

Living Word

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[0 : 00] I encourage you to open your Bibles back at page 983 to 1 Peter chapter 1.

As we said at the beginning, we're continuing our sermon series on the first letter of Peter that I began last week. And we're looking today at the second half of chapter 1. And let me pray for us now that we'll hear God's word in our hearts.

God, our Father, speak to us now, we pray, from your word, your living and enduring word. And we pray that your word will live in us and bear much fruit of holiness and love to your glory and for the glory of your Son, Jesus Christ.

Amen. Amen. Well, I'm no expert in investments, but investment advisors usually recommend some form of spread of investment to minimise the risk.

So you have a share portfolio with some shares of different sorts of companies. You have maybe some property investment to balance it. Maybe you have some futures market investments and so on.

[1 : 12] I'm sure some of you are much more experienced in these things than I am. But the general advice is spread your risk. Don't put all your investment eggs in the one basket.

At the beginning of this chapter, in this section rather, in 1 Peter chapter 1, we are in fact told spiritually the opposite of that advice.

Rather than spreading your risks and spreading your investments for the future so that you're countering risk with different sorts of investments, Christians are called to put all their eggs into the one basket for their future destiny.

And the reason for that, as we saw last week, is that our future is so certain, so sure, so guaranteed because of the resurrection from Jesus Christ from the dead, that there is no risk to spread at all. It's not the case of spreading out spiritual investments around so that we have a bid on like an each way bet. Not at all. For Christians, our total investment is to be placed on Jesus Christ.

[2 : 23] For there is no risk with him. For our future is absolutely and totally guaranteed with him because he rose from the dead. And we saw that last week, that the event of the resurrection in the past so ensures our eternal destiny that even now, in the midst of opposition or suffering even, we may be people of joy.

That's in effect the underlying idea behind the second half of 1 Peter chapter 1. That our future, as we saw last week because of the resurrection of Jesus, is so absolutely certain, nothing can take away from it.

It's imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for us, guarded by God. That there is no risk at all. We put all of our spiritual investment into our future with Jesus Christ because of his resurrection.

Therefore, verse 13 says, in the light of that, the outcome of that or the result of that, therefore, prepare your minds for action, discipline yourselves, set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed.

In effect, the language of setting all your hope is the language of investing everything totally in Jesus and his return and the grace that will be ours when he comes.

[3 : 53] That is, don't set some of your hope with him, but some of your hope over here, spread the risk. There's no risk. So set all your hope on Jesus Christ and his return and the grace he'll bring.

Related to this are two commands at the beginning of that verse. Prepare your minds for action. Literally, in effect, rolling up your spiritual shirt sleeves.

You know, you get down to do the dishes, so you roll up your sleeves to wash the dishes in the sink. Spiritually speaking, that's what's being said here. Prepare your minds for action.

That is, roll up the spiritual shirt sleeves of your minds. Start thinking the right way. And related to that, discipline yourselves. The next command of verse 13.

Literally, to be sober. Not just literally without drink, but spiritually. Not being confused or befuddled in your thinking, but rather being clear and thinking straight.

[4 : 58] Thinking in a focused way towards Jesus Christ. So getting ready for action, thinking the right way, relates then to setting all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he's revealed.

Know each way bet. All your hope focused on Jesus Christ and his coming again. The idea is a bit like a sportsman who's so single-minded in their training and determination and their focus on the goal that lies ahead.

That's to be us spiritually. Or a particularly good student who's so focused on doing their absolute best for the exam that's before them. So should we be with our focus and setting all our hope on Jesus and his return.

Nothing is to detract from that. Nothing's to deflect us from it. Nothing's to distract us from that hope. And as you remember from verse 3, we are born again by God's mercy to a living hope. Having been born again by God to that living hope, now we are to set our hope on Jesus who's to come. God's brought hope into our lives through the resurrection of Jesus and his mercy.

[6 : 12] Now having been born to that living hope, we are to focus it and set it on Jesus and his return in the future. Notice how verse 13 says, We're to set all our hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you.

The idea of the word grace is not sort of elegance like a ballet dancer. It's grace as in a gift. And the gift is this heaven that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading.

It's kept in heaven for us and we are being guarded by God for it. That's the grace. That's the gift that God has for us when Jesus Christ returns, when he's revealed at the end of history.

Now I must say our world and many religious people think that this sort of advice is folly. You see, even in the religious or spiritual world, there are plenty in our society who say, spread your investments around.

It's okay to have a bit of Christianity, but maybe add a few other sort of spiritual dimensions to your life as well. You know, a bit of an each way sort of bet, spiritually speaking.

[7 : 21] And of course, in our society, there are those who frown upon those who they regard using derogatory language of being an extremist in religion, as though focusing all your spiritual energy and putting all your spiritual eggs in the one basket of Jesus is being a bit too extremist, really.

Back off a bit. That's what our society often says, what our society thinks. Pick and mix religion is the order of the day in modern Western society.

Don't be single-minded and don't be extreme. And sadly, too many Christians succumb to that sort of thinking. It's far from biblical, let me say.

This is not the only passage, of course, that urges us to an absolute and total devotion to God in Jesus Christ. We are to invest all our spiritual eggs in Jesus Christ without any fear of risk at all, because the future is so certain because of his resurrection from the dead.

That's what guarantees it. That's what sets him apart. That's what makes it both unique and guaranteed. That's what makes sure our spiritual investment in Jesus will not be lost and not come undone and not lose value, not perish or fade or become defiled.

[8 : 42] And there's no other hope, either secular world or spiritual world, that is sure or guaranteed like this. As I said last week, by way of comparison with the heaven that's described back in verse 1, that's imperishable, undefiled and unfading, nothing else on earth in which we invest attention or money or whatever is like that.

Everything that we invest worth in in this earth is at some level vulnerable, at least, to being perishable or being defiled or fading, whether it's other people, houses, property, money, bank security, our job, our football or cricket team or whatever.

They're all vulnerable to fail, often with little notice. Only hope in Jesus Christ is rock solid guaranteed for eternity.

So we are to invest all our spiritual eggs in that basket. There's no other basket that will last. It's not a risky venture at all. It's guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

How do we then invest all our spiritual eggs in this basket? How do we set our hope on the grace that was coming to us when Jesus is revealed? It's very practical, in fact.

[10:13] That is, setting all your hope is not an abstract thinking idea. It's not being like Rodin's statue and sitting there just thinking and focusing and trying to concentrate all our hope on Jesus coming.

It's not an abstract academic sort of idea. Indeed, as we see in this passage and the rest of this letter, it's eminently practical in how we set our hope.

The first thing is being holy. We'll see a number of things in weeks to come. There are two today. The first of which is being holy in our practical conduct and life.

That is, setting our hope on the grace that's coming when Jesus returns, when we meet him at the end of history, means that firstly, we live holy lives. That's what setting our hope is about, firstly. So see what verse 14, 15 and 16 say. Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance.

[11:12] Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct, for it's written, you shall be holy, for I am holy. Now often, even Christians shrink from the idea of holiness as though somehow it's all sorts of rules and regulations, the prohibition of fun and things that we like, as though somehow holiness is just a long list of things that we've somehow got to remember.

But indeed, as these verses remind us, holiness has a marvellous simplicity. It is about becoming like God our Father.

That is, holiness is about bearing a family likeness. As obedient children, verse 14 says. That is, we've been born again, as verse 3 said last week.

In effect, into God's family. We're now his children. So this first command of being holy is about, well, bearing the family likeness. God's holy. We're now his children, so be holy like him.

As he who called you is holy, you also are to be holy, verse 15 said. Literally, the idea of holiness is being separate. Separate from something and separate to something.

[12:32] Separate from the world's standards. See how verse 14 describes that as not being conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. That is, we're separate from the world's values and standards.

The world is trying to mould us like a plasticine model into its own particular shape. We're not to be conformed to that pressure. To the values that are inundating us on television, in magazines and so on.

But rather, being separate from the world's values, more positively, we are separate to God. That is, we hold on to or cling to God and his likeness is what is to be the conforming model for us.

Rather than being conformed by the world into its secular values, we're to be conformed by God because we belong to God. We're his children, as verse 14 says.

He's our heavenly father. We belong in his family. We're to bear the family likeness. When I grew up, it was very evident that I was my father's son.

