

Resurrection Hope

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[0 : 00] This is the AM service on April the 12th, 1998. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled Resurrection Hope and is from 1 Peter chapter 1 verses 1 to 12.

Every day somewhere a young person suicides without hope. Every day somewhere a doctor tells a patient there is no hope.

Every day somewhere a job application is turned down and somebody leaves the place without hope. Every day somewhere a teenager is condemned to spend another night on the streets, unable to break the homeless, hopeless cycle.

Every day somewhere a relationship breaks down and somebody feels without hope. Just Friday afternoon somebody rang me, somebody I don't know.

[1 : 16] A relationship had broken down and he felt hopeless, needed somebody to talk to. Ours is a world of fragile hope. We rejoice at the opportunities in Northern Ireland but we know that the hope there is still fragile.

Everything on which we place our hope in this world is vulnerable. Whether it's our health, our jobs, our wealth, our house, our family, our security, even our lives.

They're vulnerable. And for many people in our world, hope is little more than wishful thinking or extreme optimism. The optimists say where there's life there's hope.

But we pessimists think otherwise. The first letter of Peter is a letter of hope. After his initial introduction, he introduces himself as an apostle.

He declares to whom he's writing churches in the first century AD in what is modern day Turkey. Peter then goes on from verse 3 to declare his hope as a Christian person.

[2 : 32] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By his great mercy, he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

This is more than wishful thinking. This is more than extreme optimism. For Peter, his Christian hope, was sure and certain. He describes it as a living hope and it's based on the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It is anchored in a real historical event. For Peter, Jesus' death was a hopeless event. It merely confirmed and cemented his own failure in denying Jesus, in effect betraying Jesus, failing to heed Jesus' warnings and exhortations to pray.

It left him a despairing disciple. And when the cock crowed, it did not herald the dawn of hope, but rather a dawn of despondency.

But three days later, the empty tomb changed all that. It threw Peter's turmoil upside down. It meant that his despair gave way to real and tangible hope. For soon after the resurrection, he met Jesus on a beach over breakfast and Jesus restored him, forgave him for his sins and denial.

[3 : 49] And therein Peter found real, tangible, living hope through Jesus Christ risen from the dead. His hope was reborn by his living Lord.

For Jesus himself, the person, is Peter's living hope. No wonder he praises God when he says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

A statement of great praise because he knows the hope that he's received through Jesus' resurrection from the dead. But Peter is not telling his readership what is his and his alone.

He is sharing what is the experience of every Christian, whether or not they've met the living Lord on a beach or not. For Jesus did not only rise that first Easter day, but Christians rose to new life in and through him.

And because Jesus lives, we also as Christian people live. And that's what Peter is sharing with these Christians scattered around modern Turkey. For Peter, the resurrection meant that he was born again to a living hope, born again to a new life, born again to something sure and certain, a

future that was assured by God's power and goodness.

[5 : 12] The resurrection was its guarantee of all the things that God had promised. Yesterday I went to the football and I was hoping that Richmond would win.

my mother wasn't. Now I had some hope that we would win because we'd not done too badly the last two weeks, the last couple of years, we'd beaten Hawthorne and so on.

But my hope was just little more than wishful thinking at quarter time when we were seven goals down. But hope in God is sure and certain.

It is anchored in a real event and that real event is a guarantee of everything that God has promised. That all those promises will ultimately be fulfilled.

We can be certain and sure about that like nothing else in this life. That's what Christian hope is about. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[6 : 20] By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. He's given us a new birth.

Literally, we are born again into a living hope. The expression born again has bad press in the media. Whenever the newspapers describe a Christian as being a born again Christian they're usually referring to somebody they regard as being on the lunatic fringe.

Somebody on the extreme of religiosity and so on. But the Bible recognises and this verse underlines the fact that all Christians are born again. All Christians have received new birth from God.

We're not talking about a psychological experience here but rather what God has done through the resurrection of Jesus Christ for everyone who places his or her faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

We are not Christians you see by our natural birth. We're not Christians through our parents or through baptism or through coming to church or a past heritage of church attendance.

[7 : 24] We are Christians through the new birth that God has given us through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Whatever our Christian past is or isn't new birth is ours if we're Christians because God has given it to us.

And it's not our right it's not our achievement. Just like with natural birth we have no say in the matter so too in effect in the end with spiritual birth.

It is God's activity. Peter makes that clear when he says it's by his great mercy he has given us new birth. God's mercy to forgive us all our failings and sins not our right nor our achievement but God's initiative and God's mercy.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

In the Old Testament part of the Bible the part of the Bible that pertains to the history before Jesus was born the people of God by and large were the descendants of a man called Abraham.

[8 : 37] They came to be known as Israelites. And God promised those people an inheritance namely the promised land of Canaan the land that's still in the Middle East is being fought over.

That land failed for various reasons. That land of Canaan was perishable in that it was vulnerable to the attacks of marauding armies.

And if you read the history of the Old Testament you see that time and time again that land was taken broken part of it perished under the armies that came and attacked it.

Not only was it a perishable land but it was also a defiled land defiled by Israel's own sin and idolatry. Not only was it perishable and defiled it was also a land of faded glory scorched by famine drought plague and blight as acts of God's judgment against a sinful people.

In contrast the inheritance God promises Christian people you and I is imperishable undefiled and unfading.

[9 : 56] Nothing can take it away nothing can destroy it nothing can corrode it or corrupt it. It is all of those things imperishable undefiled and unfading and Peter says it is kept in heaven for you kept by God guaranteed by God guarded by God preserved and protected by God for us in heaven.

Compare that with all the rest of the things in our own life our health our wealth and other people and jobs and so on compare that with people's hopes for retirement of security there are no guarantees for any of those things in life they might look well but a doctor's sentence can be sharply terminal they might look secure but fire or theft could ravage them but the inheritance that God provides is not vulnerable to a government tax it's not vulnerable to a failing bank it's not vulnerable to an act of nature a flood or a fire it is sure and certain and secure kept by God for us no moths can

eat away this treasure no thieves can steal it no rust corrode it and that is why for Peter and for Christians of all ages Christian hope is sure and certain and real a living hope not just wishful thinking but what good is an inheritance if the heir does not live to receive it what good is this inheritance kept in heaven for us if we never get to heaven to enjoy its benefits so not only is the inheritance kept by God so too are Christian people so Peter goes on to describe Christians in verse 5 as those who are being protected Christians are being protected by God so that they can enjoy the inheritance which itself is being protected or kept by God in heaven for us the idea of being protected here is very much a military or police type term being guarded or garrisoned the idea of protective custody that is God is shielding protecting guarding continuously his people so that they can enjoy the promises that he has for them in the future but God's power is nothing to presume upon nothing to take for granted Peter does not encourage Christian people to sit back thinking well God's about his business of protecting me and here I am safe and secure but rather the thing that ignites God's power to protect us is our faith so Peter says in this verse you are Christians who are being protected by the power of God through faith faith is the means by which we appropriate God's power and protection without faith there's no power of protection around us but when we exercise faith and trust in Jesus death and resurrection then God's power is a shield around us we can be certain of that assured of that but where there's no faith there's no power protecting us so Peter is encouraging these Christians to exercise their faith and trust in Jesus death and resurrection now all of what he says so far underlines the fact that for Christians we are to have absolute assurance in the things that God promises us and absolute assurance in an ultimate future in heaven with God if we're Christians and all of that depends on God's grace and mercy and power but Peter is writing to Christians who are under threat Christians who are facing the threat of

Roman persecution probably around about 60 AD less than 30 years after Jesus died and rose from the dead and for them their trials and tests and tribulations made it look as though God was absent God was faithless or God was weak doesn't this mean that their future is no longer assured doesn't it mean that God's power is now absent weak that Jesus resurrection is impotent to change and affect their lives now Peter directs them to the big perspective on life he says in this in the resurrection and the hope that you have you rejoice but even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials so that the genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed Peter is saying that your trials your tribulations the tests you're undergoing they're all temporary in the big perspective of things

