

A Living Hope

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[0:00] We're starting a new series in 1 Peter today. And as I was preparing this series, I was reminded of jet lag. I don't know about you, but I get terrible jet lag.

I've flown from Melbourne to London about 12 times, and afterwards I'm always knocked out for about two weeks. You see, my head is in one time zone, while my body still thinks it's in another. I've tried all sorts of tricks and remedies, but nothing seems to work. 1 Peter is the cure for spiritual jet lag. It's written to Christians who feel the tension of living in two time zones.

Sometimes we call this the now and the not yet. So now we're forgiven of our sins, but not yet, completely sinless. Now citizens of heaven, but not yet fully there.

Now we're in a relationship with Jesus, but we don't yet see him face to face. Peter summarizes the tension of these two time zones with his opening words.

[1:07] Chapter 1, verse 1. To God's elect exiles. So we're elect, verse 2 says, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ, sprinkled with his blood.

To be a Christian is to be elect or chosen by God, all of God, Father, Son, and Spirit. But at the same time, there's a tension because we're also exiles.

To be an exile is bad. We've all felt like exiles these past few months, even more so this past Wednesday as we're back in lockdown. Exiles are a bad word in the Bible too.

In the book of Daniel, God's people were overthrown, exiled to Babylon, where they were strangers because no one understood them or shared their beliefs.

And normally when we hear of exiles, we think of persecution like Daniel and his lion's den or his fiery furnace. Or maybe our mind goes to the Christian genocide in Nigeria or to China, where the state sometimes burns down your church.

[2:22] They are extreme stories, but hard for us to relate to because we don't see that in Australia. But Peter shows us something much more common to us.

And as we see the ordinary day-to-day opposition in 1 Peter, we'll recognize our own stories too. In verse 1, Peter's writing to the exiles, the scattered churches throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.

Now they are the scattered churches of modern-day Turkey, and we are Holy Trinity St. John's. But if this was the 9am service of Holy Trinity Cappadocia, it would be a very sad church.

Sad because we're in lockdown, yes, but sad because once again this past week, our Christianity has got us in hot water. And so some of your neighbors this past week have falsely accused you because they don't understand your beliefs.

That's chapter 2 verse 12. Some of you were attacked by ignorant colleagues because you wouldn't join them when it came to gossiping about the boss. That's 2 verse 15.

[3:38] This past week, some of you parents were harassed by other parents at the local high school meeting because you raised questions about what they were teaching your kids. That's 3 verse 9.

Many of you were slandered on social media for posting something against late-term abortion.

That's 3 verse 16. And some of you had a friend's 50th birthday recently, but you were mocked by your friends because you stopped at only two drinks because you said you wanted to drive home and be fresh for church the next day.

And so they maligned you. That's 4 verse 4. And this past week, all of you were insulted by your friends as judgmental Bible bashers because, again, you tried to share your faith with them.

That's 4 verse 14. Now, they are the scattered churches of Turkey. We are Holy Trinity St. John's. But as Peter shows us this low-level persecution, we'll recognize our own stories in this country too.

And when the exile bit of our identity weighs us down, Peter reminds them of all the privileges that come with being elect so that we stand firm.

[5 : 01] This letter is spiritual medicine for Christians suffering the jet lag of two time zones. Peter's purpose is that exiles stand firm.

And if you're not a Christian here today, my hope is that you'll want to be elect. You'll want to be one of God's chosen ones, even though you'll become an exile in your own country.

Our passage today, which Marty read, it's quite dense. But the big idea is that we don't feel sorry for ourselves. So, point one. I'm going to pick it up at verse three.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why? In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope. You see, to be elect means to be born again.

The illustration is that God is a proud new daddy. He's sharing photos of you on Facebook the moment you came to trust in his son. You see, as sure as we were born into this world, so too we've been born again to live in another world.

[6 : 14] Hence, we're exiles of this home until we get to our new home. And Peter's not merely plucking up their spirits with a sort of cross your fingers idea, but actually, it's grounded in real events.

Verse three says, he's given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. You see, for the elect, life after death is not based on merely positive affirmation, but that Jesus died and was alive.

Our new birth is not wishful thinking, but guaranteed by an historical certainty. You see, Jesus' resurrection is not just his new birth, his victory over death, but ours too.

It's a living hope. Verse four says, we've also been born into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. I don't know if you've ever inherited anything, maybe a house or a piece of granny's old furniture.

Inherited things are usually old or too expensive to maintain. Lots of inheritance has to be sold off and the proceeds shared between your brothers and sisters.

[7 : 33] But our inheritance in Jesus is of a totally different order because it can never perish or spoil or fade. Across the street, as many of you know, I live in one of the brand new houses the church owns.

