history of the world and then resurrection is tagged on at the end.

It means that because of the resurrection of Christ, nothing can prevent the coming of the kingdom. the great fact of the resurrection. Some people like the old gospel hymn, You ask me how I know he lives.

[11 : 30] He lives within my heart. That's not good enough. I don't want him just to live in my heart. I want to know when my heart is grieving, when my heart is dead.

I want to know that he lives and reigns in heaven and earth. I don't want a gospel, a living hope that depends on how I feel about it and on my circumstances.

But because he is risen, there is an inheritance, a down payment, which cannot be touched in any way. This bank is not going to go to the wall.

This business is not going to collapse in a world of economic uncertainty. That's a great reassurance. there will be trials, Peter says.

But notice verse 5, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. That's important. We are guarded in the present for a salvation that will be revealed in the future.

- [12 : 37] There are many, many times in the present when that future doesn't seem very likely. There are many, many times when that grows dim. but because God has guaranteed it, we will be secure from judgment on the last day.

That's the first thing. The hope depends on the great realities of who God is and of the resurrection. The second question I want to ask is how is this hope experienced in verses 6 to 9?

There is a paradox in verse 6. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials.

Now, Peter is not saying you are rejoicing at these trials. That's not what Christianity is about. That's masochism. That's not Christianity. Of course, we are not rejoicing at persecution.

Of course, they're not rejoicing at bereavement. Of course, they're not rejoicing at illness. Of course, they're not rejoicing at bankruptcy and unemployment and all these things.

- [13 : 48] The point that Peter is making is these trials are brief, but the coming of the kingdom is eternal. They are going to happen. And he does say two things about these trials, about how the hope is experienced.

He says these trials are not to destroy, but to refine. in other words, not to destroy us, but to make us into the kind of people God wants us to be.

Verse Psalm 7, the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Because these trials teach us our vulnerability, first of all. they teach us not to rely on ourselves. These trials are part of the advantage.

Now, they're not a sign of God's displeasure. If as a Christian you are suffering trials, that is a way of showing that your faith is genuine.

- [15 : 00] You see, if we're suffering trials, that shows we're part of the family, doesn't it? If God's family are told that in this world you will suffer tribulation, which is what the Lord Jesus Christ said, then the trials are to be rejoiced in, not in and of themselves, but because they show we are actually members of the family, genuine members of the family.

So, the trials are not to destroy, they are to refine. And the second thing is these trials lead us to knowing Christ himself. Verse 8, though you have not seen him, you love him.

Now, remember, by this time, the time that Peter is writing this, probably in the early 60s of the first century, many of the people who had known Christ had now gone, they had passed away.

And except the few who knew him in his earthly life, very few people had seen Jesus. Now, it's important we don't misunderstand this verse.

This verse does not say, though you have not seen him, you ought to love him. You do not now see him, you'd better believe in him, and you'd better start rejoicing.

- [16 : 19] That's not what it says. Because this verse is not talking about hyped up emotion. It's not saying you will always feel like this. This is talking about the work of the spirit in our hearts.

The beginning of the salvation that's going to be revealed in the last day. Anticipating it. Just as when you're looking forward to a holiday, as it draws near, you enjoy it in anticipation.

That's what's being talked about here. And you'll notice love and believe are parallel to each other. Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him, you believe in him.

In other words, this is something that involves the mind as well as the heart. We believe in him, we love him, and that leads to rejoicing. Now rejoicing is not happy-clappy.

It's not a kind of silly, volatile emotion. It's rejoicing because of the solid realities which we have, which appeal not just to our hearts, but to our minds.

[17 : 28] Inexpressible and filled with glory. Glory, of course, one of those words we bandy about in church and never really think about what it means. Now the glory of God in scripture has two meanings.

First of all, it means the utter solid reality of God. God is utterly real, more real than anything else. And secondly, it means the blinding light that shows that reality.

reality. When we see the glory of God, we see other things in perspective. Now C.S. Lewis says, I know that the sun has risen, not because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.

That's what the glory of God is. Peter is saying, once you grasp the glory of God, then you can put the trials and everything else in perspective. So then, hope is given to us from the Godhead guaranteed by the resurrection.

It's experienced as we look at trials from the perspective of the glory of God. And the third question, briefly, the last two verses, verses 10 to 12, how is this hope sustained?

[18 : 40] There are two ways in which this living hope is going to be sustained. And firstly, in verses 10, in fact, throughout the whole little section, is the word of God.

As we read the scriptures, as we allow them to shape our thinking, remember here, this is the Old Testament scriptures, the prophets, which is often a shorthand for the whole of the Old Testament, prophesied about the grace that was to be yours.

Now you see what's being said, something very important is being said here, prophecy about the grace that was to be yours. And then verse 12, it was revealed to them, they were serving not themselves, but you.

That doesn't mean the Old Testament was written directly to us. It certainly doesn't mean the Old Testament was written about us. What it does mean is that when the prophets spoke, they were speaking, not just to the people of their time, but to everybody who would believe.

The Old Testament is not just for God's people in Old Testament times, it's for God's people now because, in verse 11, indicating the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.

[20 : 06] What's the Old Testament about? It's about the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories. If I had two hours, I would go into that in detail.

I've only got five minutes, so you have to take my word for that. And the Old Testament prophets, we are told, searched and inquired.

This word searched is a word used for police inquiry, a thorough detailed examination. When Isaiah wrote the great 53rd chapter of the suffering servant, he pondered deeply and over many years probably, who exactly this was.

He saw in the distance. And then the word inquired, suggesting ransacked. If you lose your key, you ransack the place upside down until you find it.

And here is the key to the scripture, the sufferings of Christ and the glory which was to follow, which is Peter's great subject.

[21 : 13] It's interesting, when Peter is talking about the sufferings of Christ, he draws very heavily from Isaiah 53, illustrating his own point, that this is where you learn about it.

So we have the word of God, the living word of God, not an old book written long ago, but a book with the living word of the living God, talking about this living hope.

But also, what's the secondary of the spirit of Christ, and then verse 12, the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. The good news, which has been announced to you through those who preach the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

As we read scripture, and as we open our hearts and minds to what it's saying, the Holy Spirit himself teaches us and leads us to Christ.

things into which angels long to look, even God's angels, cannot understand this fully, because we have the scriptures, not a dead book, but the living word of the living God, which comes to us through those who preach the good news.

[22 : 27] And that's my final point, those who preach the good news. The Bible, when it is preached in the power of the Spirit, always leads people to Christ.

Come to him. It doesn't lead us, it doesn't lead us into ancient history, it doesn't lead us into ancient custom and ancient languages, although you need to study these things to make sure you're understanding the words and the background, but it leads us to Christ.

The living hope, spoken of right from the beginning of scripture, the living hope, which one day will culminate in the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

So Peter is saying to the elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Bithynia, he's saying to those of us here in Glasgow, in the 21st century, come to him, because in him is a living hope, and in that living hope, we can live in this world, we can die, and we can look forward to the glory be revealed in the last day.

Let's pray. God, our Father, how we praise you for the gospel. The gospel, it is the power of God to salvation, the gospel that focuses and concentrates on the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 56] Help us to believe it in our own lives, help us to share it with others, and help us indeed to love, to believe, and to rejoice. We ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen.