

Setting Your Hope

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the AM service on April the 19th, 1998. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled Setting Your Hope and is from 1 Peter 1, verses 13 to 25.

You may like to have open the Pew Bibles on page 983. We're in the middle of a sermon series through the first letter of Peter.

And I'm preaching on the passage that was read to us earlier from 1 Peter 1, verse 13, page 983 in the Black Bibles. I wonder whether you're the sort of person who puts all their eggs in the one basket.

You're the sort of person who goes to a smorgasbord or buffet meal and you just have one thing. Or are you somebody who hedges your bets and you have a bit of everything just in case there's something that you don't like and there's lots of other things that you don't want to miss out on?

[1 : 12] Are you a person whose investments are spread widely because you're minimising your risk? Or are you somebody who puts all your eggs in the one basket? Are you somebody who when you get a medical opinion think I want to hedge my bets here, I'll get another one and maybe a third just on the hope that there'll be a different opinion?

I remember preparing somebody for marriage and they thought marriage was such a risky business that they weren't going to have joint bank accounts and all those sorts of things.

They were going to keep all their things entirely separate just in case the marriage didn't last and sadly, of course, it didn't. Are you a person who puts all your eggs in the one basket?

Or are you a person who hedges your bets, keeps a bit here and a bit here and a bit here and so on? Christians are to be people who put all their eggs in the one basket.

So certain is the future Christian hope, so guaranteed is it that we can bank our all on it. If you were here last week, you heard the beginning of this chapter which stresses how absolutely certain and guaranteed future Christian hope is.

[2 : 30] That hope is described in verse 4 as an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading kept in heaven for you who are being protected by the power of God through faith.

Absolutely sure and certain. Nothing can decay it, corrode it, steal it or take it away in any other form. It is certain and guaranteed because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

No risk, no fear, so certain is Christian future hope that we are to put all our eggs in its basket.

Therefore, Peter says now in verse 13, because this hope is so sure, because it's so certain, because it's so guaranteed, therefore this is how to respond from verse 13 onwards.

Prepare your minds for action, discipline yourselves, set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. Two metaphors are used here and the first one has given me my first ever practical use for clergy robes.

The metaphor is literally to gird up your loins and in the ancient world, people would have worn long robes not dissimilar to this and every time I climb the pulpit steps, I have to hitch them up a bit, otherwise I'll trip climbing the steps.

[3 : 53] They're fairly impractical. But in the ancient world, people would wear things like this and when they were about to work or get ready for some sort of action or run, they would hitch up their robes into their belt so that their legs were freer to walk, to run, to work and so on.

Now the picture that's being described here is to gird up your loins, that is, hitch up your robes, but not literally, gird up the loins of your mind. We might translate it into roll up your spiritual shirt sleeves, that is, prepare your mind for action.

Get set to think. So often Christians don't think about the things of faith. And Peter is writing here to say, think about this certain and sure hope.

Get ready then for action. The other metaphor he uses in our translation says discipline yourselves. Literally it means be sober. Not just about literal sobriety, but rather spiritually thinking. Be clear-headed, single-minded. Not like on that ad where a glass comes down for each drink the person drinks and therefore their vision gets more and more blurred as they go out and drive and so on.

[5 : 08] But rather as Christians we are to think straight, to be clear-headed, not to be befuddled or confused about other things that might challenge Christian faith, but to have our faith sure and certain.

So that, as he goes on to say, our hope is set on the future grace of Jesus' return. That's the key to this passage, the second half of this verse.

Set all your hope on the grace that Jesus Christ will bring you when he is revealed. So in order to do that, we have to be prepared, girding up our loins of our mind, being sober in our thinking, clear-minded, single-minded, not confused and so on.

So that we can set all our hope on the future of when Jesus returns and the grace he brings us then. This is not an each-way bet.

We're not being encouraged here to place a bit of hope here, but just in case Jesus doesn't come, well, place a bit of hope here and a bit of hope here. We are to set all our hope or to set our hope fully on the grace that Jesus is bringing when he comes again.

[6 : 19] Just like a student studying for exams, if they're doing well, they set their minds single-mindedly, determinedly, towards the exams. They're not deflected or detracted or distracted by something else.

And they set their minds to that goal. Or like a sportsman who's training for a major event, all other things take secondary importance. The goal becomes predominant. That's the same sort of thing for Christian people.

That when Jesus returns, he brings grace with him for Christians. And we are to set our hope fully on that, like the student, like the sportsman. Nothing is to distract us, nothing to detract from it. Nothing to deflect us from it. And this hope to which we've set our minds is the hope that was described earlier in the chapter. The inheritance that's kept for us in heaven.

