

Not Without Hope

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Preacher: Jon Moffitt

[0 : 0 0] You're listening to the sermon podcast of Grace Reformed Church in Spring Hill, Tennessee. To learn more about us, visit our website at gracereformed.org.

And now, today's sermon. We are currently working through both 1 and Peter, verse by verse. So we're going to pick up where we left off last week.

We're going to begin our reading this morning in verse 6 through 9. Hear the word of the Lord. In this you rejoice. Though now for a little while, if necessary, you may be grieved with various trials.

So that the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire, might be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Though you have not seen him, you love him. And though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[1 : 1 1] Father, we're going to pray for our service. But we're also going to pray for the families that are suffering and have been lost in yesterday's storm. Let's pray. Our Father, we are a weak race of humans.

Lord, may our church be a light to those who are suffering. And as your word has been sung and has been read, Lord, may we find comfort in your promises.

Lord, we ask for mercy upon the families that are suffering, that are feeling the groaning of this earth, the brokenness of this curse.

Lord, may our church be a light to those who hurt in our community. In Christ's name, amen. Please be seated. I spent a lot of time this week thinking about our verses and just in general about pain and suffering.

The complexity of suffering can be emotionally and mentally crippling. The existence of suffering, on one hand, reveals that there is a problem.

[2 : 2 9] And we all agree that suffering is not the intended outcome. This is why we call it suffering. Webster's definition, I think, helps in this.

It says, to endure death, pain, or distress. To sustain loss or damage. To be subject to disability or handicap. Well, you have to have something to compare that to.

And all of humanity would agree with this definition of suffering, which means there is life without that. And we're, as humans, you don't even have to believe in the Bible to accept that suffering is wrong.

But the Bible tells us where humans find the status quo. Where they find the neutral place. Psalm 19, 1 says, The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.

We can see a holy and righteous and wonderful God from creation. Romans 1, 19 and 20 tells us this. For what can be known about God is plain to them because God has shown it to them.

[3 : 40] For His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived ever since the creation of the world. And that the things that have been made.

God says everyone actually knows this because they're without excuse. So all of humanity knows that this world is not right. And so suffering is not its original intention.

It's part of our human existence, though, to know that our world has the fingerprint of something that is good. And yet we don't experience it in its fullness. And so generation after generation conclude that, for whatever reason, suffering is inevitable.

It's part of this planet's life cycle. And so, Shakespeare in Macbeth wrote, Each new morn, new widows howl.

New orphans cry. New sorrows strike heaven upon the face. I find it interesting how each generation has profound ways of describing suffering.

[4 : 49] Benjamin Franklin said, In this world, nothing can be said to be certain except death and taxes. Sigmund Freud wrote, We are threatened with suffering from three directions.

From our body, which is doomed to decay. From the external world, which may rage against us with overwhelming and merciless force of destruction. And finally, from our relations with other men.

This last source is perhaps more painful to use than any other. And C.S. Lewis, in a book that he wrote called The Problem of Pain, concluded, Try to exclude the possibility of suffering, which the order of nature and the existence of free will involves.

And you find that you have excluded life itself. Suffering is a part of life. And the world has been offering solutions to suffering for, well, since the conception of the fall.

And really often these solutions are just intoxications of some sort. Eventually, this intoxication wears off and we're still left with death, pain, and distress.

[6 : 02] Stress. The story of the Bible is about the victory over suffering. This is why we're here today. The purpose of the Bible is to prove there is hope in a hopeless world.

The evidence of the Bible is that Jesus is that hope. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 4. Paul writes something very similar to Peter.

And I want us to look at both these passages because I think they complement each other this morning in helping us understand Peter's goal. 2 Corinthians chapter 4. In the beginning of verse 5, Paul says this.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord. With ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shown in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The power to endure suffering. According to Paul, as he sets up and introduces this, and the joy to find the purpose of our life through death, he says it's not found in ourselves.

[7 : 22] He points us to a substance outside of ourselves. And he describes it as the light of Jesus Christ. Light in a dark world.

And I love how Paul words this next verse. Look at verse 7. But we have this treasure in jars of clay. To show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

We're the clay. We're clay pots. Clay jars are fragile. They break. And he says, we hold within this fragile body a power that saves the world.

And that is the hope. It's the hope that's within sight of us by means of God's power, not ourselves. We are weak people. But the power to save and to save us comes to us outside of our capacities.