[13:39] Physically, the likeness is quite striking. Indeed, many years ago, he painted a self-portrait about when he was in his 40s, I guess, like me. And I saw this again earlier this year as he was dying.

And thought, my goodness, doesn't it look like me? It's a bit unnerving, let me say. Well, it's not about a physical likeness. It's about a moral likeness. God's our heavenly father and we are to be like him morally with his standards and character and godliness.

It's about becoming like God in character. That's what holiness is really about. We're being born again into his family. It's not trying to get in. It's being in already.

Therefore, we're to bear the family likeness. Now, we might well think, and many Christians seem to live this way, that if God's a God of mercy, as we saw last week, then in the end, he'll accept me.

So I'll just live my life as I can, as I want. At the end of my life, I'll turn away from sins and God will accept me anyway. What's the point of living rigorously holy lives now when God is full of mercy?

[14:52] In order to prod us out of complacency, see what Peter says in verse 17. If you invoke as father, the one who judges all people impartially according to their deeds, live in reverent fear during the time of your exile.

That is, your time on earth is your time of exile away from, in effect, the family home from heaven. Notice the combination. You invoke God as your father.

That is, you know you belong to God. So you're acknowledging that you're a Christian born again by God's mercy. Well, the corollary of that, Peter says, is not only is God your father, but far from being, if you like, benign, God remains the judge of all people who judges impartially.

Therefore, live in reverent fear. Not the sort of child trembling with their great ogre of a father, the sort of caricature you read in Charles Dickens novels.

But rather live in reverent fear, knowing that even God, your heavenly father, will judge you at the end of history. Now, what does this mean?

[16:06] It means that if we're members of God's family, as we are as Christians, we must not presume upon God's mercy. We must not be complacent in the way that we live our lives.

We must not think that we can get away with disobedience and lack of holiness. We're not to presume upon God's mercy as our heavenly father. For he's also the impartial judge of all Christians and non-Christians alike.

And his judgment we are to fear, for we, along with all, will stand one day before his judgment throne. Now, that seems to clash, in a way, with the idea of looking forward to the grace that will be revealed when Jesus returns.

For here, Peter has said, look forward to that grace, set your hope on us, in verse 13. And now he's saying that at the same time, at the end of history, you'll be judged impartially by the judge of the living and the dead.

How do the two ideas fit together? Well, that's what Peter explains in the few verses that follow. You see, God's judgment doesn't look like the grace that we're to set our hope on.

[17:19] But indeed it is. It's precisely the place where grace fully comes to us. See, on that final day, when we stand before God's judgment throne and we're assessed for our lives, God, in his mercy, will extend to us grace and declare us not guilty, acquit us of our sin, our failing.

That is, through Jesus' death and resurrection for us. As evidence of our faith and trust in Jesus' death and resurrection for us, we will live holy lives, striving to be like God the Father.

You see, faith is not an empty concept that sits in our mind. Faith is practical. It works itself out in our life. If we're trusting Jesus' death and resurrection, then we'll be striving to live holy lives, not being complacent at all, not presuming upon the grace of God on that final day.

So as people who set our hope on that grace that is coming to us, it doesn't mean setting our hope on grace because somehow God will just say, you're okay, come in.

But setting our hope on that grace will mean striving to live holy lives here and now as we look forward to the mercy of God on that final judgment day.

[18:38] You see, the mercy that will come to us on that final day comes at a high price. It's not cheap for God, though it's free for us. The language Peter uses is the language of a ransom.

So when a plane is hijacked and the hijackers issue a ransom note or when somebody's kidnapped in Baghdad and they issue a ransom note, some amount has to be paid either in money or the release of political prisoners or asylum or whatever it is.

Something has to be paid in order to liberate and free the hostages. That's the language of ransom. And the Bible uses it frequently to describe what Jesus' death does for us.

Jesus' death is the payment to liberate us from our sins and failings. Otherwise, we're under the sentence of death. But we're liberated from that destiny to a destiny of life because a price has been paid in Jesus' death.

God pays the price. We don't. We're liberated and we're beneficiaries of that price, that ransom price being paid for us. So see what verse 18 says.

[19:45] You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish.

