

Rejoicing in living hope

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[0 : 00] We're reading this morning from 1 Peter chapter 1 from verses 1 to 12. Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.

Grace and peace be yours in abundance. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

In all this, you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

[1 : 58] Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

For you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets who spoke of the grace that was to come to you searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you. Amen. When they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

Even angels long to look into these things. Amen. So folks, what do you hope for?

Maybe you're hoping for the day when we go down to level zero. Maybe you're hoping that the provisional assessment results that you've been given will be confirmed and your plans for the next few years will proceed.

[3 : 37] Maybe you're hoping for a promotion at work. Maybe you're hoping for a relaxing holiday. We hope in certain situations for cancers to go into remission.

We hope for all kinds of different things in different situations in our lives. And in most cases, the thing that we say we hope for, we're not certain about those things, are we?

We're not certain that what we hope for will come to pass. We might be fairly confident in some things, but rarely is it 100% we don't talk about hoping if we are certain.

Indeed, some of those things, maybe we're hoping against hope. Hoping for things that we think are quite unlikely, but it would be wonderful if they did come about.

Hope is often a tenuous, uncertain thing. But in these verses in Peter's letter, he introduces us to a different kind of hope, doesn't he?

[4 : 37] Verse 3 says, For those who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, those to whom he writes this letter, and those of us who can claim to stand in their line of succession, to us, then, he says, we have a living hope.

And that living hope makes all the difference in the world. But, so we're going to examine that living hope from six different angles this morning, each of them relatively brief.

But my hope is that at least one or two of these different perspectives will be an encouragement to each of you this morning. So, living hope.

First, this living hope comes through new birth. Do you see it there in verse 3? What we're given by the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is new birth. And that new birth is into a living hope. Now, this is a big concept, isn't it? Jesus talks about the need for new birth, and it's that same idea that Peter is picking up here. And we're used, perhaps, to this language of new birth.

[5 : 43] We're used to it because we're familiar with it from the Gospels and, indeed, here as well. But maybe we kind of gloss over just how significant a concept this is.

We might do well to pause and think what is involved in this idea of new birth. Think what was defined, what was established by your first birth, as it were.

Your ethnic identity, your socioeconomic position in life, the nation or nations of which you are a citizen, your family, your living arrangements, your biology with all of the potential that comes along with that.

The circumstances of your birth define, to a huge extent, who you are, all kinds of aspects of your life and, indeed, character. Not that these things are unable to be changed, but they come out of the circumstances of our birth.

And Peter says here, we have a new birth. And that new birth is just as far-reaching, just as all-encompassing, a new definition of who we are, a new citizenship, a new set of potentials, a new identity, a transformed character.

[7 : 07] So for Peter, you have a living hope because you are no longer the person who you once were. You have hope because you are a new person, with new desires, new character, new potential.

Sometimes we focus, don't we, on the idea of kind of progressive transformation. You know, we talk about sanctification, we talk about gradually moving on in the Christian life, and we think of that as an ongoing process by which we move forwards to glory.

And that is absolutely true, but sometimes we focus on that to the extent that we lose sight of just how radical a break with the past there has already been, that we have already, if we are in Christ, we have this new birth.

There is this definitive break with the past. The man who followed the prince of this world, followed him along that path that leads to destruction, that man is dead.

A new man has been born, a new woman, a new life in Christ. Living hope through new birth, definitive, once for all, radical in its impact.

[8 : 25] Second, notice that this is living hope. It's easy, isn't it, to get the wrong idea of what we mean by hope, because, well, like the word faith, here too, we as Christians, we use an everyday, ordinary word, in a way somewhat different to how those around us in the world use this word.

Indeed, different to how we ourselves might use the word in day-to-day conversation. Hope here is a living hope. And this isn't kind of living in the sense of growing and expanding and increasing. That might be your experience, that your hope grows as you see more evidence, as you become more confident in your dependence on what God has done. That might be the case, but it's not what Peter's talking about here.

This is living hope in contrast to dead hope. Dead hope, futile hope. Dead hope depends on something that isn't going to come to pass.

Dead hope hangs on the idols of our lives, whether they be wood or metal, or whether they be the modern idols of money and family and career. Dead hope hangs on these idols that cannot deliver.

[9 : 38] And in contrast, a living hope is a certain hope, a confident hope. This isn't an assertion in the face of despair, is it?

This isn't a million to one chance, but it might just work, that novels and films are full of. The frequency with which million to one chances come good is quite staggering, isn't it?

