

We are Indestructibles

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[0 : 00] Please have your Bibles open, that will help. There are some messages that you kind of, you know you have to preach but you don't really want to.! Then there are other messages that you really get excited about and this is one of those.

So come with me to 1 Peter, chapter 1. And we're looking really at verses 23 through to chapter 2, verse 3, although we will look at verse 22 briefly as well.

So, politics is always a funny business, isn't it? But there was a while back when the Conservatives were in power when it really did get unbelievably funny.

Do you remember this? I remember this this week, the Liz Truss lettuce thing. The question was, will Liz Truss's time as Prime Minister outlast the shelf life of a lettuce?

That was what was going on. It was a meme for a while. I think it was in the Daily Mail. I'm sure none of you read the Daily Mail. It was in the Daily Mail. And, yeah, sort of funny and kind of sad at the same time, wasn't it?

[1 : 09] As it turned out, the lettuce lasted longer. And that made me think actually a bit more about shelf lives and people. Our shelf lives.

And then I thought, do you remember that at some point, and I don't really know when it happened, the supermarkets changed their policies on best before dates on fresh fruit and vegetables.

That happened, didn't it? At one point, you could buy a lettuce and it would say best before end.

And now you go to the... And they don't put it on anymore. It was kind of a reminder that those foods are going to go off at some point.

And now we don't have that. Has that helped? Do you guys all end up with fridges full of vegetables that have gone off because there's no best before date on it? Or did that happen anyway? Definitely does in our house sometimes.

I think we've kind of done that with people. Our best before end dates used to be fairly obvious, didn't they? Because we were quite close to death. Maybe not in our lifetimes, but not too long ago.

[2 : 15] But now we've done this move, I think for good reasons, with the right motives, where we've moved death out into hospitals and into care homes.

And we have far fewer reminders of our best before end dates around us. And then it comes as a big shock, you know, when we have a serious illness or a significant injury.

And it reminds us that we're perishable, that we won't be here forever. Of course, there are some people who live with that feeling all the time because they're unwell. That feeling of being perishable.

Have you ever had that experience where you've gone to a passport office or some sort of, you know, official government thing and you need something from them? And you need to speak to them.

And they give you a numbered ticket, a bit like the one up there. And they tell you to sit down and wait. That happened to me in Clark's a little while ago when I was buying shoes for the kids.

[3 : 16] Clark's in some ways is still in the 90s, aren't they? Who operates a numbered ticket service? Anyway, you get one and you're told to sit down and wait. So, just if you remember, if you have any sort of memory of that, or maybe it's an online queuing system now.

You know, you want to book tickets for your favourite concert and you get told you are number 843 in the queue and you watch it tick. When you get that number, do you get a sudden sense of joy when that happens?

Is that kind of a lovely feeling of being seen and valued when you're awarded that number? You don't know how long the wait's going to be. It seems to last forever. And then you finally get to the front of the queue and they, you know, either your number is up or they call your number, never

your name.

And then you go through the process and you end up feeling like that number on the piece of paper, don't you? Just a number. Your time will come, your time will go. As far as the people on the other side are concerned, not always.

They have a good heart sometimes and they try and make it a pleasant experience. But, you know, you're just kind of a moment in their day. And we feel disposable. And, you know, when Jesus calls us, if we put him first, then suddenly there's a whole load of folks that we used to think of as my people who maybe suddenly think, well, you've gone a bit weird.

[4 : 40] And you might just get that vibe off them. Or they might actually withdraw a bit. Not completely, but a bit. Or they may go the whole way and just say, yeah, just not really interested in talking to you anymore.

And then we feel disposable again, don't we? And it's worse when you look around and you think the war's going on in this world. And the casualties are just numbers. Perishable, disposable.

And Peter in his letter is trying to get us to open our eyes to the fact that we are not permanent residents here anymore. And we feel that, don't we?

But in our passage today, he says, God's word changes you. It changes that. It changes you from being disposable into being imperishable.

It changes you from being just a number to being indestructible. You are, if you're a fan of maths, here's the formula.

[5 : 49] Here's the message for today. The new life that is inside you, Christian, will never die. It will never die. God's living word guarantees it and grows it.

