

Living well on the way home - session 1

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Preacher: Fiona Neden

[0 : 0 0] It's wonderful to see everyone here this morning, so it's very exciting. Let's have a look at 1 Peter. Now we're going to be looking at quite large chunks today, so keep your Bibles open, and 1 Peter 1, we're starting, going through to 2.

Now I don't have much real experience of being in exile, but twice my family has moved, not only country, but continent, and things in my life changed significantly.

For me, the first time was when I was 6 years old. My parents had been working in America, and I'd lived there all my life, and we were asked to move back to the UK, and I have to say, it was a big culture shock.

I said things which Sydney could recognise. I said things like sneakers, I said trash, I had bright blonde hair, and I wore different clothes.

So it was a culture shock to move back to the UK. The second time we moved, we moved to Dubai when I was 6 months pregnant with the first child. Again, a culture shock.

[1 : 1 4] But on neither occasion did it really feel like I was in exile. The time I really felt like an exile was when I became a Christian. I'd been brought up by wonderful, loving parents, but we weren't a Christian family.

And I heard the good news about what Jesus had done for me, that he died for me to take my sin and to save me from the punishment that I deserved. It was through a friend in my early 20s.

And I was born again by hearing of the imperishable and abiding word of God. It was at that point that I felt really like an exile, different from everyone around me, much more so than by moving country.

So here's a question for us this morning. Are we living as joyful exiles as we face trials today? To help us navigate, we have one main point.

It's on the handout. And then we'll be looking at three sub points. So one main point this morning. Exiles, you have an imperishable inheritance. So stand firm.

[2 : 2 5] So we'll be starting off looking at verses 1 to 5. And then how do we stand firm? Well, by rejoicing, by focusing on our future hope, and by loving God's people, because we are born again by his imperishable word.

Exiles, you have an imperishable inheritance. So stand firm. Peter, one of the 12 disciples, is an apostle. That means his job is to speak forth the word of God.

He's writing to Christians, the elect, scattered throughout the Roman Empire. And he calls them elect exiles. I'm sure you've thought of that, verse 1. And they're to live for obedience to Jesus, verse 2.

Right at the end of the letter, in chapter 5, verse 12, Peter says he's writing to help his readers to stand firm. So let's have a look at the beginning of the letter, verse 3.

Peter describes God is merciful. And he's caused them to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus. And he brings them to an unimaginable inheritance, verse 4.

- [3 : 39] It's imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. Just think about that. God has rescued his people.
- He's been merciful. He's given them an inheritance. And one day, he will bring them home. It's an inheritance and relationships which will not perish.
- They're everlasting. Not capable of being sullied or defiled. It will never fade, like the latest bit of kit or clothing.
- And we will never have to worry again. Our future is safe. It's being kept by God himself. There's no chance of us losing anything of this inheritance.
- Verse 5. We Christians are being guarded by God himself. Have you ever dwelt on that fact? It doesn't matter how we feel when we get up in the morning.
- [4 : 45] God's power is guarding us. It doesn't hang in the balance. It's not dependent on us. God is faithful. It's like the most honourable and kind head teacher reassuring her staff that all will be well with the salary payments this coming term.
- She has the power to deliver on her promise. And so does God. He's totally trustworthy. And he's in charge. So stand firm.
- How? Well, let's move to these three sub points. First one. By rejoicing. So we're looking at verses 6 to 12 now. Verse 6. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.
- These exiles are to rejoice. The various trials they're facing are to test and train them. The trials were mainly verbal at this point in the first century.
- So very similar to some of the opposition we're facing. Their faith, verse 7, more precious than gold, is to be refined until the day Jesus returns.
- [6 : 04] These first century exiles will be finding life economically tough. They're strangers. They're being discriminated against. The trials, however hard, will help them in praising and glorifying the Lord.
- We too, in our time, face various trials, pressures, hardships for living as a Christian. That slight eye rolling at work.
- That cold shoulder at the school gate or with our extended family. That we could be so stupid as to believe in God.
- I've experienced all of those things. And I'm sure many of you have too. Verse 8. In case the reader hasn't got the point, Christians love Jesus.
- Despite the fact they haven't seen him, they believe in him with a joy. Let's have a look at the middle of that verse. That is inexpressible and filled with glory.
- [7 : 11] Wow. The first century Christians were to be joyfully looking to the future. Not bogged down in the difficult day to day. They had to have almost unimaginable joy.
- What might that look like for us in our circumstances? And next, we have the icing on the cake. Verse 9. This leads to the salvation of your souls.
- It's a picture of great joy and great rejoicing. The Christian has salvation. Eternity with the Lord Jesus.
- Now, I don't know what's been your greatest joy in life to date. Have a think. Perhaps some really good news. A good health diagnosis.
- Maybe a new birth. For me, there were a few hours of great joy last August when our middle son, Freddie, got married. And that was before the tiredness of the whole event set in, for me at least.
- [8 : 14] Now, that's a very poor illustration. This picture here of rejoicing is another level up. It's talking about eternal salvation, forever being with the Lord Jesus.