And I love how he says this. The surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. Look at verse 8. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed.

- [8 : 30] Perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed. Always carrying in the body the death of Jesus.
- So that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake. So that the life of Jesus also might be manifested in our mortal flesh.
- So death is at work in us, but life in you. Since we have the same spirit of faith according to what has been written, I believe and so I spoke.
- We also believe and so we also speak. Knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.
- For it is for your sake. So that as grace extends to more and more people, it may increase thanksgiving to the glory of God. I love that part of our song.
- [9 : 33] Our pain is not in vain. These next few verses are ones you would want to mark in your Bible, highlight, possibly write down and put somewhere prominently in your home.
- Because I think that it provides for us the hope that we are looking for. It says this. Verse 16. So we do not lose heart. Though our outer selves is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.
- For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison. As we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.
- For the things that are seen are transient. But the things that are unseen are eternal. And there it is. The hardest part of living in this world, Paul says, is when we find our hope in looking past what you can see physically unto that which you can only see spiritually.
- I don't know about you, but this feels impossible at times. How do you keep your eyes on a God you cannot see, you cannot hear, you cannot touch?
- [11 : 04] This is what Peter is getting at. The power behind seeing past this world. Please turn back with me to 1 Peter chapter 1 so we can work through this.
- He says this, 1 Peter 1, 8. Though you have not seen him, you love him, and though you do not see him, you believe in him and rejoice with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.
- For the world, this is absolutely, sounds bizarre. To love something you can't even see or touch. This concept is strange to a world that the word faith itself is taking a new meaning.
- When we use the word faith, we aren't often using the biblical definition of faith. You know the word awful, its original meaning?
- It means to be filled with awe. I walked over to my wife's side of the bed this morning and she woke up and I said, you look awful this morning. And she said, really? I said, thanks for being my illustration.
- [12 : 21] You see, this happens to us as well. When we read Peter and he talks about faith, you know what concept we add to it that's not biblical? Blind.
- Blind faith. That's not how the Bible describes our understanding. I mean, Mark Twain famously said, faith is believing something you know ain't true.
- And during the holiday season and all the books and all of the movies, what are you told? Just have a blind faith. Believe. And it does sound foolish and it's a great tactic of the evil one to convince you that your faith really is something that's inside of you.
- Believe in your belief. Have faith in your faith. Peter didn't say it was a blind faith. This is why he points to the evidences of it.
- He says, he exists, but you can't see him at the moment. He doesn't say we hope he exists or maybe he exists. Peter was an eyewitness. He is commending their faith for someone he knows.

[13 : 30] He witnessed his miracles and his resurrection. So we would consider Peter to be an apostolic eyewitness account. Turn with me real quick to John 20.

This is a famous section. I remember preaching this. I enjoyed preaching through John. But John chapter 20, there's a really important part that the apostle brings to light for us as relates to this concept of believing in Jesus and finding our hope, yet we cannot see him.

So this is dealing with Thomas. Oh, Mr. Doubting Thomas, his famous title. And this is what Jesus says to him as he offers over to him the scars in his hands and Peter sees them and, or sorry, Thomas sees them and believes.

And Jesus says to him in verse 29, John 20, 29, have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those I have not seen and yet believed.

Now the reason he's scolding him is that Peter, I'm sorry, several of the apostles had already told through eyewitness that Jesus is risen from the grave. The eyewitness account according to Jesus should have been strong enough for Thomas to believe that he rose.

[14 : 41] Well, how do we know this? Because if you keep reading, this is exactly the point that John makes. Look at verse 30. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are not written in this book, but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have eternal life in his name.

John says, me, the eyewitness of Jesus, write this down so that you may read it, not seeing him in body, but hearing of his works through that which is an eyewitness and have eternal life.

If you believe the words of John, he says, eternal life is attached to them. That's powerful. And Jesus affirms this. This is hard for us because I think the word faith has been distorted.

So we need to have a biblical concept of faith. Faith is always in the evidence of a person and what he has done. We believe that he can accomplish this.

I heard this wonderful illustration this week and I'm gonna go ahead and steal it. Imagine there is a high wire across the Grand Canyon and you watch this man who has rocks in a wheelbarrow and he successfully walks across the Grand Canyon pushing this wheelbarrow across the high wire.

