

Living Hope

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[0:00] And let's pray that God teaches us now from his word as indeed we've just sung. Lord Jesus we do pray that we'll meet you through your word, that your word will refine us and purify us so that we may be ready to meet you face to face on that final day in heaven. Amen.

Whilst we were probably shocked by John Brogdon's attempted suicide a few days ago and found that event on the front page of even the Victorian newspapers, it is of course not that uncommon an event.

Every day somewhere in our society and in many others around the world ends their life, their own life, without hope. Every day somewhere around a doctor will say to a patient, I'm afraid to tell you that there is no hope.

Every day someone finds yet another job application turned down and their feeling in their stomach, heavy stomach, is there is no hope of getting a job.

Every night there are people on the streets homeless and hopeless. Every day somewhere relationships are breaking down, whether it's in marriage or long-term friendships or whatever it is and there are people who feel that life is now hopeless.

[1:24] Every day there are people for whom their whole house or home is somehow destroyed by fire or earthquake, flood, tsunami or whatever.

Every day someone finds their investments or savings have been taken away or gambled away or gambled away or whatever it is. Ours is a world of fragile hope and for many people everything on which we place our hope and our trust in this life is vulnerable.

It is not in the end totally secure. Whether it's our health, our jobs, our relationships, our investments, our hopes of retirement, our security, our whole life, it is in many senses a fragile hope.

We've seen that grimly painted on the faces of those in New Orleans. You see the same in Harare, in Baghdad, in Aceh and so many other places around the world and even from time to time of those whose hope has been destroyed through various means in our own country and our own city.

Hope for many people is little more than wishful thinking, a sort of naive and simple optimism that somehow tomorrow will be okay and if we're lucky the next day might even be better.

[2:51] The optimists say where there's life there's hope. We pessimists are not so convinced. The first letter of Peter is a letter of substantial hope.

It's one of its undergirding themes and we'll see it again and again in the weeks ahead of us over the next month or two. After an initial introduction, Peter, as is typical in an ancient letter, says who he is, the writer.

He's an apostle of Jesus Christ. He describes those to whom he writes, those in what is modern day Turkey. He lists some of the areas or provinces of ancient Turkey or Turkey as we know it today and then he describes them in their relationship with God and offers them a simple prayer of grace and peace and abundance.

He then goes on in verse 3 to declare the theme of the letter, a living hope. 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. If ever there's a verse in the New Testament that's worth memorising, this is one.

[4 : 06] For those of you in families, this would be a great verse to go through the next few days with your children and to memorise as a memory verse. But whether or not we're in families, whatever our age and stage, this is a great verse to remember off by heart.

Peter says that by God's great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope. Not a hope that is naive optimism or just wishful thinking, but a hope that is living, a hope that is sure, a hope that is certain, a hope that is real, a hope that is true, a hope that is full of substance, a hope that is based in history, a hope that has real content behind it.

That's the hope that Peter is describing here. A hope that is, as we'll see, anchored in a real event in history. If you cast your minds back to Jesus hanging on the cross on the first Good Friday, there for Peter and the other disciples, it's the same Peter who's the chief disciple who writes this letter, there would have been a day of hopelessness.

All their hopes of Jesus the Messiah coming, perhaps overthrowing the Romans, bringing in the kingdom of God, bringing about the perfect life that the Old Testament looked for, dashed as he hangs crucified on a cross.

And the hopelessness for Peter in particular, reinforced by that painful memory of hours before, denying three times Jesus Christ and knowing him, mocked as the cock crowed early that Good Friday morning.

[5 : 47] It would be despair, not hope, that would be in their hearts on that Good Friday, 2,000 years ago. But on that first Easter day, the empty tomb and the confrontation with the risen Lord Jesus Christ would have overturned that despair into hope.

for Jesus lived and hope was reborn by the living Lord. Peter, who denied Jesus three times, was forgiven three times on the beach the next week as he was reinstated in effect by the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, at the heart of the living hope is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Peter's not writing here abstractly about some theory or theology.

