

# An imperishable word

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[0:00] We'll be reading Isaiah chapter 40, verse 1 to 8. Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.

Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and cry to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received from the Lord's hands double for all her sins.

A voice cries, in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low, that uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken, verse 6.

A voice says, cry, and I said, what shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all this beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades.

When the breath of the Lord blows on it, surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades. But the word of our God will stand forever. Our second reading this morning is from 1 Peter, chapter 1.

[1:21] It's on page 1219 in the Church Bibles. 1 Peter, chapter 1, reading from verse 13.

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[3:34] 2 Peter, reading from verse 15. 2 Peter, reading from verse 13.

I'm one of the assistant ministers here. Do keep that passage open and do turn to the back of your handout. You'll find an outline of where we are going there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, please help us now to be attentive to your word, to focus and to listen to you.

Amen. Amen. For all of us, we know that something in the future drives how we act today.

Even just thinking about going on holiday dictates our actions now. Getting the right currency, packing the right clothes, packing snacks for the six-hour queue in Dover.

And that's also true of big life changes as well. So, as the day gets closer and closer, so our lives increasingly match up with that reality.

[5:04] So, a house move. You get the move date and it gets closer and closer and you have to decide what's going to go where. It increasingly dictates your actions and your thinking.

The same with a new job or a new school. For a new job, you accept the job offer, you get the school place, you get a start date. And then increasingly, as you get closer and closer, your life lines up with that new reality to come.

Well, that is also true in the Christian life. And the key to that is in the first word of our passage. Have a look down at verse 13. Peter says, therefore.

In other words, because of what I've just said to you, then do this. This is how you should live. Last week we saw, as we started our series in 1 Peter, that he's writing to Christians who he describes as elect exiles.

They are God's people. They are scattered throughout what we now know as Turkey. And they're scattered because of persecution. And so they are exiles.

[6:15] They are living away from home physically, but also spiritually. They are on a journey to heaven. And that amazing, imperishable future inheritance kept for them.

A future inheritance so good, they can rejoice even through suffering now. And we are in a very similar situation today.

Lots of us might say that we are exiles physically. We wouldn't call London or even the UK home. But all Christians are spiritual exiles.

This earth is not our home. Our home is in heaven. And Christians are on the way to glory. And Peter starts with verse 13 with, therefore, to show how this future day should drive our attitudes and actions today and tomorrow, this week, this year.

And so Peter writes to them and us to stand firm and live out their faith through suffering on the way to glory. And so how does Peter want us to live in spiritual exile on the way to the inheritance to glory?

[ 7 : 37 ] How does our future inheritance in the future affect my Monday morning now? Well, Peter tells us and also gives us the motivation to do it.

So firstly on the handout then, God's people in exile on the way to glory are to look forward, setting our hope fully on our future inheritance. Look again at verse 13 with me.

Therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

And we are surrounded by people who are focused, aren't we? Who have their hope set on something in the future. Footballers in pre-season training, getting ready for the new season and the World Cup.

Business people focusing on closing the deal. Academics focused on completing the research. The teenager focused on completing Netflix. The parent focused on getting to the end of summer.

[ 8 : 48 ] Peter wants Christians to be focused. To have our minds set on the future when Jesus is revealed. To have that so fixed in our heads that it's the thing above all other things that we are looking forward to.

Doing that is not automatic. That doesn't just happen. It requires determination. And so verse 13 again. Therefore, preparing your minds for action.

Which if you look at the footnote, literally means girding up the loins of your mind. Using that phrase, Peter paints a picture of a man back in those days preparing to run or to do some exercise.

He would have to gather up his robe between his legs and tuck it into his belt. Think of a bride in their wedding dress trying to get somewhere in a hurry. It requires preparation and a lot of effort.

And that is what Peter wants these Christians to do mentally. Setting our hope on Jesus being revealed requires mental preparation, determination and resolve.

[ 10 : 00 ] I guess nowadays we could say put on the trainers of your mind. Peter's mind. Your mind needs to get ready for serious exercise and action.

Peter effectively says, guys, get your minds in gear. Peter goes even deeper though because this phrase is used the night before the Exodus.

Where God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. You may remember the story. Read Exodus or watch the Prince of Egypt. God was going to judge Egypt.

And strike down every firstborn son in the land of Egypt. But God's people would be rescued by sacrificing a lamb. And smearing the blood on the doorposts.