Let's think about that first idea. The living word brings us life. Looking at verse 23. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God.

If you're a bit of a language geek like me, then you'll know that the Greek word used for seed here is spora. Can you guess which English word we get from that? Spore. That's right.

Yeah, we get the word spore from it. So, can we talk about mushrooms for a minute? Is that okay? Some of you are groaning. There's absolutely loads this year. Have you noticed that? They're all over the place.

And you dig them out of the garden and you think they're gone and they keep coming back. Exactly the same spot as they did last year. You can't kill them, can you? In fact, they're almost indestructible.

[6 : 56] Now, I did some research into mushrooms this week. Yep, that's what you pay me for. Research into mushrooms. And they can survive desiccation. Drying it.

Intoxication. If you submerge them in alcohol. They can survive exposure to acid. Disinfectants. Weed killer. Freezing. They've even been known to survive in outer space.

For several months at a time. And then there are bacterial endospores that are even tougher. Shall I tell you about those? No, I'm not going to tell you. Don't worry. The point is this.

When we read the words, imperishable seed, that is what we should be thinking of, folks. From the imperishable spore of God's word, we have been reborn.

That is the life inside you created by God's word. And do you know what? We know, actually, if we think about it, that God's word creates life.

[7 : 57] Because it's been doing that since Genesis. What's the story of Genesis? God spoke. And it happened. God speaks. There is life. There's no delay.

There's no doubt. There's no difficulty in Genesis. He just says the word. And life is created. That's what's happened in your heart if you're a Christian. Isn't that amazing?

Verse 23. For you have been born again. Not of perishable seed, but of imperishable. Through the living and enduring word of God. Let's not skip over this.

Peter doesn't, does he? He's talking to Christians. They know they've been reborn. And he says, for you have been reborn. He mentions it again deliberately. Christians have been born.

So we need to do that, right? Christians have been born again. We have been born again. Once we were spiritually dead. Then we were alive.

[8 : 58] You were lying on your deathbed, spiritually speaking. And Jesus called you. And you got up. And by his power, you walked to him. He calls you to repentance and to faith in him.

And by his death, he provides a way. And he provides by his spirit the power for you to answer him. We get to start over. There is a second chance.

You are not what you were. Praise God for that. And that new life inside us will never die. Because what does Hebrews say?

It is based on the power of an indestructible life. Jesus' life. Communicated to us through his word. So, next time you see mushrooms. You'll see a lot of them this time of year. Think to yourself. Imperishable seed. That is what is inside me.

[9 : 59] The living word brings us life. And Peter says, verse 25. And this is the word that was preached to you.

That's the good news. Don't forget it. Says Peter. That's why we love sharing God's word with each other here at Bethel. Don't we? Because new life comes when it is preached and when it is shared. That is what happens. Not when we have the slickest music. Not when we have the best food. Not when we have the most affirming community. Not when we have the trendiest leadership. Don't laugh. I said don't laugh. It happens when any of us opens the word with anyone else and we share it.

Life is created. The living word brings us life. Secondly, the lasting word guarantees that we will last.

[11 : 00] Read with me. Verse 23. For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and enduring word of God.

For all people are like grass. And all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall. But the word of the Lord endures forever.

You know what mushrooms thrive on, don't you? Yeah, I'm still on mushrooms. Mushrooms thrive on dead matter. That's where they tend to grow.

We know ourselves to be perishable on some level, don't we? Even if we're not that close with death. Take a minute and think about it. Yeah, I am. That's me.

Perishable. So we can say, yes, all people are like grass and like the flowers of the field. It withers. They will fall. Yes.

[11 : 57] It's true, isn't it? But the imperishable seed of God's living word grows in exactly that kind of matter. It grows in us, perishable as we are.

And in these verses, Peter contrasts that with the other things that we can mistakenly believe are life-giving. People, the world, their glories.

Now, that grass and flowers image is particularly powerful. It's from Isaiah, as we're quoting from. That's really powerful if you're in a society that lives quite close to the land and you see that kind of grass growing, crops growing, dying on a regular basis.