He's writing about his personal experience. The risen Lord Jesus Christ is the heart of his living hope. He's experienced that.

But you don't have to have been there when the grave was empty and been in the company of the risen Lord Jesus in those days after the resurrection to know this same living hope.

[7 : 03] For Peter is writing to Christians not even in Palestine or Israel. He's writing to them in what we call Turkey who weren't there on that day, who didn't see Jesus hanging on the cross or the empty tomb.

But Peter is saying that his own living hope is theirs as well. He may as well be writing to 21st century Christians in far off Australia. We weren't there but the same living hope is ours if we're Christians who place our faith and trust in the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

And for Peter these events are 30 years later. It's probably the early 60s AD that he writes this. Jesus was crucified and rose in 30 or 33 most people say AD.

So here it is. Peter now a much older man 30 years later and still he has the same living hope. And what's more still he has the same overflowing praise of God.

For his statement about this living hope in verse 3 is not just a statement of belief but it's expressed as so often in the New Testament these things are as a statement of praise to God.

[8:10] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That is he cannot help but when he describes the living hope that is his as a Christian he cannot help but express it in terms of praise.

He is a man who for 30 years has been a Christian now since the resurrection of Jesus and he is still giving thanks and praise to God the Father for the resurrection of Jesus and for the living hope that is now his.

Peter's experience is not unique. It's not confined to those 11 disciples there at the cross. It's not confined to those who met the risen Jesus in the days before he ascended to heaven.

No, because Jesus lives, we too, 2,000 years later can have that same living hope that Peter is describing and writing about here in verse 3.

Peter says he's born again by the mercy of God into a living hope or in our translation given a new birth into that living hope. A sure and certain hope guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

[9:19] That's why this hope is so real and so confident because Jesus is really alive. It's not wishful thinking that somehow we'll win the ashes back next weekend. This is a sure hope, a certain hope of a guaranteed eternal life and destiny and inheritance because Jesus Christ really rose.

It's the same hope that the writer to the Hebrews describes is an anchor for our souls. What a robust image that is of what Christian hope is all about.

Not just some wishful thinking that somehow God will make tomorrow better and our heaven may be, if we're lucky, we'll be there. Not at all. Sure, certain, confident, assured hope because Jesus really rose.

The expression born again often has bad press and often many Christians are reluctant to embrace that term. Occasionally over the years people might say to me when they don't know me, are you a born again Christian?

Well, I say that all Christians are born again. Here is a verse that tells us that. If you're a Christian, you are born again. You've been given new birth into this living hope through the mercy of God.

[10:40] Every Christian is born again by God. You see, we're not Christians because we're born human beings. But one day so many years ago, we were a tiny baby held by our mother or our father.

That doesn't make us a Christian at all, whether or not our parents were Christian. What makes us a Christian is the work of God in our lives. It may be that we never know a time when we were not Christians in our lives.

That we've grown up from earliest memory knowing and trusting the Lord Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection for our salvation. We're born again, if that's our experience.

It may be that we can remember back to a time during which we came to faith in Jesus Christ. When we were 7 or 12 or 13 or 20 or something.

That is a general period of our life when we realised that we came to place our faith and trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus for our eternal destiny. We're born again.

[11:42] It may be that by God's mercy, we know the exact time. I've got a friend who says, I think it was in 1963, I can't remember the date in June, but sometime in the afternoon, on a date in June in 1963, he was born again, where he came to place his faith and trust in Jesus for the first time.

By God's mercy, there are some people who know the date and time. By God's mercy, some people might know a general period of our earlier life. And by God's mercy, some of us don't know a time when we've never not had faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

But the common factor is that by God's mercy, we are born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

We ought not to shy away from or be scared of the term being born again or given new birth. For it's not being human that makes us Christian. It's the mercy of God in our lives that brings us to faith and trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And if that is what we express in our own personal hearts, faith and trust in him, then we are indeed Christians and we are indeed born again. Notice how in this passage the emphasis is on God's activity in us and for us.

