

A Living Hope

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[0 : 00] As she said at the top of her service, we're starting a new series in 1 Peter. 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 thinks it's in one time zone, while my body still thinks it's in another.

And I've tried all sorts of tricks and remedies, but nothing seems to work. Well, 1 Peter is the cure for spiritual jet lag. It's written to Christians who are feeling the tension of two time zones.

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

Now we have a relationship with Jesus, but we haven't yet seen him face to face. Peter summarizes the tension of the two time zones in his opening words.

[1 : 06] Chapter 1, verse 1. To God's elect exiles. Elect exiles. So we are elect. First two says, chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, to the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood.

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

To be an exile is bad. We've all felt like exiles these past few months, even more so since last Wednesday as we reenter lockdown.

Exile is 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 a fiery furnace. Maybe our mind goes to Christian genocide in Nigeria or China, where the state sometimes burns churches.

[2 : 20] They are extreme stories, but very hard for us to relate to because we don't see that in this country. And so Peter shows us something much more common to us.

And as we see these ordinary day-to-day oppositions, we'll see our own stories of life in exile too.

So 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 churches of modern-day Turkey. We are HTD. But if this was the 1030 service of Holy Trinity Cappadocia, it would be a very sad church.

Sad because we're in lockdown, but sad because another week has gone by where our Christianity has gotten us in the hot water. So some of your neighbours might have falsely accused you this past week because they didn't understand your beliefs.

That's chapter 2, verse 12. Some of you were attacked by ignorant colleagues because you refused to join in the office gossip. That is 2, verse 15. 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 children.

[3 : 42] That is 3, verse 9. Many of you were slandered maliciously for sharing your views against late-term abortion on social media.

That's 3, verse 16. Some of you at a friend's 40th birthday party were mocked because you stopped at only two drinks. You told them you wanted to drive home, 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 family and friends as judgmental Bible bashers.

Because again, you tried to share your faith. That's 4, verse 14. As we look at the opposition of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, 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.

[4 : 46] This letter is spiritual medicine for Christians suffering the jet lag of two time zones. Peter's purpose is that exiles stand firm.

If you're not a Christian here, we're really thrilled that you decided to log in and join us. If you're not a Christian, my hope is that you'll want to be elect, be one of God's chosen ones, even though that will make you an exile, even in your own country.

Our passages say it's really quite a dense one. But the big idea to carry you through, the big idea is don't feel sorry for yourself. That'll keep you going through. Don't feel too sorry for yourself.

There's a handout, which I think is about above here, above my head on a link. There it is there.

And you'll need your Bibles open. We're at verse number three. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Why? In his great mercy, he has given us a new birth into a living hope. To be elect means to be born again, a new birth.

[5 : 54] The illustration is God as a proud new dad 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.

Hence, we're living between two time zones. And Peter is not merely plucking up their spirits with a cross your fingers idea, but his claim is grounded in real events.

Verse three, he has given us a 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 merely positive affirmation, but based on the fact that Jesus died and was physically alive.

Our new birth is not wishful thinking, but guaranteed by an historical certainty. Jesus' resurrection is not just his new life, 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 ever inherited anything.

[7 : 13] We asked that question during the break. What have you inherited? Maybe it was a house, maybe a piece of granny's old furniture. Inherited things are usually old. Sometimes they're too expensive to maintain.

Other inheritance has to be sold off so the proceeds can be distributed to brothers and sisters. But our inheritance in Jesus is of a totally different order because Peter says it can never perish or spoil or fade.

Across the street, as lots of you know, I live in one of the brand new houses which the church built. But in the first two weeks, heavy rain leaked through one of the tiles and has already discolored the plaster.

It's a brand new house. I've got a prop for you. This is my most prized possession in life. It's my backpack. Many of you see me wear it around the place.

I've had it for 25 years, so since I was in school, and I think I want to be buried with it. I wish it looked as good as it did the day I bought it, but it's actually a bit shabby here, and I think it's a bit of an embarrassment to my wife when I'm dragging this around.

[8 : 23] But I'm never getting rid of it. In fact, this week, my son's birthday, I bought him a backpack just the same. I hope it lasts him 25 years like it did me. But clearly, this backpack has faded, and now it looks shabby.

