

A living hope

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Date: 09 June 2024

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[0 : 00] Emily, thank you. With 1 Peter open in front of us this morning's question, in your trials! and through your tears in your life, will you praise God?

! That is, as we suffer grief, when sorrows come into our lives now, when we may even face hurt or insult or pressure or even death, is it possible that we might cling to Jesus more tightly and love him more deeply and keep going more joyfully, look forward more confidently?

Through our trials that we will go through and in our tears, is it possible that rather than sinking down into despair, you and I might grow up in genuine joyful praise to our God? In our trials, through our tears, will we praise God?

This New Testament letter, 1 Peter, it's likely written not 30 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, most likely I think 60, 64 AD. Peter is writing to scattered early Christian believers, just regular men and women like you and me, in small churches, I guess, dotted around the towns and villages of what is now northern Turkey.

And in verse 1, Peter tells us, we who believe in Jesus, who we are. This was last Sunday, to God's elect, exiles, we are chosen ones, we're elect, wow!

[1 : 41] At the same time, Christian believers are foreigners, we are exiles. We are the odd ones out in an unbelieving society.

Because what we believe, Christians, and how we behave, so often clashes with the culture we live in. Ow! In verse 3 onwards this morning, Peter dives into the body of his letter with a message for God's chosen ones, wow!

Who are, at the same time, odd ones out, ow! Then, then, and us today. And do you see, verse 3, just at the start here, that Peter begins with a call to praise.

Look, praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. We're to worship him, we're to bless his name, we're to sing his praises. Why? What for?

Like for us today at St. John's, this Sunday morning, with our individual pressures and stresses and hurts, and maybe feeling on top of that how tough it is to be a Christian in an unbelieving society, why praise him?

[2 : 51] What for? Well, check out what Peter says in this deep, thick section. Praise God, firstly, he says, verses 3 to 6, for a secure living hope.

And verse 3 is very thick and very meaty. Look. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. What for? In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope.

Now, I don't know if you agree with me, but I don't think that in Orchard Park and in Cambridge and in our society, we are overflowing with hope for the future. Are we? Just in our world.

And cost of living and climate and the COVID legacy and cancer and conflicts weigh us down. Do you know the UK birth rate is plummeting?

Because who wants to bring a child into this world? And anxiety and depression in the young rises in the face of a bleak future. There's a general election coming up, not far off, with big promises of change.

[4 : 06] But I'm not sure there's many people who really believe that things can only get better. I don't know if you think I'm being too negative. I think the truth is, in a world pockmarked with sin and discord and delay and decay, left to ourselves, the dreams we have for the future fade and relationships spoil and then we perish.

Or as the Greeks would have said, the despair of this life is followed only by the unending night of death. Except, verse 3.

In his great mercy, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has given us new birth into a living hope. Just see some bits here with me. Coming to Jesus Christ, it's not that we turn over a new

leaf.

I'll try harder. No, he gives us new birth. A clean, fresh start as we enter into a living hope. That is no longer dying hopelessness, but hope that is full of life.

This hope next, it's not wishful thinking. It's not manifesting. It's not manifesting. But a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

[5 : 28] So in history, in reality, on the first Easter Sunday morning, Jesus Christ, our Saviour, conquered death and rose to new life. And his resurrection in history is the bedrock, the solid ground on which our hope is built.

Our hope comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. What is this future hope then? He has given us new birth, verse 3, into a living hope, verse 4, into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

I don't know if in your family you are expecting an inheritance one day. Many of us really aren't. We're not holding out for something big.

But imagine it. Imagine there's a grandparent who owns a gorgeous house in the country with fields around. And they say, one day this will be yours. You will inherit all this.

An inheritance. As the people of Israel in the Old Testament travelled through the wilderness, they looked forward to their God-given inheritance. Their place in a promised land flowing with milk and honey.

[6 : 38] It will be yours, God had said. As Christian believers, our inheritance is greater still. In his second letter here, look, Peter teaches explicitly, in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

This is our future hope. Our inheritance, what God will give us. Our new birth given through the resurrection given place in a promised new heaven and earth.