[13:01] In verse 2, Peter describes the Christian readers of this letter as those who've been chosen and destined by God. Not those who chose God and therefore chose their destiny, but those whom God chose and God destined.

And so in verse 3, our being born again is by the mercy of God. Not something we deserve, not something that we earn, not something that we merit by our noble life, by our generous life, by our pious life or religious practice.

No, you see, the mercy of God is what is required because for anyone to be born again, we need to know our sins are forgiven, that we are recipients of God's mercy.

If you think you deserve God's mercy, then it's not mercy at all. Mercy is always undeserved. And for any and every Christian, no matter how we came to be Christian, those who are Christians, those who are born again, are recipients of mercy.

Sins are forgiven by a merciful heavenly father. In the Old Testament, the people of God was largely the nation of Israel.

[14:14] For them, the promised inheritance was a geographical land, the land of Canaan, what is today Israel and the Palestinian Authority territories.

But through the story of the Old Testament, we realise that that land was in some senses perishable, laid waste by enemy armies, the Assyrians and Babylonians in particular.

It was a land that was defiled by Israel's own sin, its immorality and idolatry and apostasy over the centuries. You can read so many stories of that in the Old Testament.

It was a land that we might also say in some senses was faded from a good land flowing with milk and honey, a land that came to be scorched by famine and drought, by plague and blight and ultimately by exile as the people of God under God's punishment were exiled away from that promised land.

Peter even begins the letter by writing to these Christians in Turkey as the exiles of the dispersion, making a note that these Christians are scattered in various parts of what we call Turkey, what was part of the Roman Empire.

[15:28] We'll see more of that language of exiles in about three weeks' time from the second half of chapter 2. But Peter picks up on this idea of the Old Testament inheritance of the land and shows that for Christians our inheritance is not that land of the Old Testament.

Our inheritance not one day is to end up in the modern state of Israel or in Jerusalem, the land surrounded by the Med, the Red, the Dead and the Sea of Galilee, but rather that our inheritance is a heavenly inheritance, that in some senses the Old Testament land is a foreshadowing or prefiguring of a better and greater inheritance in the New Testament, a heavenly inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for us, a better inheritance than the Old Testament land.

That's what Peter describes in verse 4. We've been born again to a living hope and that living hope is this heavenly inheritance kept by God for us that will never perish or be defiled and will never fade.

It is absolutely guaranteed by God. That's a remarkable promise because everything in this world is in some senses perishable, defiled, fading.

losing value, losing life, becoming old and decrepit. There's no absolute certainty of anything in our life.

[17:06] Over the last 20 years or so we've seen banks collapse and big lending institutions or financial institutions collapse. There's no absolute guarantee for anything that we've invested.

We see people who lose their homes in all sorts of different ways, people who lose their family life for all sorts of sad reasons. We see people who are vulnerable to robbers and thieves or to gangs.

We see our own things gradually eaten up by moth or rust or whatever it is. But God is saying that this heavenly inheritance is absolutely immune from moth or rust, from thieves, from financial collapse, from corruption.

It's immune from tsunamis and from hurricanes, from civil wars and from terrorist acts. It's absolutely sure and it's absolutely certain. It is perfect and will always be so.

It will never lose its value and it is kept by God for us in heaven, guarded by God himself for us in heaven.

[18:16] That's a wonderful picture but it's only half the picture because what's the point of having a perfect inheritance guaranteed and yet we don't make it?

The next verse, verse 5, goes on to say that not only is that inheritance guaranteed for us, but that we are being guarded by God for it.

So in verse 5, we, Christians, are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The notion of being protected is that God himself has taken up garrison outside of us to guard us, to guard our hearts, to ensure our perseverance to the end to receive that inheritance that he's keeping for us.