When I started preparing this talk a few weeks ago, I took a banana from our fruit bowl. I took the best-looking banana we had, and I kept it in my office for three weeks.

And now, here it is. It's so soft that I've actually put fingerprints in it. I think it's good for the bin, but Michelle reckons that this is good for banana cake, but I'll let her eat it.

I'm not going to try it. You see, whether it's homes or our stuff, whether it's inherited things such as heirlooms or money, a defining feature of this time zone is that everything perishes.

Everything belongs in the same category as that banana. But to be elect is to receive a different sort of inheritance. You see, God hasn't invested our superannuation on the Australian Stock Exchange, which lost nearly half its value this year alone.

[9 : 37] Verse 4, our inheritance can never perish. No leaks, no depreciation in value like a brand new car. No spoiling, no going rotten or falling into disrepair.

Our inheritance will never fade. It'll never look shabby. And until we get it, verse 4, our inheritance is kept in heaven for you.

You see, heaven is actually like 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 now it's been kept safe until you take possession later.

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

[10 : 44] What if I don't make it? Because we all know Christians who we grew up with who aren't Christians anymore because as verse 6 says, a little while they 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, We, through faith, are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that's ready to be revealed in the last time.

You see, whatever the attack on our faith, whether it's insults in the workplace, slander at family gatherings, maybe it's the cumulative effect of not meeting together face-to-face on Sundays.

God's power is like a big shield. It takes the hit, the hit to protect us and our faith. If we have a genuine faith, Peter's point is that we won't miss out on the inheritance because God's power will shield us until we receive it.

And you may ask, Well, what is genuine faith then? And the answer is our second point. Read from 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.

[12 : 04] 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, the test of genuine faith. It's a very slick illustration, actually, because he creates a compare and a contrast with gold.

And so I don't have any gold. My ring is silver. And so Mark Chu, he's sitting back there. Mark Chu has kindly volunteered. This is Mark's actual wedding ring.

It's gold. And let's say I wanted to prove how perishable this gold ring is. And so I set Mark's house on fire.

Now, everything in Mark's house will perish. Granny's inherited furniture, all his stuff, even the house itself. But Mark doesn't have to worry about this gold ring.

[13 : 04] In fact, if Mark and Alyssa, when they were getting married, you know, saved a few bucks and bought a slightly less than pure gold ring, the fire will actually refine it further, make it purer.

You see, if we put everything in the world on a scale of perishability, at one end, you've got, say, grass and flowers, which last about a day.

Peter will speak about that next week. Then comes my banana, lasts about a week, I reckon. My backpack and our stuff, say, 25 years. The house itself, maybe 50 years.

But in 100 years, maybe even 1,000 years, this gold ring will still be okay. And so the shock is, verse 7, when Peter says, of greater worth than gold, which perishes.

Sure, gold is at one end of the spectrum. It will outlast us all. But like everything in the world, gold is just like the banana.

[14 : 06] It will perish. Because in a billion years, what will be left of that ring? But if your faith is genuine, you will be standing.

Shielded by God's power, remember? In fact, Peter uses the same vocabulary for inheritance as he does for our faith. They are both imperishable.

You see, just like gold, the more the heat is turned up on a Christian, the more pure their faith becomes. Their faith is refined by fire, just the way gold is.

And actually, Peter says, verse 7, fiery trials have come. Why? So that your faith will be proven genuine. Fiery trials, tests of our faith, are there, are God's ways to refine us, mature us as Christians.

And so when we're feeling the heat at work or amongst our friends, Peter says, verse 4, for our inheritance is kept safe. And so are we. His point is that no one can hurt us.

[15 : 15] Because there's something about being invincible that encourages us to take risks, to stand firm. Even if they killed us, we'd only go to be with Jesus.

But they're not going to do that in this country. Maybe the worst thing people could do here is cause you to lose your job because you're a Christian. And yes, unemployment in Australia, it's a horrible experience.

We don't want to be too glib about that. But when Jesus is revealed, as he says in verse 7, we won't remember a short time of unemployment or losing some friends.

Because our story of standing firm will, verse 7, result in praise, glory and honour. And I don't know how that is actually going to work.