That is the fulfillment of Old Testament sacrifice. He was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. You see again here the past, the future and the present that I made comment about last week.

The past is anchoring our future destiny. The death and resurrection of Jesus brings us redemption or ransom from our sins. It guarantees our life.

And so secure then is the future that it impacts the way we live now. So, so sure is that past event and therefore our future destiny that we are people of holiness now or we're to be people of holiness now.

So we are as holy people or striving to live holy lives, relating to God as our heavenly father, bearing the family likeness in his character and godliness.

[21 : 05] We're trusting all the time in those events of the past in Jesus' death and resurrection. And we're looking forward and trusting in that future grace that will provide mercy on that day of judgment and our arrival, our sure arrival in a heaven that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading.

You see, now the present grace is that we relate to God. Our sins are forgiven. We're given new birth. On that final day, that declaration of forgiveness is, if you like, absolute, a decree absolute.

God says on that final day in Christ his judge, your sins are forever forgiven. Welcome to the heaven that I've kept for you. This imperishable, undefiled and unfading place.

It's something we appropriate now because we know our sins are forgiven and we relate to God.

But that future grace is when that decree absolute comes into effect in the declaration of Jesus on his judgment throne.

That's why it's worth living holy lives now. So that we're demonstrating our faith in those events. If we're not striving to live holy lives now, then we're obviously not people of faith.

[22 : 24] Faith is just something that remains in our head. It's some sort of intellectual proposition. Not biblical faith. Not faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

And it's worth living holy lives now because the imperishable, undefiled, unfading heaven that's kept there for us and we're guarded for it is worth the cost of living holy lives now.

So great is it forever. So the emphasis here is on choosing holy living. Well, the second command about what it means to set your hope fully on the grace that's to be revealed comes in the second part of this passage from verse 22.

Holy living firstly and now love. Now that you've purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.

That's the second great command of this passage. The first was back in verse 15 about be holy.

This one in verse 22, love one another.

[23 : 32] Both of them, in a sense, illustrate or show what it means to set your hope fully on the grace that's to be revealed. Love. Mutual love is what verse 22 describes.

Brotherly love, in fact, is the idea of the word. Philadelphia is the Greek expression of brotherly love.

That's the word that's used here. And that's what is ours because we belong in God's family.

So therefore our fellow Christians are our brothers and sisters in Christ. We're to demonstrate brotherly or sisterly or siblingly love to each other.

That's the context in which we already are. But the end of verse 22 is even deeper than brotherly love. We have genuine brotherly love, mutual love.

Therefore, using a different verb for love, a stronger word, agape, love one another deeply. Now, this is not a sentimental, sickly, sweet sort of love.

[24 : 37] Not a romantic sort of love. But rather a love that is selfless and robust, is costly and deep. And notice there is no escape for us from this command either.

It's not an option for a Christian to be holy or not. It's not an option for a Christian to love or not. And the love is on God's terms, not ours. Both in the nature of that love and the object of it.

You see, it's very easy to love our friends. It's very easy to love some of our family. It's very easy to love lovely people. It's very easy to love loving people.

And there are other people who don't fit any of those categories. And when we belong in God's family, we rub up against them. We're to love them too.

I remember when, and I've used this illustration before, when I came to Holy Trinity, a former retired minister friend of mine in England wrote to me and he said, my words of advice are simple.

[25 : 42] They are three words. Love them all. That's the hardest thing. Don't want to look at anyone in particular. 90% of people are easy to love.

There are always some that are hard. As Christians, it's not an option to just love the ones we like. As a Christian, we're to love all, especially within the context of the Christian family.

Love all. Deeply. Love them all. Not just sort of superficial niceties. Deeply, generously, sacrificially, in costly ways.

Love them all. Love them across the generations, across the racial backgrounds, across the economic differences, across the cultural divides. For one of the great joys of being a Christian is we're thrown together with all sorts of people that we may never otherwise choose to be with.

Love them all. Is what, in effect, Peter is saying here. It's a real challenge to us, I think, here. How deep and how open is your love? How generous and costly and sacrificial is it?

[27 : 01] Or are you choosy about where your love is demonstrated, within the Christian family in particular? You see, there are no options here.

