

# The life-changing hope of Jesus

*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: 14 March 2021

Preacher: James Ross

- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Now we're going to read in Isaiah chapter 8 from verse 9 to verse 18. And we're reading this because again Peter draws our minds to it in 1 Peter chapter 3.
- So Isaiah chapter 8 and at verse 9. Raise the war cry you nations and be shattered. Listen oh you distant lands. Prepare for battle and be shattered. Prepare for battle and be shattered.
- Devise your strategy but it will be thwarted. Propose your plan but it will not stand for God is with us. This is what the Lord says to me with his strong hand upon me.
- Warning me not to follow the way of this people. Do not call conspiracy everything this people calls a conspiracy. Do not fear what they fear and do not dread it. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy.
- He is the one you are to fear. He is the one you are to dread. He will be a holy place for both Israel and Judah. He will be a stone that causes people to stumble and a rock that makes them fall.
- [ 1 : 1 0 ]     And for the people of Jerusalem he will be a trap and a snare. Many of them will stumble. They will fall and be broken. They will be snared and captured. Bind up this testimony of warning and seal up God's instruction among my disciples.
- I will wait for the Lord who is hiding his face from the descendants of Jacob. I will put my trust in him. Here am I and the children the Lord has given me.
- We are signs and symbols in Israel from the Lord Almighty who dwells on Mount Zion. From 1 Peter 3 and at verse number 8.
- And we are going to read to verse 17. So let's hear God's word together. Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.
- Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing. Because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.
- [ 2 : 2 4 ]     They must turn from evil and do good. They must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer.
- But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.
- Do not fear their threats. Do not be frightened. But in your hearts, revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you.
- To give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. Keeping a clear conscience. So that those who speak maliciously against your good behaviour in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.
- For it is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. Now if you turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Peter chapter 3 and at verse 8, we're going to think together about the life-changing hope that there is in Jesus.

[ 3 : 39 ] Now of course we all recognise, don't we, that hope is so important. And we felt so glad, I'm sure, with that sense of light at the end of the tunnel.

And especially for us as a church to be able to think about coming back together again. But it's much wider than just current restrictions. The medical profession for years has recognised that patients are much more likely to have a good recovery if they feel that they have hope, something to live for.

And we can all agree, I am sure, that hope is important in everyday life. But the question of course remains, who or what do we hope in? And is that a solid hope that is firm and unchanging regardless of circumstances?

Or are we hoping in wishful thinking? You know, I can resolve to think positively, as the self-help psychologist would encourage me to do.

But what if visualising my goals doesn't change my circumstances and rather it makes my circumstances actually get worse? You know, we can place our hope, for example, in a vaccine.

[ 4 : 52 ] But at the same time, I'm sure we're realistic enough to know that that's not going to solve all the problems of our society. As the foundations of our lives have been shaken in so many ways in the last 12 months, how does Christianity bring good news?

And how do we offer the world solid hope? And that takes us to our text because Christian hope is in the risen Lord Jesus.

Christian hope is, in fact, the Lord Jesus. Not in something temporary. Not something we can lose or be separated from.

Rather, a hope that matches our dreams and longings. A hope for now and for eternity. Now, as we get into our text, that one image that might be helpful for us to think about is this one.

You know, Jesus asked the church to be shining a light. You are the light of the world. So think of Christians and think of the church acting as a lighthouse.

[ 6 : 06 ] With that call to shine light in the darkness. And the light that we shine is, of course, the living hope that's found in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

And so Peter writes to a church that was facing opposition, that was being marginalised, could easily give in to fear.

And maybe we feel that ourselves. And he says, hold on to that hope you have in Jesus. And not just hold on to it for yourselves, but shine out that hope.

Communicate that hope to others. Because, and this is the theme of the section, it could save lives. Chapter 2, verse 12.

Live good lives and do good deeds so that people may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. So how can we do that?

[ 7 : 01 ] How can we hold on to hope and shine that hope in our world? Well, Peter draws attention to who we love, who we fear, and who we place our hope in.