But in the first two weeks, there was heavy rain and it leaked through the tiles and discoloured the plaster work. It's a brand new house. I want to show you a prop.

So this, if you can see that, this is my most prized possession in life. This is my backpack and I've had it for 25 years this year. I had it since I was in school.

And I wish it looked as good as it did the day I bought it. But you can see it's a bit shabby and dirty. There's a big hole in it here. Clearly, it has faded.

When I started preparing this talk a few weeks ago, I took a banana from the fruit bowl. And when I bought it from Aldi, it was flawless.

[8 : 36] It was, you know, not a mark, perfectly yellow. But now, I've kept it in my office for three weeks. And now, I don't know if you can see that very clearly, it's so soft that there are fingerprints in it.

And if I push this any, hold this up any harder, my fingers are going to go right through it. So there you go. There's a banana. Clearly, it has spoiled. You see, whether it's new homes or our stuff, maybe it's inherited things like heirlooms or money, a defining feature of this time zone is that everything belongs in the same category as that banana.

But to be elect is to receive a different inheritance. See, God hasn't invested our superannuation on the stock exchange, which lost half its value this year.

Instead, verse 4, our inheritance can never perish. No leaks, no depreciation like a new car. There's no spoiling, going rotten or falling into disrepair.

There's no fading. Our inheritance will never become shabby. And until we get it, verse 4, our inheritance is kept in heaven for you.

[9 : 56] You see, heaven is a giant storage place. It's where eternal things are kept safe. That's where Jesus is. It's where our inheritance is too.

Peter wants the exiles to know that the people who hurt you can't get to your inheritance. Because right now, it's been kept safe until you take possession later.

And all of this is quite fantastic. Peter says, verse 6, But here's the thing. What if my faith perishes in the meantime?

Because we all know Christians who aren't Christians anymore. As verse 6 says, For a little while I had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials, And so they gave up following Jesus.

What if that happens to our faith? Verse 5, Who through faith are shielded by God's power Until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

[11:00] You see, whether it's insults in the workplace, Slander at the family gatherings, Maybe it's the cumulative effect of not meeting together on Sundays.

God's power is like a big shield in a battle. It takes the hit from all of these attacks on our faith. Peter says, A genuine faith won't miss out on inheritance.

Because God's power will shield us until we receive it. Of course, you may ask, What is a genuine faith? And the answer is our second point.

Verse 6, In all of this you greatly rejoice, Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith, Of greater worth than gold, Which perishes even though refined by fire, May result in praise, glory and honour, When Jesus Christ is revealed.

What Peter's doing here is showing us the proof of genuine faith. It's a very slick illustration actually, Because he creates a compare and a contrast with gold.

[12:14] Now, I've got some gold as another prop. Here it is here. This is actually Mark Chu's wedding ring. He gave it to me just before, He didn't give it to me, He lent it to me before the start of the service.

Now, let's say I wanted to prove how genuine this gold is. And so I set Mark's house on fire. Everything in his house will perish, From grannies, inherited furniture, all his stuff, Even the house itself.

But he doesn't have to worry about his gold jewellery. In fact, even if Mark and Elissa bought cheaper jewellery, cheaper gold, The fire will only make the wedding rings more pure, If the fire gets hot enough.

Actually, if we put everything in this world on a scale of perishability, At one end you've got grass and flowers, Which Peter will talk about next week.

They last a day or two. Then will come my banana. The banana lasted about a week. Then it'll be my backpack. That was 25 years. Then the house across the street, maybe 50 years.

[13:23] And in 100 years, maybe in 1,000 years, All you'll have left is this gold ring. But the shock is, verse 7, Of greater worth than gold, which perishes.

And so sure, gold is at one end of the perishable scale. It will really outlast us all. But like everything else in the world, Even this gold ring will perish.

Because in a million years' time, What will be left of this ring? But if your faith is genuine, You will still be standing, Shielded by God's power, remember?

In fact, Peter uses the same vocabulary For our inheritance and our faith. They are both imperishable. You see, just like gold, The more the heat is turned up on our face, The purer it will become.

Actually, Peter says, verse 7, Fiery trials have come, So that your faith will be proven genuine. Trials are God's way of refining your faith.

[14:36] When we're feeling the heat at work, Or amongst our family and friends, Peter says, verse 4, Our inheritance is kept safe, And so are we. His point is that no one can touch us.

And there's something about being invincible That encourages us to take more risks. Even if they killed us, We'd only go to be with Jesus.

But they're not going to do that in this country. But maybe the worst thing people could do here Is they cause you to lose your job. And yes, unemployment in Australia Is a terrible experience.