But we're not to become complacent about God's power. It's not for us to sit back idly and think, oh, well, God's protecting me, the inheritance is sure, I'll just live life as I ought and I'll get there at the end.

[19:21] No, rather, the guarding of us by God is appropriated by us through faith. As you can see in verse 5, God is protecting us by his power and we appropriate that through faith.

That is, daily and continuously trusting in the death and resurrection of Jesus for our salvation, we are appropriating the power of God to keep us to the end of our lives.

Just as the beginning of our Christian life is an activity of God to make us born again by his mercy, so is our perseverance in the Christian life an activity of God, guarding us by his power which we appropriate through faith and trust in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now, all of this so far, the assurance of where we're headed and the assurance of God's work to get us there is to give the readers of this letter and us for this promise is not limited to them but is applying to us as well is to give us an absolute rock solid guaranteed assurance of our eternal destiny that is not an arrogance because it doesn't depend on us.

It's a humble but confident assurance because it totally depends upon God's mercy and power. Now, remember that in particular Peter is writing to a church facing persecution.

[20:59] We'll see more evidence of that in the chapters that follow, especially chapter 4. people. For them, no doubt, there was the temptation that under trial and persecution and opposition, they could well be tempted to think, where is God here?

Hasn't He abandoned us and left us? Maybe the trials and the opposition of the Roman Empire coming on top of these little gatherings of Christians in different parts of Turkey made them feel that God was weak compared to the might of Rome, that God was perhaps faithless to the promises that He had made.

Maybe they were tempted to think, does this mean our future is not secure? How can we trust such promises as this? Well, Peter fills in the perspective in verses 6 and 7.

In this salvation and inheritance and protection of God, you rejoice. Even if now for a little while you've had to suffer various trials, trials, the purpose of those trials though, verse 7 says, is that the genuineness of your faith may be found to result in praise and glory and honour when Jesus is revealed.

And the analogy in the middle of that verse is that gold which is precious is tested by fire to make it pure, to burn off the impurities. Well, our faith is even more precious than gold and these tests and trials and persecutions that you face are purifying and strengthening your faith so that it will last so that on that final day you end up giving praise and thanks and honour to Jesus Christ.

[22 : 46] Now, whilst we don't experience in Australia, by and large, the same degree of persecution that the recipients of Peter's letter originally faced, and maybe for that we can be thankful, there is still opposition to Christians in our society, we're still ridiculed of all those of any faith in our society and we know and hopefully in the next three weeks using that booklet in the notice sheet we'll discover more of how our brothers and sisters in Christ are facing persecution around the world.

When I was in China just a few weeks ago teaching, one of the students in my class had been in prison the year before for being a house church pastor, no less, no more. Another student had gone to confront the authorities the very week I was teaching as they were trying to close down his church and maybe he was facing imprisonment.

These are real things that our brothers and sisters face in other countries. We get it easy here. And whilst in a sense I don't want to trivialise the suffering that we face through ill health or loss of jobs or bereavements or whatever, God uses all of those things to test us and refine us.

Too often Christians have a simple view that God is only going to give us just easy and nice things. You can see someone who's written about that in the Melbourne Anglican this month. A very trite view of God, not a biblical view.

God actually does bring trials and tests into our lives for our good to strengthen us and deepen our faith, to purify our faith so that at the final day we will receive that wonderful inheritance that is guarded for us.

[24 : 26] That's God's design. You see, God's design for us is not just this life. So often we've actually shrunk our view of eternity into our life on earth.

Part of that is because we face such a good life in Australia that we get so absorbed by it, so sucked in by it that we don't see the eternal perspective that the Bible teaches us about.

And too often there are Christians for whom they've never experienced trial, they've never undergone that sort of deep testing, so when they're confronted by some problem, their faith just withers and dies.