The glory of heaven, which is God's promise for Christian people. It's described here in verse 13 as grace that Jesus Christ will bring. The word grace does not mean gracious elegance, but rather a gift.

[7 : 25] God's grace is something that he gives freely. It therefore implies that what he gives is not something that we earn or deserve or merit or attain in our own achievement, but rather something that God freely gives Christian people.

And that is his inheritance of heaven, kept for us, guarded for us by God. You see, the hope that's being described here is not wishful thinking, as we saw last week.

This is confident expectation. Absolutely sure and certain is this hope because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. That's the guarantee for it.

Now, in effect, what's going on here is Peter said last week, you are born again to this living hope. And now he's saying, so set your hope fully on the return of Jesus Christ and the grace he brings then.

Born again to hope, now set your hope fully on the grace that Jesus brings when he comes again. Now, I must say, our world thinks this sort of thinking is rather strange and indeed folly.

[8 : 30] For the religious of our world, it's a pick and mix time. Pick a bit of religion here, a bit here. Oh, I don't like that bit of Christianity, but I'll pick that bit of Eastern mysticism and this bit of New Age thinking over here and mix it all together and you take what you like.

For most of our world then, who are religious, this single-mindedness is rather strange. But it reminds us that there is no place for Christians to pick and mix.

We are to be single-minded and determined in setting our hope fully on Jesus' return. Now, for most of our world, it's not all that religious. It's a secular world.

I think it's typified by the new slogan of the age each day. If you notice the last month or so, seize the day. Seize the day because there may not be a tomorrow.

Seize the day because today is all that counts. Live for today, for who knows what tomorrow may or may not bring. It's a fairly pessimistic worldview, I think.

[9 : 32] But it certainly runs against what is being said here. We are to seize not today, as Christian people, but the day when Jesus returns. That's where our hope is to be set.

Not today, but on that day when he returns, bringing grace for Christian people. Sadly, too often Christians succumb to the pluralist religious thinking or the secular seizing of today, as if there is no tomorrow.

But here we are being told very clearly that that future day is to be our all-consuming goal and hope. You see, no other hope is worth living for.

All the things that people place their hope on in this life in the end fail. Relationships, wealth, jobs, homes, health, even the Sydney Swans will fail.

Only Christian hope is worth living for. Only Christian hope is sure and certain because Jesus rose from the dead.

[10 : 46] Now what does it mean in practice then to set our hope on the day when Jesus returns? So far, Peter's been talking about your mindset, the way you think about Jesus' return.

But what now in practice will show that? Well, there are two things in today's reading. The first, is to live holy lives, to be holy in all your conduct, he says in verse 15.

Now holiness sometimes gets a bad press these days. But holiness is not so much a matter of rules and regulations, although there are some basic rules that comprise holiness.

But in essence, there is a simplicity to holiness. It is being like God. So Peter writes in verses 15 and 16 saying, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct.

For it's written, he quotes here from Leviticus in the Old Testament, you shall be holy for I am holy. In the end, holiness is imitating God, his character, his standards, his priorities.

[11 : 55] Therefore, it does involve some obedience to his rules and regulations. But in essence, it's becoming like the character of God. Christians are to model him.

The word holy has as part of its connotation being separated. Being separated from things, but also positively being separated to God.

Being separated from the things that are not of God, being separated to the things that are of God. From the standards of the world to the standards of God. From the character of the world to the character of God.

Peter expresses that in verse 14. He says, like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. That is, to the things of our world.

Don't be conformed, moulded like clay. The idea is of a pot of moulding or shaping clay. That's what our world tries to do to us in the way we think and act. Don't be conformed to the world but rather be conformed to God.

[12 : 58] Be moulded by the character and standards and priorities of God. That's what's to shape you, not the world, he says. For Christians, this God that we're talking about here and that Peter's writing about is not a remote, unknown, uncaring, harsh God but rather a heavenly Father.

the model of imitating God is a family model. Verse 14 begins, like obedient children and goes on to talk about be holy because God is holy.

God is the heavenly Father, we are to be the obedient children and that is as we exercise holiness and practice it, we are bearing the new family likeness.

Peter said earlier in the chapter that we are born again, not in a natural family but rather into a heavenly family. God has become our heavenly Father, therefore we are to bear the family likeness.

So often in families you can see physical family likenesses but here Peter is talking about a spiritual likeness to God. We are part of his family if we're Christian people, therefore we are to reflect the character and standards and priorities of God in our life.