So let's think about those together. First of all, who we love. Now, we're in verse 8 here. Who is Peter speaking to in verse 8? He says, finally all of you.

So he's been looking at talking to specific groups within the church. Now he's talking to the whole church. And he's saying, finally. So remember, this is continuing that theme of chapter 2 in verse 12.

That the way that we live might lead others to be saved by the Lord Jesus. And so the question becomes, how does the Christian church express love? And how does the hope of Jesus motivate our love to create something attractive that would lead people to Jesus?

And he focuses on who we love in two regards. First of all, thinking about within the church family. So one of the wonderful messages for this church under pressure is that the church, the people of God, are to be a place of comfort and refuge.

[ 8 : 13 ]    Refuge, because the church is the family of God that is built on and centred on the living Lord Jesus. And so he uses family language to talk about how we are to be with one another.

So let's just look at this language for a moment. He says, be like-minded. Remember that you share the same faith and you share the same ethics. He says, be sympathetic.

Show understanding to one another. At the centre of these five qualities, we are to love one another. This is brotherly love.

This is family love. That special love that we have because God has saved us. We are to be compassionate. We are to have a kindness and a care for one another in our family.

Sensitive to each other's needs and weaknesses. And we are to be humble, serving and not competing. And Peter introduces that because it matters for two reasons.

[ 9 : 17 ]    One, it matters for our mission. Because we are to show a loving, hope-filled, alternative community to a watching world that needs the light of Jesus.

Currently living in darkness. Perhaps living in despair or loneliness or fear. And they need a community that's got hope and love and unity. And it also matters because of our witness.

Because our words and our actions should match up. So we've been thinking about the church as being a lighthouse. Now perhaps you are familiar with some classic stories set in Cornish.

If you've read Enid Blyton and the Famous Five. If you've read some Daphne du Maurier. You'll be familiar with this group of people in history known as the Wreckers.

And what they would do is on stormy nights, these group of men would go and extinguish, put out the light in a lighthouse. So that ships would run aground.

[ 10 : 18 ]    And they would then plunder and take the wealth from the ship. Should have let the light shine but instead they extinguished it.

And that's a warning and a challenge and encouragement to us as a church. Not to be those wreckers that would extinguish the light of God's love by not loving one another.

Rather that family love would shine bright in the way we live together. That as we come back together in a couple of weeks, it'll be clear that we're a group of people that love each other.

And so he talks about how we love within the Christian family. But he also, in verses 9 to 12, talks about how we love, show love towards opponents. Those who oppose us.

And Peter here draws again, I think, on Jesus teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. So in Matthew chapter 5 and at verse 43, he corrects a misunderstanding.

[ 11 : 19 ]    You have heard that it was said, love your neighbour and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. That you may be children of your Father in heaven.

He causes his Son to rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. We are to love those who are opposed to us because that's how God our Father treats those who are opposed to him.

We are called to a radical non-retaliation, not getting even, rather returning blessing for evil.

Also because that's the pattern of Jesus and we'll think about that. So why make this difficult choice to love those who oppose the church? Three reasons we can identify. First of all, in verse 9.

Repay evil with blessing because to this you were called. So here is the calling of the Christian church. We've been called to be disciples of Jesus.

[ 12 : 19 ] So we're called to walk in his footsteps. And he shows us that non-retaliation. Also, we are to love our opponents because that's the way of life in the kingdom of God.

So verses 10 to 12 here draw on Psalm 34. And as you read those words, you'll notice that there are positive promises and negative promises.

So if you would love life and you want to see good deeds, there's a positive promise. You must keep your tongue from evil and lips from deceitful speech. If you want the eyes of the Lord to be on you and for you and for his ear to listen to your prayer, you must turn from evil and do good and seek peace and pursue it.

Recognising negative promise, the face of the Lord is against those who do evil. So if we want to know life with God and all its richness and vitality, then we need to love those who oppose us.

