

Exile, Faith, Hope, Love, and Joy

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 October 2021

Preacher: Bishop Steve Breedlove

[0 : 00] Please pray with me.

Lord, as you have just instructed us, it is our desire and our heart and our passion at this moment to abide fully in you. Lord, to receive the life that you give us and to receive the very presence of the Holy Spirit among us, that the words that I speak may be words from you, not words of men, and that what is heard may be received as your word to us personally.

Thank you. Thank you that you're here. And it's in the great name of Jesus Christ that we pray. Amen. Please be seated. If you have a Bible, turn to 1 Peter chapter 1.

If not, please feel free to find it on your phone as long as you have silenced that little demon. I want to speak directly to those who are being confirmed and received, but what I say especially to them, I say to all of us because I want to bring you a word of encouragement from this letter.

I have returned to 1 Peter again and again over the course of 40 years of ministry to teach and strengthen the followers of Jesus Christ for a journey of faith in a very challenging and resistant world.

[1 : 31] And that's really the tone of this letter. Peter's original purpose holds just as much today as when it was originally written. And that is to enable us to walk steadily with confidence and clarity and purpose and hope in spite of resistance and suffering.

To live in the light of the glory of where we're headed and to allow the glory of heaven to bleed back into our present day.

So that where we are headed actually infuses where we are now. I'd love to be able to be with you for five, six, seven weeks and walk through the whole letter.

I can only give you an appetizer, simple framework. You might even want to jot down the notes. Actually, if you use five words, if you jot down five words, you can have the whole outline. Okay? And they'll come clear as I speak and then I'll remind you at the end. My method is simple. This is originally a direct letter to a group of followers and I want to read it to you in a very personal manner directly to you.

[2 : 37] These are God's living authoritative words. And I want to, again, as we jump in, I want you to note that what Peter writes are declarations of reality.

It's an important statement. They're declarations of reality. They're not sort of if possibly statements. They're kind of like if you think about this or if you feel this.

This is a very declarative passage written to you as a follower of Jesus Christ. Verse 1. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who are elect exiles of the dispersion.

Exiles. Strangers. Peculiar people. Never meant to be fully at home in this world. We possess an identity and a citizenship and an allegiance that sets us apart and can and does create stress at times because we are inevitably living against the grain of the world.

And that's not surprising. Don't be surprised by that. The nature of the exilic life is not because we're being punished. But it's because the Father has caused us to be different people.

[3 : 48] We have been given a new identity. And that's noted for us as a declaration of reality in verse 3. 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. So, if you call yourself a Christian, if you've come to believe that Jesus is Lord, if you've entrusted him as your Savior, you've experienced a new birth, right?

Births happen to be fairly definitive markers, okay? Either you have been born or you haven't. How many of you have been born? Some of you haven't, apparently.

How many of you have been born? Come on. How do you know? Do you know? Are you sure? Now, I'm going to ask another question, which apparently is also going to cover a lot of you based on the number of children that came out of here.

How many of you have given birth? How do you know? Are you sure? Births are clear markers, are they not?

[4 : 59] And Peter says to the followers of Jesus, you have been born again. You have a second life, a new life, a spirit-generated life with the possibility of being filled and animated by the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is a beauty. This is a miracle that has been given to us. And Peter explains it in verses 14 through 19 that we are children of God, sharing his holiness, headed for holiness.

He has paid for us with an incalculable gift, the value of the ransom of the blood of Jesus Christ. We are valued and beloved by the Father, and we are called to live in the grain of who we are, which is holiness, that draws us, is like true north over the course of our lives, to become more and more like what we will be in eternity.

The image of being God's child runs through the letter because then, therefore, it tells us what it means to live against the grain of the world, but with the grain of who we are.

And it tells us that we are called to be a family with others, a family of love. That's what it means. We're a family of worshipers. We are to be messengers and ambassadors for Jesus Christ in the world. We are to declare the excellencies of God.

[6 : 08] It tells us that we are to live as givers of blessing to all we meet. You have been blessed and gifted, therefore, pass it on. We are to live as people of hope.

What an incredible calling and identity. People of hope. So if being in exile means living against the grain of the world, it also means living with the grain of who you really are.

And the letter explains that. I'd encourage you to read it. What's the nature of this new life? In this first paragraph, we're given three words. It's a new life of hope, a new life of faith, a new life of love.

But that begins with hope. That hope is embodied in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Not just the promise of eternal life. Let me just say that again. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the demonstration of the fact that we're not going to have this kind of ephemeral life.

But there's a new creation coming. A new heaven and a new earth. And this body, this dying thing that it is, will be raised eternal, undefiled, incorruptible, no longer subject to pain or decay.

[7 : 21] It says that right in the text. I met a woman recently. I'm going to call her Melanie. That's not really her name. And she wanted me to pray with her. And she's really recently developed a third incurable autoimmune disease.

First, she was diagnosed several years ago with rheumatoid arthritis. There was another one in between that I don't really know the name of. And then a third one that I'd never heard of called Sjogren's syndrome. Her salivary glands and tear ducts dry up.