[14 : 17] Becoming a Christian you see means changing life, changing lifestyle, changing character, changing standards from the worlds to God's. It's not an instantaneous thing, it's something that we need to keep practicing and developing throughout our lives.

Now you might think is striving to live a holy life really worth it in this life? Isn't God just going to accept us at the end anyway? Can't we have our cake and eat it too?

Can't we do what we want now and then enjoy the benefits of heaven later on? Peter warns against such complacency. He 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.

The time of your exile is literally meaning living in this world because we belong in heaven and this is in a sense an exile away from where we belong, away from heaven. Now Peter, what Peter is saying here is this, membership of God's family, that is seen when you invoke God as your father, ought not to make us presume that we stand okay with God.

It ought not make us presume that on the final day God will just let us in regardless. Just because we've invoked him as our father, just because we've claimed a family likeness to God, doesn't mean that we're just free and easy to do what we like and we'll be there on the day of judgment and ushered into heaven with a red carpet.

[15 : 53] Don't presume on this God who is your father because he is an impartial judge. He judges everyone, Christian, non-Christian, on that final day and he judges each according to their deeds.

His judgment, you see, we are to fear because he will expose our deeds of our life, our thinking and our actions. For we, like all people, will stand before his judgment throne whether or not he's our father.

And this raises a question perhaps in your minds. Peter has been talking about setting your hope on the grace that's to be revealed. That's a positive thing, a good thing. But now he's saying on that final day we stand under judgment.

Well, where is the grace in that? God's judgment hardly looks like a demonstration of grace. But that's actually precisely the point about what God's grace is.

God's grace that will be given to us when Jesus returns is not avoiding judgment but it's given to us in the midst of judgment. God's verdict on our lives then will be innocent, righteous, acquitted, accepted, found acceptable in God's sight.

[17 : 10] God's God's word then will be as Jesus warned us, that that verdict will be there at the end of time. Now there are plenty of people who invoke God as their father but they don't live for the future.

They don't set their hope on the grace that is coming to them at the end. And on that day the judgment of God will expose their pretense and the hypocrisy of their claims.

God's word then will be as Jesus warned his disciples and others, away from me you evildoers, I never even knew you. You see invoking God as father is not something to cause us to presume upon his grace but rather as we anticipate that grace so will our lives be holy now as we anticipate it.

None of us you see will stand before God's judgment throne. on our own merits all of us will be found lacking and deficient. But for those who rely on Jesus Christ, for those who begin to live holy lives now trusting in that final verdict because of his death and resurrection from the dead, on that final day the verdict will be you are accepted, well done my good and faithful servant.

Well how does this work? Peter goes on to explain it I think so that his readers understand exactly what Jesus has done which means that we can have confidence in his grace on that day.

[18 : 45] My favourite television program is The Bill. I've become an addict in the last six months ever since Ted and Morwen Watkins in Lee Creek introduced me to The Bill when I visited them I've watched it week by week and I tape it when I'm not going to be at home.

And the other day there was an episode on The Bill where a man had been placed in police custody for bank robbery and his wife kidnapped a girl and took her hostage demanding the release of her husband from police custody.

And if he were not released she would do something terrible to this girl. Now in effect what was happening there was that this woman was claiming that the ransom price to free this girl was the release of her husband.

Just like a hijacker hijacking a plane and they demand some price to be paid. Maybe the release of a prisoner, it may be being taken to a particular country, maybe the payment of money.

But a ransom price to be paid for the freedom of hostages, those who are entrapped or enslaved. Now Peter uses that sort of analogy, the word ransom, to describe what Jesus has done.

[19 : 59] The terminology he uses suggests that people of their own free will and volition and power are in the end enslaved or trapped in sinful living, in failure to meet God's standards.

And there's nothing that we can do to bring our own redemption or freedom from that. No price we can pay. We cannot become perfect in our own strength and all the money in China is not going to pay it, no matter of, no manner of gold and silver will not set us free from the lives that we live.

Only Jesus' death, his blood, is the power of God to free us from that hostage situation, liberate us, if you like, for living for God.

God. In the Old Testament, the people of God had to make sacrifices daily, weekly, annually for various situations and circumstances. And each sacrificial animal was to be pure and spotless. There was no point sacrificing an animal that was no good. It had to be the best that you had. That sacrifice was made in order to bring people forgiveness and release from their own sins and failures.