A whole new restored creation in which we will live. And look, 1 Peter 1. This inheritance can never perish, spoil or fade.

Do you know this? In the new heaven and the new earth, there will be no perishing. No disease, no decaying, no dying for you, for anyone. This inheritance will never spoil.

There will be no conflict. No messing life up. No hurting each other. There will be no sinning, being ashamed, saying sorry, then falling again.

[7 : 51] No more of that, ever. And this inheritance will never fade. We've got a big rose tree in our back garden. It covers most of the garden now. And last week, 10 days ago, covered just in the most beautiful white flowers.

Now, a week later, those roses are turning, fading and falling white to shriveled brown. Faith, our inheritance, God's new creation, will never, ever fade.

This is our living hope. To be part of this imperishable, unspoilable, unfading future and place. And, says Peter in these verses, it is absolutely certain and secure.

Look down first. First, this inheritance is kept in heaven for you. That is where it's stored for you.

There is no safer place for your inheritance than with Almighty God.

And second, God will keep you safe until then. So don't think, I don't know if I'll be strong enough to keep going as a Christian until then.

[9 : 00] No. You who, through faith, are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that's ready to be revealed in the last time. Our God is very powerful and his shield is very strong.

And whatever life throws at you, he will shield you and protect you as you trust in him. Until the certain coming of this wonderful future salvation that is secure.

Take a breath after that. Is it good to hear that this morning? It massively is. That all by his mercy, all gift to those who come to Jesus Christ, an utterly secure, certain, wonderful, eternal, living hope. In a society without hope. This stunning, secure hope. Well, first off, it is so what our world needs to hear, doesn't it?

We've been talking in church a little bit about this little book, Have No Fear. And John Lennox, the writer of the book, he recounts being on the train to London, sitting beside a middle-aged man reading a scientific-looking text.

[10 : 23] This is what happened. I said, hello, are you a scientist? He said, yes, I am a metallurgist. I think that's a metal-y science person. How about you?

I'm studying mathematics. The conversation then lapsed. He continued his reading. I took out a New Testament and started to read it. Yet he noticed what I was doing, as I'd hoped.

And eventually he said, pardon me, but is that a New Testament you're reading? Yes, I said simply, and continued to read. After a while, he broke in once more. I don't wish to disturb you, but did you say that you were a math student, and yet here you are reading the Bible?

How is that possible? I answered, do you want to know why I'm reading the Bible? Tell me, have you got any hope? The effect was dramatic.

The man turned white and mumbled something about us all muddling through. I said, you know, I didn't mean that. I meant, do you have any personal hope? None whatsoever, the man replied.

[11 : 23] Do you? And what is it? How honest the man on the train. And what a brilliant opportunity to share something of this living hope with a man on a train.

Not just share, though, with the world around us, this is the hope that you too can have, but a hope to really, really believe ourselves. See, I think, if you're like me, do you know, when life is busy or stressful or tiring, sometimes you cannot see beyond the next 24 hours or 48.

You've got your head down, you're keeping going, you're gritting your teeth. Let me just make it to the next weekend or the next bank holiday. And in the middle of that, being a Christian can feel like just one more thing I'm trying to fit in and do.

But I'm tired and it's hard and it's harder still when I know that there's a whole society who think Christianity is a waste of time and not true and actually a bit morally offensive.

And so on I plod getting older with everything perishing and spoiling or fading. But to these scattered Christians then and to us today, do you see what Peter says?

[12 : 41] He says, lift your heads and open your eyes and know this. You have a living hope. You can head up.

Look back. Jesus has been raised from the dead. He's alive. Look up. You have an inheritance kept in heaven for you. Look forward to the coming of the salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

This is real and it's certain and it's yours. Your future in a perfect new creation. And as you and I grasp all of this, as we somehow raise our heads, hear this truth and believe, what will rise in us?

Verse 6. In all this, you greatly rejoice. To which we can say we could, yes. Like what inexpressible joy for you and me today to have this living certain hope for the future and all of it through God's mercy.