And also, now we mentioned this already in verse 9, we show love for our opponents because we're conscious of our blessing. Repay evil with blessing because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.

[ 13 : 35 ] In other words, the living hope in Jesus, our future hope in Jesus, the blessing of knowing God, the reality of an eternity living in his presence with perfect love, that should motivate us towards loving people now.

What does this look like? Well, here's one example. It's the story of a Japanese man by the name of Mitsuo Fuchida. He was the pilot who led the kamikaze raids on Pearl Harbor, the US base, attacking and killing.

He thought America was the ultimate enemy. He was later captured by America, became a prisoner, and he expected to be treated shockingly. But rather, he was treated well.

Indeed, he was looked after by Christian soldiers who loved him and who shared the truth of Jesus with him. And their love, instead of evil, led him to faith.

That's a dramatic story. But it also looks like offering friendship, a really listening, giving a welcome to people with radically different views and very different behaviours to us.

[ 14 : 48 ] We are called to love. So here is a call to the church and to the Christian community that we are to act as a lighthouse, not like those wreckers. And for us to do that, both within the church and outside the church, we must have our life built on the Lord Jesus.

We must be looking to his example. We cannot give ourselves a day off from living like Jesus. His mission and his honour must come first and must dictate how we treat other people.

Our goal is to shine the light of Jesus to Edinburgh and beyond. That's one of our primary callings as a church. And our love is an important part of that.

Let me say, if you're not a Christian, please come and join us on the 28th to worship with us. But also, let me encourage you to consider the promises that we looked at from Psalm 34.

One of the things the Bible is clear, we will all face God on the judgment day and we will have to give an account for our lives. And especially, we will have to give an account for how have I responded to Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

[ 16 : 03 ] On that day, do you want God's face to be turned towards you with his smile and his welcome? Or do you want his face to be turned against you in condemnation because you have rejected Jesus, his son, his Saviour?

Let me urge you to consider who Jesus is. God's love for you in sending Jesus to be the Saviour from sin that you need and to turn to him.

And for all of us, that we'd be looking to Jesus and seeing him as our example of perfect love. Peter encourages the church to have their words and their actions match up.

Well, Jesus always practiced what he preached and we see this, especially at the cross. Jesus said, love your enemies. Seek the good, pray for those who persecute you. As he was being nailed to the cross by cruel enemies, Jesus prayed, Father, forgive them.

They don't know what they're doing. And you know, this truth stands at the heart of our good news. Here is our hope. By nature, you and me and all of us, we are enemies of God.

[ 17 : 14 ] We have turned our back on our loving Father in heaven. We have rejected and rebelled against God, our King. We deserve judgment. But by God's grace in the sending and the sacrifice of Jesus, we can be loved and forgiven and granted eternal life and receive living hope.

And it's that living hope that shapes who we love. But that also shapes who we fear. And that's where we turn to next, verses 13 to 15.

Now, in verse 13, we're introduced to a general principle. And the principle is this. Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? Essentially, if you're eager to do good to and for others, you will usually be well received.

But Peter introduces what we might call the Christian exception. So in his day, the Christian church was being met with suspicion and distrust. They were seen as a threat to society and to family stability.

Soon, Emperor Nero would come in his hatred of the Christian faith and would begin brutally persecuting and killing many Christians. So there is a Christian exception.

[ 18 : 30 ] Today, there are untold stories of persecuted Christians who are feeding the poor, caring for the sick, teaching children, welcoming displaced people, all the while facing attack and intimidation and mob violence.

What about in our setting? How do we face the fear of man that we can experience? You know, if we struggle with issues of self-esteem, if we're sensitive to the views and the comments and the behaviours of others towards us, there is that real temptation towards hiding our truth, hiding what we believe.

So Peter wants to encourage us to think about how can hope, how can hope in the Lord Jesus keep us on mission? How can it cause us to shine rather than hide our light, to stand firm rather than cave in?