[16 : 10] And you see him do it once and then twice. You watch him do it all day long. He keeps going back and forth. And then he walks over to you as you stand by the high wire and he goes, is this impressive?

Of course that is impressive. Not only that, it's amazing. And then he asks you, do you think I could do it one more time? Well, you've already seen him do it ten times. He goes, yeah, I think you could do it ten more times.

I think you could do it one more time. He says, great. He dumps the rocks out and says, get in. See, that's what we're talking about as far as faith.

It's not a blind faith. It's not that we don't have the evidence that Jesus can actually do it and did it. He did. The question is, are you going to put yourself in Christ and be carried by him believing in the evidence that was written to you in his word?

This is not a blind faith. Don't let the world convince you that you're a fool. We have the evidence and we have every right to believe it. This is good.

[17 : 17] This is comforting because when we face suffering, we need something to hold on to. And Peter says, you can hold on to that which you don't see. And blessed are you if you do.

If you turn with me to Ephesians chapter two just for a moment, I want to talk about what has happened though and why this is so hard for us and why we're going to continue to have to fight for the evidence of Christ as our hope.

We're going to cover more of this idea of the evidences of our faith in chapter two so I'm not going to spend much more time on that this morning. But we live in a world and this is why I think it's hard for us as believers but we live in a world where the world is under the influence of Satan and Satan has put the world under the spell of what I would say the Stockholm Syndrome.

Stockholm Syndrome is defined as a psychological response where a captive begins to identify closely with his or her captors as well as with their agenda and demands.

If you would think about that in such a way how is this related to maybe possibly the Bible describing our world? It's right here in Ephesians. It's actually scary.

[18 : 44] Look at Ephesians chapter two and verse one and how Paul describes the influence of Satan who is the captor and has changed and twisted the minds of the world.

Look at verse two. Chapter two verse one. And you were dead so he's talking about us and our past and you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you once walked following the course of this world following the prince of the power of the air the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind and were by nature the children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

So he convinces us so much of his way that it becomes the part of what we want to do and we desire to carry out the evil. We take up his mantle.

And so I would say yes the world is under the trap and following the lies and they are trapped and carrying out the evil. This concept of the Stockholm Syndrome it came from a botched bank robbery in Stockholm, Sweden.

In August of 1973 four employees of a bank were held hostage in a vault for six days. During the standoff the author says it seemingly strange bond developed between the captives and the captor.

[20 : 07] One hostage during a telephone call with the Swedish prime minister stated that she fully trusted her captors but feared that she would die in a police assault on the building.

psychologists who have studied the syndrome believe that the bond is initially created when the captors threaten the captor's life deliberates and then chooses not to kill the captive.

The captor's relief and the removal of the death threat is transposed into feelings of gratitude toward the captor for giving him or her life.

As the Stockholm bank robbery incident proves it takes only a few days for this bond to cement proving that early on the victim's desire to survive trumps the urge to hate the person who created the situation.

The survival instinct is at the heart of the Stockholm syndrome. Victims live in enforced dependence and interpret rare or small acts of kindness in the midst of a horrible condition as good treatment.

[21 : 16] They often become hypervigilant to the needs and demands of their captors making psychological links between the captor's happiness and their own.

This is the last paragraph I found interesting. Indeed the syndrome is marked not only by a positive bond between captive and captor but also by a negative attitude on behalf of the captor toward authorities who threaten the captor and captive relationship.

Do you know how the Bible describes the world's relationship towards God under the influence of Satan? Hostile. Hostile. You see we live in a world where Satan at times uses tactics to then create fear and dread and chaos and then provide solutions so that we depend upon those solutions.

And we depend upon them so much that we begin defining and defending them even into the point of the opposition of our God. This is why when the Bible says do not put your hope in this world the world says you're crazy.

What else do you have? What else is there? If we all I saw it yesterday that there are people who believe that if we use AI there are certain parts of our bodies that we can change to live forever.

[22 : 46] We don't need God to live forever. We can do it ourselves. We don't need God to right the world of cancer and pain. We have the capacities of God-like miracles in ourselves.

Again we want to trust what we can see. We want to trust what we can handle not what we can't. This is what we face. It's so powerful and we can become in love with this world and the pleasures of this world because remember it has the fingerprint of God.