And when God passed through the land and saw the blood, he passed over their houses. So it became known as the Lord's Passover. And as God's people ate the meal of roast lamb on the night of their rescue, they were instructed to gird up their loins.

[ 11 : 06 ] Get ready. Get ready for the exile. Get ready for rescue. Get your minds in gear. Get yourselves in gear for the journey to the promised land.

Your inheritance. And while Peter says that the Christian is in the same boat. A similar situation. The journey to our inheritance of heaven requires mental preparation.

Getting ready for action. And that involves being sober minded. Verse 13. We often connect the word sober to alcohol.

We know drunkenness affects every aspect of the human body. It clouds our judgement. It slows our reflexes. It provokes us to do things we wouldn't normally do.

And so being sober minded here is to think clearly about who we are and where we are heading. So Christian living starts with a Christian mindset.

[ 12 : 09 ] I guess if we are honest with ourselves though, often we have our hopes set on worldly things. And we become drunk on the priorities and promises of this world.

For example, lots of people around us are focused on careers. But as we get our minds in gear tonight amidst the Sunday night blues for the week ahead and throughout the year, we can remind ourselves.

I'm not first and foremost a teacher on the way to become senior management. Or a lawyer on the way to become senior partner.

Or a parent trying to survive the week. Or whatever it is for you. I'm first and foremost an elect exile on the way to meet Jesus in glory.

And so that is what I will set my hope fully on and long for this week. And so we put on the trainers of our minds. Think with a clear head.

[13:07] On the journey to glory, we look forward to that future day. Setting our hope fully on the revelation of Jesus in all his glory.

And that inheritance to come. So on the journey to glory in exile, we look up. We also, we look forward. But we look up. It's the second point on the handout.

Look up. Being holy in all your conduct. Have a look at verse 14. God being holy not only speaks of his purity, but his separateness, as we thought at the start of the service.

He is set apart from everything else. He is the creator, not the creation. He is perfectly good. Our world is not. And so because God is holy, God's people are to be holy too.

Distinct from the world around. Set apart. I guess set apart like your toothbrush is set apart for your teeth. Definitely no one else's teeth.

[14:28] And definitely nothing else. It's distinct. It's holy. It's set apart. And again, Peter takes us back to the Old Testament in the book of Leviticus with God's people on the way to the promised land after the Exodus.

God had given them the law to live out their salvation distinct from the world around them. And notice how Peter uses the concept of family here.

As obedient children, God's people are to conform to the family likeness. The spiritual DNA, as it were. Now, I guess if we were to get the Sunday club children up the front, it wouldn't take long, would it, to match them to their parents?

Because children conform to the family likeness. The running joke in our families that our daughter Abigail looks so much like me that we call her Mandy Meadows. She has my likeness.

Poor girl. And what is true physically is a picture of what is to be true spiritually when it comes to being children of our heavenly father.

[15:40] Christians have been born again into a living hope, as we thought last week. Part of a new family. And as children of a holy father, we are to be like him.

Holy, set apart, distinct. Now, we've all been in situations, I think, where we feel we don't fit in. Maybe that's you here this morning.

Maybe in going to a different country on holiday or for work, we're fully aware we stand out. We look different. We sound different. We dress differently and stand out from the crowd.

A stranger. An alien. An exile. And then, well, we can either go two ways. We can go all out and don't even try and blend in.

Be like a classic Brits abroad like me. A stick-on in England football shirt. Get sunburnt three hours after you step off the plane. Or we try and blend in. Attempt the local language with our best accent.

[16:40] Wear the local clothes and so forth. Well, for the Christian, we are somewhere we don't fit in. And God has rescued us so that we wouldn't fit in.

And be conformed to the passions of the world around. But instead to be distinctive. To be set apart to live God's way. Standing firm in the gospel by standing out.

But because of the hostile world we live in. I guess being holy and distinct is something that we often struggle with. Who wants to be known as the misfit on their road?

Who wants to be known as the member of the God Squad in school or uni? Or the person who wants to be the person slandered with phrases like intolerant and bigot?

None of us want that. That's what these Christians in Turkey were facing. And so the temptation for them and for us is to keep our heads down and blend in with the locals.

[17:45] But Peter reminds us that Christians are to live like an alien on planet Earth. Like classic Brits abroad. We are to be distinct and set apart as obedient children of God.

And that is worth the cost as we saw last week. Because our heavenly inheritance and Jesus himself are waiting for us in glory.