And Peter's big truth is that we fight that fear, the fear of man, with a greater fear, the fear of the Lord. Now, three ways to think about this in verses 14 and 15.

But first, from Peter's own story. Now, if you know the story, when Jesus is arrested, when he's been betrayed, he's soon to go to the cross.

[ 19 : 50 ] Peter three times denies even knowing Jesus because of the fear of man. In a place called Galatia, he stops eating food and sharing friendship with a group of Christians out of fear of what people from Jerusalem might say.

So he knows the fear of man. And so Peter humbly shares this lesson. Here is what I've learned. What you need is a greater fear. The fear of the Lord.

In other words, to be so overwhelmed with a sense of wonder that the love and the goodness and the wisdom and the power and the mercy and the kindness of God is for me and to me.

And when that fills our horizon, it displaces those other fears. So he can use his personal story to draw on.

He also draws on Isaiah 8. Verse 14, do not fear their threats. Do not be frightened. We read that in Isaiah 8. In the wider context, we are not to fear the message of Isaiah is because the Lord is with us.

[ 20 : 53 ] He is the one who we are to fear and to honour and to regard as holy. He takes loyalty, devotion first place and his greatness again removes and displaces the place of the fear of man.

And the other reality that he draws on is a reminder of blessing from God. And this again takes us back to that beatitude that we began with.

Blessed are you when people persecute you because you have your reward in the kingdom of heaven. In verse 14, even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.

So he's setting their vision not on the threat, the opposition, but on eternal reward and on life in the kingdom of heaven. Life in God's family, knowing God in your heart and your life, having his power, his truth, his love within you.

While you also remember the reward from God still to come. When our vision is filled with a sense of the glory and the goodness of God, the impact of that can be amazing.

[ 22 : 11 ] A number of us heard a recent story from Ethiopia of one man who came to trust in Jesus from a different faith background.

And as soon as he did, he was driven out of his village. His family didn't want to know him. He was told, don't come back. We don't want to hear your message or see from you. His response, we went to the outside the village and he built a house there.

And from that house, he kept going in to share his faith, to share the good news. And over time, his family and his friends began to trust in the Lord Jesus too.

And now that house on the edge of town, it's a church where people gather to worship Jesus as Lord. What happened? Yes, he was fearful of attack and oppression.

But more than that, he had that overwhelming sense of God's goodness and was rejoicing in that. And that eclipsed all those other fears. And that's what God will do for us if we allow his glory and the goodness of his love to shape our lives and to be our focus.

[ 23 : 23 ] Yes, maybe like me, you have struggled or you do struggle with the fear of man. You find yourself at times crippled by anxiety, wrestling with low self-esteem, fearful of the opinion of others, which would stop you doing what you know to be good.

Peter says, And that's the opinion that ultimately matters.

And as we reflect on this, we recognise as a 21st century church, we're facing a similar situation to the church in the first century. We face opposition and we live on the margins and many people don't necessarily want to hear our message.

How do we deal with that? How do we not give in to fear? Well, we need to let the beauty of Christ kill the beast of fear and anxiety.

We need to meditate on the love of the Lord Jesus Christ to see his incredible love for us and love for sinners that would overcome our fear of sharing God's truth, of living to display God's love.

[ 24 : 59 ] We must talk to ourselves, of the good news at the heart of our faith. Talk to ourselves about the reality of the cross. The power of the gospel every day to remind ourselves of living hope.

And that takes us to our final section, who we place our hope in. So Peter gives us a measure of great confidence here in verse 15.

He says, So he's saying, Christian, you have a living hope.

And he says, As you live out with good lives and good deeds, as you shine the light of Jesus, it will make people ask the why question. How do you love that way?

How do you have hope in the face of so much darkness and difficulties? Is that what people see in us today? And how do we speak when we've got an opportunity to talk about our hope?

[ 26 : 10 ] That's where Peter goes next. He says, First of all, Always be prepared. And that's a great lesson, isn't it? Imagine if every day we had high expectations.