I think fireworks is maybe a helpful analogy for us. People and our glories are like fireworks. Beautiful, yes, but fleeting.

Our human ideas, our words, our lives, they burn brightly, don't they? Especially against the backdrop, which is not very light itself. And then they're gone. Bonfire night is great.

[13 : 13] But you don't build your life on it, do you? That's what Peter's saying here, really. But the word of the Lord endures forever.

It is not like those other things. It lasts. And because it lasts, we will last. God uses the word to create life in us and also to sustain life in us.

In other words, the life that we have is like the word that produced it. The life that we have is like the word that produced it. It will endure forever.

Why? It doesn't depend on our effort. It doesn't depend on our effectiveness. It depends on the durability of what God says, which in turn depends on God's own infinite power.

So that's how we know that we will always live. If they made a superhero movie about Christians, what would it be called? The Indestructibles.

[14 : 27] That's what it would be called. Because that's what this amounts to. We are indestructible, even though we feel perishable. Why? Because the word that created life in us is indestructible.

Why? Because the God who spoke it is indestructible. And part of the good news is that anyone who will receive that word can become an indestructible to you.

So here then, for your encouragement, is a list of things that don't apply to you if you are trusting in the Lord Jesus. Nothing lasts forever.

Yes, it does. You and your love, the Lord's love for you, will last forever. You can't take it with you. It's not true for Christians. Your memories, yourself, your personality, your love, the Lord's love for you, you take with you.

A life tragically cut short. It may be true humanly speaking, but for the Christian, it does not apply. Because our lives do not end here. What a wasted life.

[15:43] You look back and you think, all those things I did, all that time I spent doing that. What? No. Does not apply, Christian. All of those things will be redeemed in the context of eternity.

Never lived up to their potential. All those things I could have been done, I never got them. You are imperishable. It does not apply. You might know, stoicism is out there making big inroads again, especially among young men.

That's all about rationalizing the things that we experience in order to graciously endure in life.

That's really what stoicism is on about. Strength in the face of adversity.

But it just doesn't offer anything in comparison to this, does it? If you're talking about enduring, about lasting, then this is it.

There's nothing imperishable about processing things that happen in life and not getting too upset about them and then dying. Not when you could be an indestructible.

[16:53] What do we need to do? We need to stay in the word, don't we? That's what Peter wants us to do. Stay in the word, to keep going. Lean into the fact that God's indestructible word will sustain us forever.

And in that, we can learn, we can learn from others, can't we? We can learn from somebody who comes from a nation that we would perhaps currently consider an enemy. The man on the right there as you're looking at it is Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

He was a writer. He was imprisoned in the Soviet gulags. Bible's forbidden in the Soviet Union. No Bible. Where was the living word? He memorised it.

And he said, that was the thing that kept him going, that sustained him through all of those years in prison. If you look around our church, we're mostly white.

Because we live in the modern West, we're mostly well-educated as well. But in this matter of leaning into God's sustaining word, we can learn from a black slave woman who never had an opportunity to be educated.

[18:09] It's Harriet Tubman. She was an abolitionist. She ran the Underground Railroad with some help. She couldn't read. Where's the living word in her life?

She memorised it. And she depended entirely on that memorised scripture to sustain her in that dangerous and difficult work, in a dangerous and difficult life.

Do you know what that means? It means the word of God can sustain you even if you can't read, even if you have no Bible. And in fact, that's the experience of Christians in all kinds of places today.

China, Muslim countries. And boy, do they treasure God's word. They soak in it when they have it. That's what we want to be like, isn't it? The new life inside us will never die because God's lasting word guarantees it. But that imperishable seed when it goes inside us is supposed to produce a flower too.

[19:17] So let's then turn to our third point and let's look at verse 22 quickly. Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply from the heart.

One of the commentators really helpfully summarizes this. He says, the message of his love kindles ours because it first creates life in it then sustains life in us and then it grows love in us as we taste God's word.

So then it makes sense, doesn't it, if that is us with the imperishable seed that will sustain us forever, growing us in love, it makes sense then that we would want to get rid of things that aren't consistent with that life and that love.