They've never got deep roots into God's word, so when in a sense there's some sort of drought, they just wither and die like a little plant in summer. Peter's saying here that through persecution and tests and trials of various sorts, it's as though God is deepening our roots, strengthening us in times of adversity, indeed in times of temptation as well, so that we may endure and persevere and last to receive that unfading, imperishable and undefiled inheritance on the day of Jesus' return.

So don't resort to a sort of simplistic, childish view that God is like a benign candy man who just hands out lollies willy-nilly.

[25 : 55] God's got much deeper purposes for us in mind that will require suffering, sometimes persecution and difficulty, but for the sake of a glorious inheritance which awaits us and He is strengthening and purifying us so that we persevere through thick things.

It's the second thing to receive that inheritance in the end. That's what Peter's saying in verses 6 and 7 here to Christians who are being persecuted. Your hope is secure, this persecution is not a threat to that hope, it's actually God strengthening you to persevere to receive that hope on the final day.

It's not that God is absent, far from it. He's there, He's bringing about these situations. But notice how Peter goes on to say in verse 8, although you've not seen God or yet Jesus Christ, you love Him and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and what's more, you rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy.

See what he's saying here. Probably in the midst of persecution, the temptation is to say where's God in all of this, He's not here. Peter is saying though you haven't seen God and seen Jesus Christ, your hope is secure so you still love God, you believe in Him and even in the midst of your persecution you are filled with an indescribable joy.

That is so secure and confident are Christians of the final destiny and that great day of joy at the end that that joy spills over now, even in the midst of trials and difficulties and persecutions.

[27 : 50] That ought to be the Christian practice and experience today. See the connections then of past, present and future in these verses. The past was Jesus' resurrection and that is the guarantee of the end future hope of heaven that is ours, of a perfect heaven, a secure hope because of the past.

And because that future hope of a glorious inheritance is so secure, anchored in the past as it is, then for the present the joy of the future actually comes back at us now.

So that even in the midst of opposition and persecution, in the midst of bereavement and ill health, in the midst of strife or unemployment or grief or whatever, here and now on earth, we are filled with an indescribable joy.

It all comes from the resurrection of Jesus that guarantees the future that spills over into the present. That's how it's all connected here in these verses in 1 Peter chapter 1.

Too often it seems to me that for we Christians the hope of heaven is a diminishing concern. I think you see that in some sense reflected in the content of modern Christian songs compared to the older hymns by and large.

[29 : 10] There are exceptions on both sides, let me say. Sometimes I hear it in our prayers that our prayers are so caught up with the immediate that we've lost sight of eternity.

Sometimes you hear it in the substance of Christian sermons over time. There are some ministers probably who hardly ever preach about heaven or the heavenly future that is guaranteed.

I think we hear it in our own conversations with each other as Christians. We're so caught up with the here and now that we fail to have our eyes focused on the sure and certain hope of a glorious inheritance.

And therefore, because our hope is so concentrated into the here and now, the joy of heaven has little impact day by day on our lives here.

Of all people, Christians ought to be people who stand out for our heavenly hope and our eternal joy. As the hymn writer says, fading is the world's best pleasure, all its boasted pomp and show, but solid joys and lasting treasure none but heaven's children know.

[30 : 21] The optimist may well say, where there's life, there's hope. But the Christian would want to make that more substantial. Because of the life of Jesus, there is sure hope, a living hope, to which by God's mercy we've embraced through faith.

Let's pray. God, our heavenly Father, we do indeed give you thanks with joy in our hearts that by your mercy you've brought us into a relationship with you, given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

And we pray, Lord God, that you'll keep your promise not only to guard that eternal inheritance that is so perfect, imperishable, undefiled and unfading for us, but that you will even use trials and tribulations and persecutions so that we may have strong faith that lasts to the end of our lives so that on that day we may receive that glorious inheritance.

Even now we pray, Lord God, that you'll fill us with joy as we anticipate our eternal destiny. Joy and thanks to you for your mercy to us in Christ.

Amen. Amen.