Over time, dry mouth, difficulty swallowing, eventually inability to speak, cuts and ulcers in her mouth, constant pain. And then her eyes eventually dry up and she goes blind.

The doctors told her that the progress of her disease in three months was equivalent to the normal progress in 10 to 15 years. Her body has betrayed her.

It's attacking her. And my heart weeps for her. And it's hard to get her off my mind. And I prayed for her and asked the Lord to give me words to pray.

[8 : 24] And he gave me a visual image of Jesus in the tomb. But on the beginning of the third day, when the power of life and youthfulness and vigor overcame death, and the processes of decay and death were literally reversed.

Imagine what it was like. The decay and rotteness yielded to life just as surely as night yields to dawn, right? And I'm sure Melanie at the end of the days when the resurrection comes, she will get the new body.

But I did pray that the Lord would, by his grace, reverse this process of decay even now in this life. Healing. We are people of hope.

And I don't think we've let that change our hearts and emotions as much as it can. Hope is like the air we're meant to breathe, the light that shines around us in which we live and move.

And I would encourage you, and I could give you a list of things, because it's just a delight. Think of every discouraging thing you can think of. And find out what promises of God and what guarantees of God speak against that discouragement and offer hope.

[9 : 46] And understand and hold on to what it means to live as a life, a person who at the profoundest, who is able to face reality, but see that judgment is swallowed up by mercy.

That the sound of judgment, which must ring, is overwhelmed by an even louder peal of a bell that is just magnificent and swallows it all up, and it becomes mercy.

Second, verses 6 and 7, we are people of faith. In this, you rejoice, though, for now a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials, so the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, may be found a result in praise and honor and glory at the revelation of Jesus. We live in assurance of the hope-filled end of things. That's what Hebrews 11 says faith is. Faith is the assurance of the things we hope for. So whatever it is that you hope for, you know, in this exercise, look at your discouragement and answer the hope.

What are the promises that are given to that hope? Live as people of hope. Think about the hope. Well, faith says that you are assured that that hope is going to come true. You're convinced that even though you cannot see it, it will happen.

[11 : 03] And the reason that we can live that way is because we know that we have evidence for what we already believe, guys. We're not floating out there with no evidence. The faith that we believe in is rooted in real history and in real science.

We can hear stories of transformation and change from people who've walked before us. There's miracles and interventions that have happened to us sitting in this room. Tell those stories to one another.

Hold on to them. Cling to them. Think about the plausibility of creation, of the nature of life, the wonder of being a human being, the wonder of design and interrelationship, the echoes of beauty and love that are seen through cultures and through all of creation.

You know that there is more to life than human existence or you wouldn't be here today. You know that there's elements like justice and truth that you are fighting for in your jobs.

Those are not visible principles. They express themselves in the material world, but you know something behind it is even greater. There is love.

[12 : 07] There is goodness. We understand that there are events in history that are real, that happened. We stake our life on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's clear as a bell.

1 Corinthians 15, if Jesus hasn't been raised, we're fools. But we come here every week to enter into the present work, the continuing work of the once-for-all sacrifice.

So what happened in history has present reality. What a great story we are living in. Life has meaning and purpose. Our faith holds that.

It will be tested. My dear mother-in-law, excuse me, my dear mother-in-law, Sally's mother, Sunshine, Montgomery, Alabama, honey, life is just a veil of tears.

A veil of tears, if you didn't understand the accent, okay? Yeah, it is. Faith will be tested. But it's the muscle that we exercise.

[13 : 14] If hope is the air we breathe in and the light we walk in, faith is the muscles for doing this thing called Christian life. I'm 58 years into that journey. And I've had plenty of fears and doubts and battles and temptations and addictions and failures.

But I'm here to testify to you today that God is faithful. God carries me every day. And he won't quit. And he won't quit for you either.

Finally, this faith directs the eyes of our hearts to Jesus, whom we cannot physically see, but we love. Verse 8, Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that's inexpressible and filled with glory.

And again, Peter's making a statement of fact, not feeling. You love Jesus. Now that sounds like you might think, well, that's a big presumption.

I'm not so sure. And in fact, John 15, if you want to know what it means to love Jesus, dig into John 15. That's all over that one. Okay? But if you believe, if you're people of hope, and if you hold by faith, Peter is basically saying that is also a life of love because you're connected to Jesus and you are therefore connected to the source of eternal, infinite love.

[14 : 29] And it will fill your life with love. You are walking in love, you are living in love, and you will be given love. So you live a life of love.

Hope, faith, love. And Peter ends it by saying, guess what? You add that all up and it comes to joy. So five words, and I know I've run through that very quickly.

Five words give you the outline of this passage, but it's really the outline of the whole book. And I would encourage you to consider these five words and actually go back and look at 1 Peter in more depth in your own life.

Exiles, hope, faith, love, joy. That is what it means to follow Jesus.

Amen. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen.

[15 : 36] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Gentlemen, Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.