And how this salvation is revealed in there in verses 10 to 12. We'll have to skip over these verses slightly. But they show that this generation were very blessed to have the Lord Jesus revealed to them.

Salvation is through him. So, what about for them then and us now? This passage helps Christians to see themselves as elect exiles.

Fortunate to be living in the time of the revelation of Jesus. Despite trials, they can greatly rejoice. They have an eternal inheritance that nobody and nothing can snatch away.

It's the same for us too. We live in the same era of world history. We live post the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We too have this certainty that God is guarding us and our inheritance until he takes us home or he returns.

[9 : 31] It's as if we're part of the most incredible royal family you could ever imagine. Nothing or no one can take away our status.

If we're trusting in Jesus, we will live with God forever. We are living our spare life now, in fact. So, yes, there will be hardships.

But we have a glorious future and inheritance to come. And this is corporate as well as individual. Next, standing firm by focusing on our future hope.

So, we're in verse 13. Usually, it's best to go through a passage chronologically. But here, we're going to look forward a moment to verse 18 and 19.

So, turn with me to 18. You were ransomed. And skip to verse 19. Can you see? With the precious blood of Christ.

[10 : 30] What an amazing, glorious, eternal truth for the Christian. And it's so key to realise that Jesus has done it all for us, for me.

He died for me to set me free. His blood was spilt for me. And it's remembering and clinging to that that helps us to live for him in grateful response.

Having reminded ourselves of that forever truth, we can now go back to Peter's argument. So, go back to verse 13 now. Peter starts with a therefore.

Because his readers have this salvation, Peter wants them to prepare their minds for action. If we don't prepare our minds to do something, we can't do it.

In the book of Exodus, this word was used to describe girding up your loins. When they were leaving Egypt, they were to hitch up their tunics, stick them in their belts, so they could run.

[11 : 37] The Israelites were to prepare their minds to flee from God's enemies and go to the promised land. And the first century Christians were also to be prepared.

And sober-minded, did you spot that? This is a serious business. Set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Have you ever considered what setting your hope fully on something looks like? It's about focus. I recently heard a podcast about two of Britain's best-known ever middle-distance runners.

I'm probably giving away my age here. Seb Coe and Steve Ovett. In the 1980s, they won lots of gold medals. And one striking thing was that both of them trained on Christmas Day.

I can't actually imagine doing that. But they were really focused. They were setting their hope fully on that gold medal. So much so that it affected how they lived in the present.

[12 : 46] Even if it meant training on December the 25th. They were sober-minded and girding up their loins and preparing their minds for action.

We too are to set our hope fully on Jesus and his eternal kingdom. And that will affect how we live in the present. Look with me at verse 14.

We are God's children. In response to his lavish sacrifice for us, we'll want to live obediently for him. Not for the passions we ran after before we were saved.

That was ignorance. And verse 15. God is holy. So we will want to show the family likeness. If you're a family member, look at verse 17.

Then fear the right person. This is our spare life. This exile. We're to live as he would want us to.

[13 : 52] And now we come back to verse 18. We know the truth. We know whom to fear. Who to be in awe of. We know that it's all about him.

He has rescued us. Not with perishable things, but with something much more precious. The blood of God himself. Jesus, the lamb without blemish or spot.

Verse 19. It's a truly marvellous thing to know. And that we are so special. That Jesus, the creator of the universe, died to save me, and you, and anyone else who will repent and believe.

It's unconditional love at its very greatest. Verse 20. Look down. He, that's Jesus, was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest.