[21 : 14] that was then, if you like, a ransom price that was being paid. But Jesus' death is far greater than that. It's Jesus' perfect death alone that can bring freedom from a hostage situation of our own lives.

Now all of that is what Peter's talking about in verse 18 onwards. He says then, describing what Jesus has done, 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.

Jesus' death has transferred us from, in a sense, slavery in our own futile ways of thinking and living into God's realm and brought us new hope.

Jesus was destined before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him, you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are set on God.

Christians are those who trust God's promise that at the final judgment day because of Jesus' death, God's declaration about them will be innocent, acquitted, righteous, acceptable, not because of anything we do, but because of the blood or death of Jesus Christ.

[22 : 58] In the present, the grace we receive from God means that we know that we're forgiven, that we have acceptance by God and access to his presence through Jesus Christ.

We're born again to this living hope. But the future grace that Jesus is bringing will be that final declaration in the judgments hall of God. You are acceptable through the death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

And that's why it's worth living holy lives now for the sake of that future grace that is stored up for us in heaven. That's why it's worth shunning the temptations and illusory pleasures of this world for the sake of the pleasure of heaven on that final day.

Just like somebody who's so disciplined that they put aside the pleasures, temptations and distractions of this world as they prepare for the goal of an exam or a sporting contest or a diet or something whatever.

So are Christians to be those who shun the pleasures of this world that are wrong for the sake of the glory of heaven which is promised us in the future. Way up you see the cost of wrongdoing.

[24 : 06] It is not worth it compared to that future grace that Jesus promises us on the final day. This world promises lots of bad things that look good but they are not worth forfeiting the future grace that Jesus holds for us.

Choose holy living now Peter is saying because the benefits at the end on that final day will be worth it every measure. Holy living is the first thing that practically shows that we set our hope on the grace that Jesus is bringing.

The second one more simply is to love one another. In verse 22 Peter says now that you've purified your souls by your obedience to the truth that's a way of saying now that you've become Christians so that you have genuine mutual love that is love for the brethren.

It's talking of the word is Philadelphia. It's talking about belonging to a family and having love for other Christians. Now the command is love one another deeply from the heart.

A different word for love is used one that some suggest is a stronger word. Love one another deeply. This is not sentimental sweetness but robust costly sacrificial love and there is no escaping this command for Christian people.

[25 : 33] Do you love each other like this? Loving one another deeply from the heart? I remember two years ago when I began ministry here a retired minister friend of mine wrote to me and he said my one main piece of advice would be love them all.

very simple but also very hard. It's easy to love the lovable. It's easy to love the people who share the same interests same humor as you.

Those you've known for a long time. But Christian love is to be bigger than that. Broader than that and deeper than that. This is love for those across the generations. Across the ethnic backgrounds. Across the cultural divides. Across the socioeconomic differences and so on. We are to love each other. All of us. Here. Deeply from the heart. Not just those we choose to love and not just those that love us in return.

But selflessly. In a costly way. Loving each and every one of us. Deeply from the heart. And there's no excuse that exonerates us from this obligation.

[26 : 42] How do you match up? Whom do you love within the Christian fellowship? Is your love deep? Or are you somebody who shuns Christian fellowship?

Walks out the door? And just slips in the back the next week? This obligation is on each and every one of us. To love fellow Christians deeply from the heart.

My challenge to you is to take up this obligation. Practice it today after church. Begin to love somebody you've not loved before. The person who annoys you.

The person you dislike. The person you've never spoken to before. The person you've ignored. And begin to love them deeply from the heart. There are no excuses for any of us.

This is an obligation on every Christian. It's not an optional extra in the Christian life. But for the sake of the grace that Jesus is bringing on the final day it is worth the cost now to love each other deeply.

[27 : 48] Someday we will all have to give an account of ourselves before God's judgment throne. Many people spend more time preparing for retirement than they do preparing for that day.

And yet that day is more certain than a long retirement. But if we set our hope on the grace that Jesus will bring us on that day our hope will not disappoint us.

It is worth being scrupulously holy now. It is worth loving each other deeply now for the sake of the grace that Jesus offers us then.

You're not a bunny if you put all your eggs in this basket. Instead the rewards are out of this world. Let's pray.

Our God we thank you that Jesus is risen from the dead and that guarantees the future grace that he promises us when he returns again.

[29 : 05] Stir up within us we pray Father a hope for that day. Strengthen us that we may not be deflected or distracted from preparing for that day.

Strengthen us to live holy and loving lives. Being prepared to pay the cost of that for the sake of that grace which is guaranteed and certain for us.

Amen. lives for now.

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