Imagine if every day we thought, I could do something that could result in someone being saved. By God's grace, you and I might meet someone in eternity.

Maybe someone who we know, maybe someone who we don't, who would say thank you to us. Because our words and our lives pointed them towards Jesus. Isn't that a wonderful thing to think about?

When we think about heaven as this wonderful family reunion, pray that there be people there because of your words and your witness.

And especially there's a message to the church. Our words and our witness, our love for one another and for the world. If we're always to be prepared, how do we make those preparations?

[ 27 : 16 ] Well, we need to pray every day. Pray about our day. Pray at the start of the day. Pray through your diary as well as for those random moments. Have that prayerful mindset of dependence on God.

Live aware of his love and of his good news for you, Jesus. Stay close to God's word. Stay close to that truth. And keep that mission mindset.

Really hard during lockdown, but keep a mission mindset. So we're always to be prepared. And we're always to be prepared to answer the question of where our hope is found.

And the idea here is that we'd be ready to make an informal defence of the truth that we believe. Not that we'd necessarily have to stand on a platform and give, here's my sort of very clear, concise ten-point speech.

Rather, in our everyday conversation, we can defend and explain the basic message at the heart of our faith. To show that our hope is not vague or naive.

[ 28 : 20 ] It's not in ourselves. It's in the Lord Jesus. It's based on living hope because it's based on a saviour who died for us and then rose again for our salvation. We talk about the power of testimony, don't we?

We talk about people's stories being so important in others coming to church and coming to faith. The power of testimony lies in not what we say about ourselves, but what we say about the Lord Jesus.

That he would be clearly revealed as our hope. And as we are always prepared and we're answering the question of hope, our attitude matters.

Because there is a temptation, I'm sure, on the one hand, as we face opposition, to simply close the door to others out of fear or out of anger. Or perhaps we want to sort of lob grenades, try and score points, and we think in terms of teams and opponents and we don't really dialogue and really speak and really love.

Peter shows us a better way. He calls us to be, to do these things, verse 15, with gentleness and respect. Remember, everyone that we talk to is an image bearer of the living God.

[ 29 : 37 ] Those people who oppose you and mock you, remember that apart from God's grace, we too would be hostile to God and want nothing to do with him and his love.

We need to create a culture of respect. Christians need to be different in the way that we speak to each other and speak to and about others as well.

We also, verse 16, need to keep a clear conscience. That is to say, do my walk and my talk match up? Do my words and my actions line up?

And do they reflect the character of the Lord Jesus? Remember, we want to be a lighthouse, not those wreckers that would extinguish the light of Jesus. And verse 17, as our attitude matters, are we willing to suffer for doing good?

Are we willing to count the cost of discipleship, to follow the pattern and in the footsteps of the Lord Jesus, who was willing to suffer and die for doing good, for doing us ultimate, saving, eternal good?

[ 30 : 52 ] Peter's message then is this, be transformed by the life-changing hope of the Lord Jesus. In preparing for this message this week, the government announcement was made that we were able to return to church as of the 28th of March, and that's wonderful timing.

And that's a real gift for us because our focus on that day will be the cross of the Lord Jesus. And the week after, we will think about the empty tomb and the resurrection of Jesus at Easter Sunday.

So that our message to a world that's looking for hope, to you, if you feel drained of hope or empty of hope, if you're looking for answers, your hope will be found, ultimately and only, in a crucified and risen Lord Jesus.

One who was willing to die in love to forgive your sin. One who rose in victory to grant you eternal life.

And my prayer for us as a church in Becloot is that many would come to seek and to find, and again, let me say you're welcome to come. Sign up on our website to find out. Because in his death, there is certain hope that our sins will be forgiven, our guilt will be removed, we will be declared right in God's standing if we believe in him.

[ 32 : 21 ] That what he did on the cross, he did for me. And in his risen life, there is eternal hope as the last enemy of death is defeated, that we can anticipate and enjoy life with God now and the love of God now and forever.

Amen.