That's given a body. For the sake of his people. And God the Father raised him from the lowest place, from the dead, to the highest place, to his glorious throne, so that believers might place their faith, their hope, fully in God.

[15 : 07] Nothing else. Can you see where he lands in verse 21? So your faith and hope are in God. A hymn comes to my mind here.

When God graciously opened my eyes in the 1980s, there was a hymn around. It was a really popular one. In fact, we're going to sing it later. It's a Graham Kendrick.

And some of the words go like this. Hands that flung stars into space, to cruel nails surrendered. This is our God, the servant king. I find the words very powerful.

And Jesus is that servant king. So we can call on God as Father. Our hope and faith are in him.

Verse 21. What an amazing peace and safety there is in knowing that we are so loved. God himself died for us. God himself died for us.

[16 : 04] And he has been raised to glory, where we will follow if we only cling to him. So what's our identity? Do we set our hope fully on Jesus?

Am I like the dedicated athlete? What might it look like for me? What is it that distracts me from living fully for Jesus now?

I know I get distracted by all sorts of things. Some of them are good. Family. Even serving in church. And I get distracted by things that are not so good.

Focusing on leisure too much. Or modern comforts. And for our church family, what would it look like for us to do this more and more?

Does Grace Church together model living lives in response to Jesus' amazing sacrifice for us? So final point in this session.

[17 : 06] Stand firm by loving God's people because you've been born again by his imperishable word. So we're starting at verse 22. God's people have been born again.

They are, as in verse 1, elect exiles. They're saved and kept by God himself. But they are saved for something.

Both verses 2 and 14 have already talked about obedience. Now we're looking at the question, how do we do that? 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 reminded that there are ways to live in response to God's mercy. Love one another. If we're God's children, let's act like it.

[18 : 09] What's really helpful here is the since. Verse 23. Since you've been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.

Those who put their trust in him have been brought to new life by God's imperishable, living and abiding word. Next, we have a quote from Isaiah 40.

Have a look at 24 and 25. All flesh, that's us, is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass.

The grass withers and the flowers fall. That's our experience of life. You don't have to live very long to know this is true. Most of us will have lost a loved one fairly early along the road.

And just reading the headlines or seeing the news, we see that life is easily expunged. And it's very painful. But God's inspired word in Isaiah tells us, verse 25, But the word of the Lord remains forever.

[19 : 21] What a contrast to our transient world. Now, we know all too well something of the turmoil in, for example, the Ukraine and the Middle East currently.

But God's word is imperishable, not fleeting. What's more, at the end of 25, that last clause, this word is the good news that was preached to you.

The readers of this letter have this imperishable word, and so do we. It's the same good news. So we're to love one another because we're born again by the imperishable word.

But how do we show that we love one another at Christchurch? How are we to think, to feel, to act, to pray differently, in line with God's word here?

How we use our time shows where our hearts lie. Where are our closest friends? Are they within the church family, or at least amongst believers? Supporting people in the church is a great use of time.

[20 : 29] Meals when needed, lifts places, giving away hand-me-downs, all these things speak volumes. Do we think about how to build one another up on a Sunday?

Do we pray for each other? Do we keep short accounts with each other and not bear grudges? It's so easy to hang on to bitterness, and I know I can be tempted to.

What about corporate evangelism? Most of you will know that every Christmas recently, we've been having a wreath-making event, and our main purpose is to share the living word with our friends so that they can have access to this living hope.

We want our friends to know Jesus, and we want to do that together. A world without God is like grass that falls.

But as Christians, we have real meaning in life. Christians have God's word, the good news. We've been born again by his imperishable word, and we're to go on loving God's people, and to tell others about him.

[21 : 35] The beginning of chapter 2, the first three verses there, they're a bit of a bridge, and Christians are to live obediently, and we're to long for the spiritual milk that God offers in his word so that we can grow up into salvation.

That was true for the early Christians and is still true today. We're to be nurtured by God's eternal word and to grow up in spiritual things.

So back to our question at the beginning, are we living as joyful exiles as we face trials today? Christians, we have an imperishable inheritance.

So stand firm. Let's rejoice, focus on our future hope, and love one another in the here and now. Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice.

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[22 : 37] Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice. Let's rejoice.

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