But when Jesus is revealed, You won't remember a short time of unemployment Or losing some friends. Because your story of standing firm Will, verse 7, Result in praise, glory, and honor.

I don't know how all that's going to work At the end time. Maybe when Jesus returns, There'll be large TV screens. And there'll be serious stuff on the screens.

[15:40] Like all the Christian martyrs Down through the ages. All of that stuff will be shown. But so will the bits from your life. When you were excluded at work. When you lost your job.

When your family were teasing you Because you were a Christian. When you were maligned For your biblical views On social media. And you did it all For a Jesus, Verse 8, Who you have never seen But you love.

And even though you don't see him now You believe in him. In God's eyes It's not gold That's the precious thing. But stories of when Christian faith Stood firm.

Verse 7 The genuineness of your faith Is of greater worth Than gold. And even though fiery trials Equals grief.

We don't need to feel too sorry For ourselves actually. Because genuine faith means Verse 8 We can be filled With an inexpressible And glorious joy.

[16 : 46] Actually joy is all Or the tone of joy Is all over this passage. Because verse 9 You are receiving now The end result of your genuine faith.

The salvation of your souls. And so even when it's tough To be a Christian We need not feel too sorry for ourselves.

There are real reasons to rejoice. For our remaining verses 10 to 12 They just basically drive The same point home. Let me read verse 10 Concerning this salvation The prophets who spoke of the grace That was to come to you Searched intently And with the greatest of care Trying to find out The time and circumstances To which the spirit of Christ In them was pointing.

Do you remember that reading Which Sue brought to us? Isaiah 53 Classic Isaiah passage Where as verse 11 says He predicted the sufferings Of the Messiah And the glories that would follow.

Isaiah was writing About a suffering servant He could predict that this person Had no beauty or majesty But he didn't know his name Was Jesus of Nazareth The way you do.

[17 : 59] Isaiah spoke of This servant being Pierced for our transgressions Crushed for our iniquities But despite his Intent searching He didn't know The time and circumstances Of Easter The way you do.

Verse 12 It was revealed to them That they were not Serving themselves But you When they spoke of the things That have now been told You By those who preach The gospel to you By the Holy Spirit Sent from heaven The you in these verses Means us We're in the same era As Peter's audience The prophets Envied us You see If Isaiah and his buddies Had a Bible time machine They wouldn't have gone To the Garden of Eden Or Noah's Ark They would have come To now To where we are Because you Had pastors And parents Who preached the gospel The gospel to you You heard things In your churches And read things In the New Testament That poor old Isaiah Could only Predict Predict For all his Spiritual gifts And prestige He would look at us Sitting around our computers Today Listening to this sermon

He would think that We are the privileged ones Even this morning We've heard that In Jesus We have a new birth A living hope An imperishable inheritance An imperishable faith The salvation of our souls We've heard the gospel Which End of verse 12 Things Into which Even angels Long to look We're so much more Privileged Than we realise Let me just finish With a story A few years ago A family arrived In Australia And they arrived In our church They started coming here Because we Have those English classes On Tuesday morning And then they came To our Christianity Explored course A little bit later Eventually They made their way To Sunday church Where they heard The gospel And a few months later They put their trust In Jesus But the trouble is That as soon as They did that That instantly Made them exiles From their home country They can no longer Return as Christians In fact If they want to See their parents Everyone has to fly To a neutral country Where it is safe And so This past few weeks They've had to apply For protection visas From the Australian government Because if they went home Their government Would persecute them As apostates A couple of weeks ago Andrew and I Had to write them Letters Or letters on their behalf To the Australian government Declaring that Their faith Was genuine And I said In my letter I said Well They were baptised They've got excellent Church attendance They give financially To our church They're members of A Bible study group But really What I should have said In the letter Was that During this fiery trial The family could have Made their lives Easier By renouncing Jesus But they decided

To stand firm Instead I could have said Here is a family Who are willing To be exiled From their own Home country For a Jesus Whom even though They have never met Or never seen him They love him that much We don't want to be glib About a life of exile But neither do we Need to feel sorry for them Because at the same time They are elect now Chosen by God A new birth A living hope An imperishable inheritance A faith that will not be moved And so now And so now for them There is

only Inexpressible And glorious joy Because they are On the road Now To meeting Jesus Face to face And As Peter says Receiving the end result Of their faith The salvation Of their souls So let me pray Father God

[22 : 22] We praise you For this letter And please Father Help us Not to feel Too sorry for ourselves Thank you that Even though we are Exiles That we are also Elect Thank you for all The privileges That come With being your Chosen ones New birth Living hope Imperishable inheritance Thank you that you are Guarding our faith Please Father Would we Keep our eyes On all these things And stand firm In the fiery trial And we ask these things In Jesus name Amen