But this hope doesn't depend on the laws of good story writing to come to pass. This is a sure and certain hope. Ed Clowney, he contrasts this against the sort of fond hope, the hope that we cherish precisely because it's fragile.

The hope that is precious because we know it needs to be protected. That hoping against hope when we have little if any expectation that what we hope for will come to pass.

No, this is living hope. This is hope for the future that affects our present because it's anchored in the past.

[10 : 45] So you see there, the end of verse 3, Peter anchors this living hope in historical reality. This living hope is through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

The apostle Paul says, if Jesus is not raised, then we are without hope. There is no point in our faith if Jesus has not been raised from the dead, but Peter says he was raised and because of it, we have living hope.

Living hope for the present, living hope for the future. Living hope that is sure and certain because it is backed by the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead.

What could he not do in your life? The God who had the power to raise Jesus from the dead. What will he not choose to do in your life?

The God who gave his son in order that you might live. Our hope is in that God who has the power and who has the will to act.

[11 : 46] Our hope is in the God who, verse 5 says, shields us by his power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. The God who shields us.

The God who preserves us. The sun can't hurt you. The moon can't hurt you. Nothing can hurt you because God himself shields you.

Third, this living hope comes with an imperishable inheritance. This is verse 4, the new birth not only into a living hope, but also into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade.

Remember, Peter's writing to people who are living at least in some sense as exiles. Whether they're exiles from their physical homeland, they are certainly mentally far from home, whether or not physically so.

Because Peter says they are citizens of heaven rather than citizens of this earth. They live far from home. And yet, Peter says, they have an inheritance.

[12 : 52] Think back to the days of the desert wanderings for the Israelites as they made their way from Egypt by the most roundabout route possible eventually to the promised land.

What's the great hope? The coming inheritance. That one day they will reach the land of their inheritance. And the tribes each have their allotted area of land.

And God puts in place all kinds of laws about how that land can and can't be inherited and who can and can't buy it when it has to be given back because the inheritance is precious.

God preserves the inheritance of his people down through the ages. But the greater significance of that inheritance of that patch of land in the Middle East, the greater significance of it is point to beyond itself.

To point to this true inheritance that Peter says these exiles are now born into. They inherit it by right because of who they are. They have this new birth as children of God the Father and therefore they inherit his riches.

[14 : 01] That inheritance in the land that God was so keen to preserve with all of those different laws, that inheritance was lost, wasn't it? When the people went off into exile, they lost their inheritance.

They lost their birthrights. birthrights. And at best, partially regained when some returned. And in contrast to that very visible and yet perishable inheritance, in contrast to that, this inheritance they have now received, Peter says it will never perish, never spoil, never fade.

In fact, not just that it never will, it cannot do so. This inheritance cannot perish, spoil, or fade. Why? Because it's kept by Almighty God. Kept in heaven for you, the ones shielded by God's power.

My friends, this inheritance that Peter says they possess, that we, standing in their succession, ourselves possess, this inheritance is more precious than anything this present life offers.

Because the things with which you and I fill our days, they don't meet these same criteria, do they? They are corruptible and defiled and fading.

[15 : 24] We set our hearts on what we think the richest inheritance of this life and in so doing we end up disappointed. People let us down.

Money turns out not to deliver what we thought it would and so on and so forth. The inheritance of this life lets us down but we fix our gaze on the inheritance into which we have entered through new birth.

And when we are focused there we cannot possibly be disappointed because that inheritance is imperishable, unspoiling, and unfading, kept by God for you.

Now this does not mean it will be easy here and now, does it? Because this living hope comes in the face of trials.

This living hope isn't just a matter for the future, this is hope for the future that affects our present here and now. Peter says, verse 6, Peter says that it's possible, indeed that it's right, it's proper, it's

possible to rejoice here and now, to rejoice in the glorious truths that he's revealed in these preceding verses, to rejoice in the truths of verses 3 to 5, it's possible to rejoice in all of this even as we suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

[17:12] And Peter presents two reasons for this kind of hope in the face of trials, two reasons for rejoicing. First reason, these trials are temporary. Do you see there verse 6?

He says, these trials are for a little while. Peter says, rejoicing is possible when we see our trials in proper perspective, when we see the reality of what they are, when we see how transitory, how momentary is our pain.

Sometimes that's hard to believe, isn't it? It's very easy to focus on what's right in front of us, to focus on the difficulties in which we're mired, to think about the immediate situation, the struggle of the moment.