I don't know the mechanics of what that will look like. Maybe when Jesus returns, there'll be these large TV screens and there'll be all the serious stuff like Christians, Christian martyrs persecuted down through the ages.

[16:17] All of that will be shown, but so will the bits from your life. When you were excluded from work, when your family were teasing you because you're a Christian, when you were maligned on social media, all of that will be shown as well.

And you did it for a Jesus you never, verse 8, you never have seen, but you loved. For a Jesus who, even though you do not see him now, you believed in him enough to stand firm.

You see, in God's eyes, it's not gold that is the precious thing, but stories of when Christian faith stood firm. Verse 7, the genuineness of your faith, in God's eyes, is of greater worth than gold.

And even though fiery trials means grief, Peter's point is we don't need to feel too sorry for ourselves because genuine faith means, verse 8, we are now filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy.

actually, a joyful tone is the dominant sort of idea in these passages. Verse 9, because you are receiving now the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

[17:43] And so even when it's tough, we need not feel too sorry for ourselves because there are real reasons to rejoice now as well. in our remaining verses, Peter just keeps driving this 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 Isaiah passage which Sue read for us? It's classic Isaiah. And Isaiah in that passage he says he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow.

Isaiah is writing about a suffering servant but he didn't know his name was Jesus the way you do. Isaiah wrote that this person had no beauty or majesty but he didn't know the details of his life the way you do.

Isaiah spoke of him being pierced for our transgressions crushed for our iniquities but he didn't know the 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 things that have now been told you by those who preach the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven.

[19:07] Because we're in the same era as Peter's audience the you in verse 12 means us the prophets Isaiah and his buddies envied you they envied us you see if there was a Bible time machine Isaiah and his buddies wouldn't go back to the Garden of Eden or to see Noah's Ark or Moses crossing the Red Sea they would have taken the time machine to now because you had pastors and parents who preached the gospel to you you heard things in your churches and read things in the New Testament that poor old Isaiah and his buddies could only predict from a distance for all his spiritual gifts and his prestige he would look at us sitting around our computers listening to this sermon thinking that we are the privileged ones even this morning we've heard that Jesus in Jesus we have a new birth into a living hope an imperishable inheritance an imperishable faith the salvation of our souls things

Peter says into which even the angels long to look we're so much more privileged than we realise and so let's not feel too sorry for ourselves let me finish with a story a few years ago a family who come to our church today a family from our church they arrived in Australia a few years ago and they started coming to our English courses on Tuesday morning and then from there they decided to come to our Christianity Explored course and then after that they came to Sunday Church where they heard the gospel and soon after that they gave their lives to Jesus the trouble is though that that instantly made them exiles in their own country literally in fact they can no longer return home as Christians in fact if they want to see their parents they all have to fly to a neutral safe country to meet there and so what they had to do recently is apply for protection visas from the Australian

government because if they went home their government would persecute them as apostates and two weeks ago

Andrew and I we had to write letters to the government declaring that this family's faith was genuine and in my letter I said well of course their faith is genuine they were they were baptized they've got excellent church attendance they give to the church financially they're members of a Bible study group things that the Australian government would go oh this person ticks the boxes but really what I should have said was during this fiery trial this family could have made their lives easier by renouncing Jesus but instead they're standing firm for him I should have said here is a family who are willing to be exiled from their home country for a Jesus whom even though they have never seen him they love him that much we don't want to be glib about life in exile but neither do we need to feel sorry for them because at the same time they are elect chosen by God a new birth a living hope an imperishable inheritance a genuine faith and so now for them alongside the trials there is an inexpressible and glorious joy because they are on the road to finally meeting

Jesus face to face they are now ready to receive the end result of their faith the salvation of their souls and so let me pray as we finish father father god thank you for so many reasons to rejoice thank you that we are elect that we have a new birth a living hope an imperishable inheritance thank you thank you that you are keeping us safe as well and father thank you for the joy that comes even amidst the trials father please would we stand firm in Jesus would we fix our eyes on our inheritance on seeing him face to face would we love him and believe in him so much that we're willing to be exiled for his sake please father when the fire comes please help us to stand firm please remind us of the joy and the privilege it is to be your chosen ones to be elect we ask it in Jesus name amen