And so how are Christians living in exile to stand firm amidst constant persecution? By looking up. We are a child of our heavenly father.

And now to share the family likeness of holiness. Living distinctively. Standing firm by standing out. Knowing that the cost is worth it. And so on the way to glory.

God's people look forward. Look up. And also look back. Remembering you were ransomed. That further incentive to live God's way in exile comes from looking back to the cross of Jesus.

[ 18 : 50 ] Have a look at verse 17. And if you call on him as father who judges impartially according to each other's deeds. Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.

Knowing that you were ransomed from futile ways inherited from your forefathers. Not with perishable things such as silver or gold. But with the precious blood of Christ.

Like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. What was the price and cost of the ransom which sets us free? It was not expensive gold or silver that was used to rescue us from the futile ways of this world.

Instead we were ransomed by the precious blood of Jesus. There is nothing more precious to God than the blood of his own son.

Yet what was most precious to him was freely given in order to provide a rescue and forgiveness to sinners like us. And again Peter applies both the logic and the language of Exodus to the Christian.

[ 20 : 02 ] Particularly in the description of Jesus in verse 19. The precious blood of Christ like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. The Israelites who left Egypt having been saved through the blood of an unblemished lamb.

Would surely have been supremely grateful. For such provision and rescue from God's judgment. Well in a similar way Peter's readers and all Christians today are to reflect deeply.

Reflect deeply on the fact that they have been spared God's judgment. Through the unblemished lamb of God. The Lord Jesus Christ. Dying on the cross in our place.

Imagine how grateful an eldest son leaving Egypt on Passover night would be. For that sacrificial lamb which had literally taken his place.

Spared his life. Granted him freedom. There would be no doubt there would be a sense of awe and reverence. That this God who showed his power was the same God who had provided a lamb to rescue him.

[ 21 : 15 ] And so Peter connects the wonder of deliverance from judgment. Through the sacrificial death of Jesus the lamb. With a response of awe and reverence.

And so Peter says in verse 17. Conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile. So God's people now journeying through exile and our inheritance to glory.

We are to fear God. And to fear God that's not the same as fearing heights or spiders. It means to grasp the awesomeness of God. To be humble before him.

As our saviour, judge and Lord. Jesus died for us. That we may escape the futile ways of those around us.

And belong to him. Living in obedient children in reverent fear. And so Peter says don't look back to your old life. Look back to the cross.

[ 22 : 17 ] Peter could have stopped there. But he chose to include verses 20 and 21. Not leaving us with Jesus' suffering and death. But his resurrection and glory. All to build our confidence and hope.

Jesus' death wasn't a divine afterthought. But it was always the plan. As one commentator says. God knew the complete program of redemption.

Before the foundation of the world. And so God will finish what he has started. That one day we will see the one who is raised and glorified.

And so verse 21. We can have faith and hope in God. Peter now coming full circle. To how he opened in verse 13. This is the hope.

We are to set our minds fully on. The glorious destination ahead. The glorious person ahead. The Lord Jesus Christ. If you wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus.

[ 23 : 19 ] A Christian here this morning. Then this rescue is still on offer. Now we don't have to smear blood on doorposts anymore. We have to come to Christ.

Admit our sin. Put our trust in his death for us. For the forgiveness of sins. And that imperishable inheritance. Will be yours. But Peter isn't done yet.

Because lastly on the way to glory. We are to look around. We are to look around. Loving one another earnestly. The journey to glory.

Is not one that each Christian travels alone. In fact it's more like a sweaty commuter train. Packed full of other Christians. And so verse 22. Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth. For a sincere brotherly love. Love one another earnestly from a pure heart. We're back to the family language again. If you spotted that. Peter's used throughout. God is our father.

[ 24 : 19 ] And through new birth. Believers become obedient children. Who are brothers. And sisters. And we are to love each other earnestly. Earnestly has the meaning here.

At full stretch. The idea is of someone extending themselves further than they had before. Like an athlete at the Commonwealth Games. Striving for the line.

Stretching. So what does it look like. For these Christians to love each other at full stretch. Chapter 2 verse 1.

So put away all malice and all deceit. And hypocrisy and envy. And all slander. These sorts of things are the weeds.

That need to be uprooted in the church. Only as they are weeded out. Will the full flowering of brotherly love. And sisterly love. Within the church family be clear.

[ 25 : 16 ] The motivation to do this. Is that this love. Towards other Christians. Towards us in this room. And further. Is a natural outworking of our salvation.