[14 : 58] God's fulfilment and the realisation of heaven lies in the future and that will lie forever but the things that are difficult the trials the tribulations they're fleeting in the end they will pass away Peter is saying that the point of these trials and tribulations is a bit like gold that's refined by fire to make it pure throw a bit of gold in the fire and the impurities and the dross will be consumed and the end result is pure gold Christian faith he says is like that the trials the tribulations the tests the difficulties sent by God to purify faith to make it better than it previously was well for us Peter's perspective is perhaps a little foreign we don't live thankfully in a society where persecution is a threat to Christian people at least overtly and we do not want to trivialise our sufferings today sometimes people portray their sufferings as their lost job their flat tire and so on this is more serious than that yet very often

Christians today do not face trials and tribulations as they ought all too often it seems a difficulty comes along and people's faith buckles under pressure and wilts in the heat probably you've all met people like this the man who grew up in a Christian family was active in the Christian church married somebody from the youth group or another Christian continued in Christian fellowship and Christian ministry brought up children as Christians but then in mid thirties or thereabouts suddenly almost inexplicably gives it all away and leaves for another woman now the details don't have to be exactly the same but all too often that seems to be the case and what can be said for this man is that his Christian faith had never been tested brought up in a secure Christian environment Christian church encouraged and so on it was easy to exercise Christian faith but the first temptation trial or tribulation that comes along he falls for it because his faith had never been tested under trial and now it's found lacking well you can change the circumstances but I meet people all the time for whom that sort of thing has been the case as soon as something comes along that is a difficulty the trial the tribulation the test means that

God is given up on they leave in effect practical Christian faith abandoning God because they feel that God has abandoned them but Peter says that's not true God hasn't and doesn't abandon his people but rather the test the trials the tribulations they're sent by God to purify us to challenge us help us see the big picture of what God's on about in this world and in this universe trials you see force us to depend upon God they expose the lack of our own resources to deal with difficulties so it's a question worth asking ourselves how in the last year has our faith been purified and tested by God how in the last year has our faith become purer and deeper in God through the trials that we've undergone Christians who exercise true faith recognise that trials and tribulations are temporary even fleeting in the eternal scale of things they recognise that their promises their things sent by God in order to preserve us and purify us that we may be ready to receive God's promises at the last day and Christians also recognise that God does not always give us the answers to the trials and tribulations of this life maybe not even until the final day will we understand why things are but that doesn't matter because God is testing us to prove us to purify us so that we may stand and persevere to that last day despite all those trials and for the readers of Peter's letter they were far greater than our own despite all their trials Peter says now even now you can have joy in this life Christian joy joy just like oil floats above water so is joy the oil of gladness that floats above the watery tears of grief or the floods of affliction joy is something over the top and always over the top for the

Christian person no matter how deep the troubled waters underneath are so even in the midst of trial Peter says exercise joy now because Jesus is risen that's why we can exercise joy if the tomb were not empty we have no place for joy but it was and we do so rejoice in recent decades the hope of heaven has been a diminishing concern for Christian people you can see it in the way people pray and the things people pray about you can see it in hymns and songs generally speaking the older the hymns the more expression of hope of heaven there will be as a general rule and I think you see it in the content of sermons by and large around the Christian world you see it in Christian conversations heaven is no longer an important concern for Christian people and the result of that is that

[20 : 42] Christian life and ministry and witness is crippled it fails to persevere it fails to see the goal and cling on to it all too often it's sucked in by the pressures and pleasures and treasures of this world failing to see that God's treasure is even better in heaven Christians ought to be people who stand out in the world for their hope their clinging to real and secure hope not placing their hope in flimsy things that are vulnerable to the whims of this world but rather placing a firm sure living hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and because he rose know that whatever happens in this world God's promises are secure for eternity fading is the world's best pleasures all its boasted pomp and show but solid joys and lasting treasures none but Zion's children know Jesus resurrection a past event is the guarantee of the future promises of heaven and they in turn are the cause of real and abiding joy in the present now

Jesus lives and thus we live Jesus lives and he will guard us to the end Jesus lives and what joy that blessed assurance gives us each day while there's life there's hope no it's better than that while Jesus lives there is real living certain hope hallelujah may wait so I will go into and Ohio Thank you.