There are no excuses always out. We are to love deeply each other as Christian brothers and sisters. So we don't choose whom we love.

God chooses whom we're to love. We must love. And for the sake of the future grace, for the sake of setting our hope on the grace that's coming when Jesus returns, we're to love deeply each other. And just as the command to be holy in verse 15 led on to a few more verses grounding it in the past salvation, so too here the command to love one another deeply in verse 22 leads on in Peter's writing to ground it again in the salvation that is ours through Jesus Christ.

For we've been born of God, given new birth into this family of God in which he is now our father. Therefore, by implication, fellow Christians are our brothers and sisters. We have mutual love with each other.

[28 : 11] That love has got to be deep love with each other. But it's grounded in God's mercy of salvation to us again. See what verse 23 says. You've been born anew, not of perishable, but of imperishable seed through the living and enduring word of God.

And then to show how the word of God is living and enduring, he quotes from the prophets, all flesh is like grass, all its glory like the flower of grass, the grass withers, the flower fails, but the word of the Lord endures forever.

Sorry from the Psalms. That word is the good news that was announced to you. That's God's work in us. He's given us new birth through the resurrection we saw in verse 3 last week.

The practical means of that is that we've got new birth through the living word of God, which is not just talking about Jesus, the living word, but the scriptures as the living word about the resurrection of Jesus.

That is God's Bible, these ink on page that looks so out there is actually living and enduring. It's not just dead words on a bit of paper, but rather as those words of the gospel come to us and confront us, they actually become in a sense within us, like a seed that begins to grow within, giving us new life and ultimately bearing much fruit for the glory of God in holiness and love.

[29 : 35] You see, Peter's words at the end of this chapter about how we come to faith through the word of God show us just how powerful the Bible is. But it's not dead words, old and musty, dusty words to leave on a top shelf somewhere or in the bottom drawer.

But when we read God's word of the gospel, we are actually being confronted with something very powerful indeed. It is living and enduring. It's more long-lasting than human life and more long-lasting than anything else on earth.

So when we read the Bible, compared to any other thing that we read, we are reading something very powerful, which is another reason why we encourage you to read it each day and encourage you to use daily Bible reading notes to help you understand it and to grow from it.

Well then, to conclude, someday each one of us will be called to give account before Jesus the judge on his throne.

Some of us spend more time preparing for our retirement on earth than we do for our eternal destiny in heaven. Our retirement on earth is full of uncertainty at every score, economic, physical, etc.

[30 : 51] Relational. Our eternal destiny is totally secure. It ought to devote our attention in preparation as we set all of our hope on it and on Jesus' return.

And that will mean practically here and now on earth living holy lives and loving one another deeply. And more things to come as the rest of this letter will unfold in the weeks ahead.

You see, because that grace that is coming to us when Jesus returns is sure and is certain, rock solid guaranteed, then it is absolutely worth living holy lives now and it is absolutely worth living loving lives now.

That is, don't hold back on the holiness and love thinking, well, let's have a bit of an each way bet here. If this world is all there is, then I might as well live it up. But just in case it's not, well, I'll have a bit of holiness and a bit of love on some good days like a Sunday morning.

I remember my old year 10 history teacher saying, well, I sort of do go to church because if there is a God, then at least I'm on his side by going to church. But if there isn't, well, the rest of my life is sort of, you know, I'm enjoying it.

[32 : 06] Well, that's not how we're to be at all. We're to be rigorously holy and rigorously loving because we know that it is true because it's based on the resurrection. We know that the grace that's coming to us is rock solid and guaranteed.

We know that heaven's imperishable, undefiled and unfading. It's an investment that is worth all our eggs in that basket. It will not let us down. You won't be a bunny if you put all your eggs in the basket of Jesus Christ.

For the rewards are real. They're also out of this world. Let's pray. God, our Father, we pray with thankful hearts that by your mercy and the resurrection of Jesus, you brought us into your family and secured an eternal grace and destiny for us.

But we pray that your living and enduring word will bear fruit for your glory in our lives, that we may be holy as you are holy, that we may love deeply as you have loved us deeply.

We pray this, Lord God, for the sake of Jesus, our Saviour. And Amen.