It's very easy to focus on that rather than to think about the longer-term reality. But that longer-term perspective does make a difference, doesn't it?

You accept the vaccination because you know that the momentary pain is far outweighed by the long-term benefits, however unpleasant you think needles are. You face sitting the exam because even if it does last a few hours, it's going to be over at some point.

[18:29] And yet, some of our trials, we look at them and we see no end in sight, do we? We don't see the end coming. It's not a three-hour exam. We don't know whether it's ever going to come to an end.

Maybe some of you have struggled with fear and anxiety and depression. Maybe you've struggled with that since the days of your youth and you don't think it will ever change.

And the truth is that it might not. It might not change. Except it is certain that it will change.

This side of eternity, it may not change. But in the days of your inheritance, it is certain that your present trials will come to an end. And right now, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100 years looks like a long time.

One day it will not. One day we will look back and say that was but a moment. Here today and gone tomorrow. Your present trials will come to an end.

[19:36] Maybe you look at the trajectory of our society and you think, well, the trial of being different to everybody around us. That trial is going to last forever.

It looks that way, doesn't it? I don't have much hope for a radical 180 degree shift in the path that our country and many other countries are on. It seems very likely that you and I will have to continue to march to the beat of a different drum for my lifetime and for yours.

That frustration of being at odds with the world around us, it may well last throughout our lives but it will not be the case on the last day. It will not be the case in the days of our inheritance.

To our finite minds, maybe the span of a human life is about the most that we can reasonably get our heads around but Peter says, lift up your eyes, look to the horizon, look to the longer term, look to the days of your inheritance.

Think not just about this life but think about the life to come. you have a living hope. These trials are what you suffer for a little while and yet they are the blink of an eye on the scale of eternity.

[20:57] Furthermore, he calls us to rejoice in living hope in the face of temporary trials. He calls us to rejoice secondly because these trials are not without purpose.

verse 7 says, these temporary trials they've come in order that the proven genuineness of faith might result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus is revealed.

Peter says that revealed genuineness of faith is of greater lasting impact, is of greater preciousness than even the finest of gold because even gold perishes.

The longest lasting, the most precious of metals, even that perishes. Even that will spoil and fade. But the tested, proven genuineness of your faith, that will stand the test of time.

Peter says, it is glorifying to God when you persevere in your faith in the face of trials. The idea here, I think, is something similar to the opening section of the book of Job.

[22:03] Do you remember, in the book of Job, Satan goes and says to God, he says, well, Job only loves you because you give him good things. You bestow blessings upon him and therefore he loves you.

And God says, well, okay, take them away. Take those things away and his faith is proven, isn't it? The book of Job proves it is not for God's gifts that Job loves God.

Well, so too, my friends. If your faith in God perseveres in the face of immense trials, if you have faith not because God gives you abundant blessings, but because you love God himself, because

you depend on the promises that he has made to you, because you rejoice in the good gifts that he has given you, even as other things are withheld from you or taken away, Peter says it is glorifying to God.

And it is possible for us to stand firm in the face of these trials. It is possible because we have this absolute confidence, this living hope into which you have received new birth.

Not futile hope, living hope that gives us confidence to continue in the face of trials. Even though, verse 8, we love Jesus without having seen him, we walk by faith and not by sight, yet still, we can be filled with this inexpressible and glorious joy.

[23 : 47] Now, Peter talks about all kinds of trials here, but it seems he's particularly focused on the trials that come precisely because of the faith that he is focused on.

He's thinking especially about trials, not just in the general run of human existence, but trials that come because of professed faith in Christ.

And it may be that some of us have experienced some dimensions of that to a greater or lesser degree. maybe there have been social consequences for your faith.

And we don't have to go far to find a church being discriminated against by a charitable trust for its beliefs. We don't have to go far to find people losing their jobs because of their professed views.

And that, of course, is to say nothing of the appalling suffering experienced by believers in other countries. It's worth going online and looking again at the situation that early rain covenant church over in China are still going through as they face persecution from the state.

[25 : 00] Their pastor still imprisoned. But we live, you and I, in a post-Christian culture, don't we? In Scotland today, belief in the God of the Bible is not the majority position.

There's some vestiges of the days of Christendom, some vestiges of it left over in our laws and in social attitudes as well. And that accounts for some of our comparative ease as against our brothers and sisters in other lands.

But does that account for all of our ease? Scott McKnight, in his commentary, he asks, and I think he's right to ask, he asks, why we have this comparative lack of suffering?