And that is what Peter says next. Chapter 2, verse 1. Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and slander of every kind.

Those things aren't consistent. they don't belong in a life of deep love. And when you do those kinds of things, what are we doing when we fall into those traps?

[20:39] What we're doing is we're reaching for a security, maybe a sense of being better, a sense of greatness that everybody in this world is scrabbling around for. That's what we're doing when we

do these things that Peter is telling us to get rid of.

But we already have that. That's what Peter's just told us, isn't it? We have the imperishable seed. We don't get our security from feeling better than other people and making sure that everybody knows our truth.

We have the imperishable seed. It's not just out there on X or on the playground, actually. It's here when we say things like, well, their kids always get more leeway at church than mine.

Or when we say things like, well, you can't really expect any different from her. We need to get rid of such things. Literally, the Greek means put them away, which means we have to do something. We have to go beyond coming to church on a Sunday, listening to somebody explain the Bible, and nodding our heads. because Peter says we are to grow up in our salvation.

[21 : 58] Chapter 2, verse 2. Like newborn babies crave spiritual milk so that by it you may grow up in your salvation. That's why we have to put those things away.

And in fact, that's the pattern in almost all of the Bible, isn't it? It's something true followed by something to do. And that's why sermons that give us no clear idea of what we're supposed to do and some idea of how to do it are unfinished sermons.

And we have to balance that with what Rich was saying last week. That it flows out of who we are in Jesus. And that's absolutely Peter's thing, isn't it? You are the imperishable seed.

Now live like you are that. That's what he's saying. The only way we produce fruit is because we are rooted in Jesus. And so Peter says get rid of those things because they are not consistent with the message of Christ's deep love for you.

The word that he has planted in your heart. And the way to do that, verse 2, crave pure spiritual milk. Develop a craving for God's word.

[23 : 10] The same word that brought you life that sustains you now. flood that space that is currently filled with that lack of security and that desire to seem better in the eyes of other people.

Get your truth out there. Flood that space instead with the pure milk of God's word because that is the charging station for our spiritual batteries. And notice we need it pure.

Neat. not diluted by the latest trendy self-help stuff. Not with the difficult bits sieved out. Not distilled down for the ingredient that tastes best to us today.

Pure. All of it. Even if it doesn't directly speak of Jesus' birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension. All of it. Find ways to replace those things from verse 1 with God's thoughts.

Internalize God's word like Solzhenitsyn and Tubman so that it can come out of you. Literally eat it so that it can grow in you. Right? I don't mean literally eat paper.

[24 : 28] You know what I mean. Do it regularly. Do it often. Do it often. Like a newborn needs feeding regularly and often. Could mean listening to an audio Bible.

Could mean singing or listening to the truth being sung. Could mean reading. Could mean listening to a sermon. There are all kinds of ways to do it.

We just need to drink it in little and often. That new life inside us will never die because God made it and God sustains it and God will grow it in us.

I'd love to just finish with this. In 1991 scientists went back into Chernobyl. Do you know about Chernobyl?

It's a nuclear power plant which suffered a massive explosion and what they were expecting was to find it completely devoid of life. That's what you'd expect. Right? Nuclear blast zone.

[25 : 26] Instead what they found was not only had some of the fungal spores that were there before survived. I'm back on mushrooms. Not only had they survived but they were thriving.

Isn't that amazing? In fact not only were they thriving when scientists did their tests whatever those are they found that those mushrooms were using the radiation as an energy source.

folks that is the imperishable seed that is in us. That is what God has given you if you're a Christian. That is what God offers to anybody here who is not a Christian today. The imperishable spore of God's word. That means we can survive even thrive in a nuclear winter situation.

Isn't our God great? Isn't his word great? Let me pray. Lord we thank you.

[26 : 39] We are so thankful for what you have done for us. That you have planted in us your life-giving word. And that because your word is like you indestructible we are too.

Lord we pray that we would live out that truth. That we would put away all the things that are not consistent with the loving gospel message that we have received from you.

Please Lord help us instead to crave your word all of it pure so that we will grow in the life that you have given us. We pray that in Jesus' name.
Amen.