Have a look at verse 23. Since you have been born again. Not of perishable seed. But of imperishable. Through the living and abiding word of God.

For all flesh is like grass. And all its glory. Like the flower of grass. The grass withers. And the flower falls. But the word of the Lord remains forever.

And this word is the good news. That was preached to you. The motivation to love one another. Comes from being born again. By God's words.

And the emphasis here. Is on the focus on things that do and don't last. Is on the focus on things that do and don't last. Which is why Peter includes this poem from Isaiah 40. Isaiah looked forward.

[ 26 : 15 ] To another rescue of God's people. A new and greater exodus. And Peter says. Look we've experienced that rescue. That Isaiah longed for.

The new exodus. Through the death of Jesus. The lamb. All through God's eternal. Imperishable words. These verses highlight.

How fleeting and fading our world is. Don't they? Like flowers in the fields. Definitely at the moment. Human glory and human body.

All perish. It's like we all have the Midas touch. But instead of everything we touch turning to gold. Everything we touch eventually turns to dust.

Everything we see in life. Is ultimately perishable. Except one thing. God's words. That we are reading this morning.

[ 27 : 11 ] As God's people. We have been born. Into an imperishable inheritance. Through God's imperishable words. So we are to love one another. Growing together. By longing. For more of God's words.

So look down verse 2. Like newborn infants. Long for the pure spiritual milk. That by it you may grow up into salvation. If indeed you have tasted.

That the Lord is good. A Christian's relationship. With God's word. The Bible. Is like a baby's relationship with milk. Craving it. In order to grow.

A newborn baby's cry. Is them saying. Mummy. I need feeding. I cannot grow. Unless you give me milk. Give it to me now. They don't have the words for that. So they cry.

And so the Christians cry. Is that we need feeding. I cannot grow. In my love for God. Jesus. And for each other. If I don't feed on the spiritual milk.

[ 28 : 12 ] Of God's word. And when the church. Is suffering. As Peter's. Readers were. Either verses 1 to 3. Will happen. And it will be.

An extraordinary witness. To the world around. As we put away. Malice. And slander. And we crave. God's word together. Or it won't happen. And the church. Will fall out. Fall apart.

And the world. Will think. There's really nothing in it. The same is true for us. Under pressure. God's people. Are to love each other. At full stretch. Spurring one another.

On to the line. To set our hope. Fully. On the grace. To be revealed. God's word. And all of this is worth it. When we consider. What truly lasts.

And to get our minds in gear. We can make two lists. From things in this passage. Things that. Last in life. And things that don't last. The things that don't last.

[ 29 : 10 ] Include money. Silver and gold. In verse 18. That perishes. Our bodies. Verse 24. Human glory. Verse 24.

Whether that's glory. From reaching the top. Of a professional. Glory from our peers. At school. Or at work. All of that. Will eventually perish.

Like flowers. In the field. But the second list. Of things that last. Including our inheritance. Chapter 1. Verse 4. The precious blood of Jesus.

Verse 19. And God's word. Verse 23 and 25. And when we put the lists. Side by side. We can see that it'd be foolish.

To give up imperishable things. And things that last. To live. For the perishable. And fleeting things of life. If you wouldn't call yourself.

[ 30 : 08 ] A Christian. Maybe. Some of us are living for. Things in it. That this world has offered. We have to think. All the world. Everything the world offers.

Is fleeting. And fading. And yet. An imperishable inheritance. Is on offer. A glorious. Inheritance. Is on offer.

For all those. Who will turn. To Jesus. So amidst suffering. Amidst. The pressure. To blend in. With the locals. God's people. In spiritual exile. Are to stand firm.

By standing out. Holy. And distinct. On the way to glory. Looking forward. Setting. Our hope. On the grace. To be revealed. When Jesus returns.

In all his glory. Looking up. As God's obedient children. Conforming to the family likeness. Looking back. To the sacrifice. Of Jesus. And the rescue.

[ 31 : 03 ] That he won for us. With thankfulness. Reverence. And awe. And looking around. Loving one another. At full stretch. Craving God's eternal word.

Let's pray together. Father God. We praise you. And thank you. For the death. Of the Lord Jesus. Our lamb.

Dying in our place. For the forgiveness. Of sins. And we pray. Father. That we would. Be those who set our hope. On that future day. When we will meet him. In all his glory.

And that we would be holy. And distinct. This week. Amen.