It does reflect his glory but it is cursed by sin and it is being rampaged by Satan and his minions. 1 John tells us this in chapter 2 verse 15 1 John 2 15 Do not love the world or the things that are in the world.

If anyone loves the world the love of the father is not in him there is nothing about this world that should draw our sacrificial affection towards it. We should not sacrifice anything for the world that's what he's saying.

For all that is in the world the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and the pride of life is not from the father but is from the world. It's the tactic. And so if you fall in love with it it's as if you're falling in love with the person who put you in the bank vault.

[24 : 02] Say don't fall in love with that person. They are manipulating your mind. Satan is manipulating our minds to trust that there is something of value in the world.

Verse 17 and the world is passing away. That is so hard for us to believe but it's true. Along with its desires but whosoever does the will of God abides forever. And what is it God commands his will to be?

Believe on the son. That's his command. That's his will. I know that my own heart falls prey at times. I look at the world and I think if we just did this or voted this way or if everyone could manage their lives and finances this way we could solve this problem.

That's the lie. We need to believe that this world is exactly as John says. It's passing away. Matthew 24 35 Jesus says himself heaven and earth will pass away but my words will last forever.

This is why it's so encouraging when Peter says the world around you is going to mock you it's going to make fun of your blind faith believing in this Jesus that's a myth and Peter says but yes if you believe verse 9 1 Peter 1 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls so our whole future rests upon this one man's word but just as a reminder the apostles also with thousands of other followers saw Jesus saw his miracles witnessed his resurrection and 500 apostles disciples watched him ascend into heaven after his resurrection they then went and died horrible deaths for one purpose they would not bow the knee to any other king than the king that sat on the throne they proved their faith by their death now that is a witness that is worth listening to no other story in the history of the world has eyewitnesses like this you see

[26 : 21] Mormonism was written by one man verified by one man Islam is the same but when you look at the Bible the Bible was authored by 40 different authors over 1500 years and it all is cohesively proclaiming the same truth and fulfilling the same prophecy that Jesus Christ is the Messiah and the king of king and the lord of lords it's not a blind faith church we've had 1500 years of evidences as it was written and now a total of 4000 years of proving it does not fail so it is true we may not see our king right now but we know he is the king and we see the evidence of our king in the lives of each other when we show grace and kindness and mercy and forgiveness when we proclaim these good news it says our spirit within us does what it manifests the truth to us and that from this manifestation to one another we find hope and we find comfort so church we need to keep listening to the wisdom of the word and not the wisdom of the world but the volume seems to be imbalanced it seems it seems like the volume from the world is so loud in our ears that at times our faith wavers that therefore our actions follow it is easy to fall in love with the ways of the world when that's what is the predominant message we hear every day you see the gospel frees us from our sin from this world into a sinless world with a loving king that is not accomplished by our own efforts but this is so contrary to our world they redefine what is good and they make it evil and they take what is evil and they make it good and then they point to your own capacities and your own righteousness they say you don't have jars of clay you're a steel pot you're a force to be reckoned with and we go and we crash our lives on the ground trusting in our own strength the reason why we remain here in this suffering according to

Christ before he left he says go out into all the world and preach the good news of the kingdom for those who are trapped in their sins can be set free they can come to life and come to live and teach them all that I have commanded this is why we're still here and we will suffer and die until the last human hears the gospel so our time and money and emotions are not spent trying to make this world better or our life better it's futile this is why Jesus says seek first the kingdom of God and all these other things the father will take care of you don't need to worry about them and so we have we actually now have the strength spiritually speaking to take the light of the king into dangerous places in our world because our bodies are consumable because they can't touch the soul so here's just a few points of application trying to understand when Peter says even though we don't see him we can have hope we can have joy in the midst of this suffering so I guess

I have three three points for us to think about as a church as we close this down this morning point number one is our hope is in what we currently see but is not hidden where do we see Christ in its clearest form not a trick question in his word in his word this is why Paul tells Timothy Timothy you're going to be tempted to teach and preach a lot in the congregation but I'm telling you make the public reading and preaching of the scriptures the primary focus of your gathering he says insist on it this is why I love how much scripture our church reads we fill your program with scripture so you can take it home be encouraged be reminded with good theology because it is the truth of Christ implanted into our hearts that keep us from believing in the lie of this world and so believe that the word of