Given that we live in a determinedly secular society, why do we not suffer more than we do? Well, his suggestion is that our lack of suffering is in part due to a lack of nerve on the part of the church to challenge our contemporary world, to declare the message of the cross and to live according to the teachings of Jesus with uncompromising rigor.

Yes, the Bible doesn't say every single Christian in every age will always suffer, but Paul does say in 2 Timothy 3 that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

[26 : 37] So if our persecution isn't all that great, even though what we say we believe is at odds with what the world around us believes, then why are we not more persecuted than we are?

Maybe it's because we're not living with uncompromising rigor. Maybe it's because we are not declaring what we believe as boldly as we might.

Not that we go and deliberately pick a fight, but that we stand. We say, here I stand, I can do no other. This is what God has said.

It's a dangerous thing to live with uncompromising rigor, because it might well result in trials and suffering. But Peter says, they are only temporary, and they bring glory to your God.

living hope. Living hope on the basis of God's plan. This is what Peter says in verses 10 to 12, isn't it?

[27 : 48] This salvation of souls, that which our faith produces, that which is the result of this living hope, this salvation is the subject of the writings of God's prophets down through the ages, isn't it?

this isn't a new idea. The means of salvation was not a backup plan. God didn't look and see the forces gathering to come and to kill Jesus and say, oh no, what am I going to do?

Oh, I guess maybe I could bring some good out of it after all, if I tweak things. No, this was always the plan, down through the ages.

This plan expressed in embryonic form even in the days of Adam and Eve. This plan revealed through God's dealings with his people Israel, foreshadowing time and again the plan that he had in store and revealed through the words that he spoke to the prophets and then fully realized in the person of Jesus.

This was always the plan. Now, you are probably less bothered than the people who Peter was originally writing to about continuity with the Jewish faith per se.

[29 : 05] Whether we stand in the succession of the Jews is probably of less importance to you than it was to them. But, surely it is good to be able to say, to say when you question yourself and to say when other people ask, isn't it good to be able to say, the faith to which I hold is the faith that is revealed in God's word?

To be able to say the ideas that I am presenting, the gospel that I am proclaiming, this is not my imaginings. This is what God himself has said.

Isn't that what we all need to be able to say? That this is not the product of our collective imagination. This is not you as an isolated individual coming up with some weird cultish plan.

To be able to say covenant church, New Mills, is not a cult, but is standing on what God himself has said. To be able to say this isn't only what God said 2,000 years ago, but actually it's what he's been saying since long before that.

That this was always God's plan and therefore it is to this which I must hold. My friends, the good news of the gospel is precious, isn't it? Peter says even the angels long to look into the things that have been told to you in the pages of his word and by those who have preached the gospel to you.

[30 : 40] Finally, sixth angle on living hope. Living hope results in rejoicing. Do you see this woven through the verses? It's there right at the start, isn't it?

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God deserves to be praised for what he has done. We rejoice because of the new birth that brings us this living hope.

Verse 6 says we greatly rejoice in all of this. Now my friends, maybe the trials that you have gone through, the trials that you are going through right now, the trials that mean you're not here with us in the room right now but you're watching me online.

The trials of family who have walked far away from God, the trials of the suffering that has come to you because you have stood firm on God's word. Maybe the trials that you are undergoing even right now, maybe they have snatched away your joy.

But Peter says, so abundant are God's blessings. So amazing is the joy of this new birth. So certain is this living hope.

[31 : 52] So certain is the salvation that's ready to be revealed. So wonderful are these things that we rejoice in the midst of trials. We rejoice because these trials prove the genuineness of our faith.

Verse 7, we rejoice because we are receiving the end result of our faith. Verse 9, the salvation of our souls. This rejoicing comes despite the fact that we do not now see him.

My friends, we rejoice because of the certainty of God's plan. God's plan established before the dawn of time, spoken through the prophets, reaching its culmination in the person of Jesus Christ and known to you and to me.

We rejoice because of God's plan. So if you are not rejoicing, that you know these things that the angels long to investigate, if you aren't filled with joy because you have this inheritance unperishing, unspoiling, and unfading, if it doesn't thrill you, if it doesn't cause you to overflow in thanksgiving, that you have this living hope, well then I think you would do well to consider these things more fully.

Because the more we recognize the reality of our present situation here and now as citizens of heaven, the more we recognize that reality then the less we will consider ourselves as poor exiles on this earth and the more we will rejoice in the greatness of that salvation.

[33 : 31] And so to God's name be praise, glory, and honor. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.