God is your greatest hope but there is a mistake we often make is that when I talk about knowing the book people immediately associate that with personal seminary study time at home but this is not how the church has done this as a matter of fact the growth of the body in belief in Christ has always been a communal event if you go back and just read Ephesians chapter 4 which we won't do this morning Paul says when the body functions as it grows it builds itself up into the full knowledge and full love of Jesus Christ and it rests underneath his protection it literally says so that we aren't tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine and how does it start he starts in verse 11 it says that the apostles the preachers and the teachers administrate God's word the truth of the gospel and as it permeates in our hearts and we start encouraging one another and serving one another it is in that moment our church becomes mature in Christ so it is true and helpful and valuable for you to spend time memorizing and reading his word but where

God places the emphasis of the Christian life and the hope of the Christian life is in the gathered church around his word and this would make sense because you know those writers Paul and Peter when they're writing those letters they weren't going to the printing press there were no printing presses as a matter of fact the first 1500 years of the Bible was hand written why well because the printing press didn't come down to the 1500s the church had to study the Bible together because one didn't have access to it number two it was expensive if they did this is why they gathered at the synagogues so that the elders could go in and grab the scrolls and read the scrolls to them because that's where the word of God was housed secondly our hope is often faced with attacks from this world therefore not only are we studying God's word together but we're coming together to encourage and build one another up these letters that Peter would write he would write them to a congregation the congregation would sit there and hear the elders read from Peter to encourage them and then they are told like Paul says consider daily how to build one another up encouraging one another why because we are faced with the constant doubt of that which we cannot see and so the best way for the enemy to destroy us is to isolate us what frustrates me about modern

[33 : 42] Christianity is that modern Christianity has a focus on the individual life of the believer it's called pietism when we focus in on our own strength and our own capacities and I just need a good motivational speech on Sunday John and a good book to keep me going throughout the week but this is not what it says it says that we are to work as a family Paul has two times illustrations not only Ephesians but also Corinthians where he talks about how the body functions like a human body by detach my arm from the body that arm is of no value it's going to lay dead on the floor and I'm now weak I am with less capacity and so we must believe that the gathered church isn't nice it's not helpful it's life if we make sacrifice and discipline ourselves we do so so that we can remain under the word and that we can remain healthy caring for and building up one another which leads us to our third and final point this morning that I have no hope of giving you any other wisdom than that of the gospel often we think the gospel is for the sinner who has yet come to faith in Christ

I think it's interesting how Peter starts with suffering and isn't questioning their salvation he says the way through your suffering is remembering the sufficiency of Jesus Christ the gospel as a matter of fact that's how he starts the first seven verses are about how Christ is sufficient on our behalf I love how he says this in this you rejoice you're not rejoicing in your decisions that you made in your sanctification you're not rejoicing in how you resisted sin that's not what he says those are our good reasons to rejoice they're comforting to our faith every time we fight sin and temptation I'm thankful for that I don't like sin and I don't like what it causes but that's not where my joy is he says in this you rejoice what's that in who and what Christ has done for you church I'm telling you right now there are some dark moments ahead of us that's just because of life I'm not a prophet or the son of a prophet but I've read his word there's a lot of pain ahead of us they tell us of the pain the writers do and then they say to get through it look unto

Jesus the author and finisher of your faith laying aside the way and the sin so I think as we look at the world around us I think everyone can conclude I feel very uneasy where we're going I feel very uneasy about technology about how easy it is that we just embrace things like abortion and homosexuality and all kinds of sins I feel there's pain in our future but the only thing that makes sense to me is hope that is beyond the circumstances of our world to a God who says you will not be crushed you will not be abandoned you will not suffer needlessly your pain is not in vain proclaim the good news of the gospel and all God's people said Father we are weak scared and often feel alone wondering often what you're doing

Lord we want to make sense but struggle but in your kindness and in your sovereignty you have not left us without hope and though we don't see you right now we know we will and when you come you're going to wipe away our tears there'll be no more sin or death there'll be no more reports of storms of murder of hatred for you have the power to make all things new for those who are strong in our congregation

Lord may you give them the wisdom to help those of us who are weak and those who are weak Lord may be humble enough to receive the help and care and may we build one another up with the gospel and may we not trust in our own strengths for your glory amen thanks for listening to the sermon podcast of Grace Reformed Church in Spring Hill Tennessee where everyone is in equal need of grace to plan a visit or to learn more about us visit our website at gracereformed.org