Says Peter, praise God. Praise God for a secure living hope. But not just that.

[14 : 00] Because in verse 6 onwards, Peter goes on as part of this call to praise God to speak of life right now.

Look, praise God for a secure living hope. Secondly, in these verses, praise God while you suffer distressing trials. Now.

Look down at this with me in verse 6. In all this, this wonderful hope of a future inheritance, you greatly rejoice. Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

Because, I don't need to tell you this, but you see, here's the thing about life for Christian believers back then and now today. Although our certain future is glorious, our lives of joy now can be marked by trials and tears.

That is, sorrow and distress and tears are often the experience of Christians. Peter says here, you may have had to suffer grief.

[15 : 13] I don't know what kind of emotional or expressive person you are. Some of us will cry a few times a week. Others of us keep our distress locked away.

But all of us may suffer grief in all kinds of trials, Peter says. You should know the New Testament speaks of many kinds of distressing difficulties you can face now.

And I guess if I were to ask you, maybe you think straight away this morning of a bad boss. Or a body that doesn't work how you want it to. Or not having enough money. Or the death of someone you love.

Or trying to be more like Jesus but failing. Or having naughty or tiring children. Or an unfinished PhD. Or a really hard relationship. Or your mental health struggles.

The stuff that genuinely causes you grief and moves you to tears. Those are some of the trials that you might experience. Some of the many trials. That said, alongside these very real trials that may come immediately to mind, Peter does have something more particular in mind in this letter.

[16 : 28] And that is the trial of suffering as a Christian. In an unbelieving world. Because Christians are exiles.

You and I are foreigners. We are odd ones out. In a society that neither fears God nor likes Christians. And so if and when you live boldly for Jesus in the world, you may well suffer for it. Forgive me. Forgive me. I wanted to have a slide with these on. But from 1 Peter. Through his letter, Peter will say that those who don't know God, they accuse you of doing wrong. Chapter 2 verse 12. They will insult you. Chapter 3 verse 9. They may speak maliciously against your good behaviour. Chapter 3 verse 16.

They may even heap abuse on you. Chapter 4 verse 4. For Peter's first readers, 30 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, these insults, this verbal abuse, this suffering at the hands of a non-Christian world was a fiery ordeal that they went through.

[17 : 44] And maybe you say, I can only half connect with that. At some level, some of us will know what that is about. So as you live for and speak about Jesus, family members criticise.

Neighbours avoid eye contact. Classmates or colleagues gently or not so gently mock. You are sidelined from a friendship group.

You are slurred. And it can prick you hard, that. Maybe at the same time you think more widely in society.

Not to kind of open this stuff up to talk about now. But the social media anti-Christian rants that come in. Or news of Christian teachers being disciplined for not being gender affirming.

Or the almost oppressive June pride flags everywhere you look before which you are meant to bow. All of that kind of stuff together can weigh hard on Christian believers.

[18 : 49] And go beyond the UK. And discover even authorities clamping down and instructing Christians, you must not attend church or else.

You see, we have a living hope for the future. Glory. But for now, for a little while, Peter says, this is Christian reality.

We may suffer. We may suffer grief in all kinds of trials. Trials that hurt and make us cry. And yet, even here, look at this.

Even here, in the trials of life, our merciful God is at work and worthy of praise. Do you know this? Why must we endure trials and tears now?

Verse 7, These have come so that trials in our life come from God with a purpose. 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.

[20 : 04] That's an extraordinary thing to get your head round, to start to get your head round, three quarters of the way through a sermon. That trials come into our lives from God, not because he's against us, but because our faith is so precious to him.

Your faith in Jesus, your clinging to Jesus Christ as your saviour, is of greater worth than gold in God's eyes. Here's the question.

Do you know how you show that precious gold is genuine? How do you show that gold is genuine? This isn't, by the way. You take precious gold and you put it in the fire.

You test it. Take a blowtorch to this fake gold bar and what will happen? It'll burn, it'll disintegrate, it'll go up in smoke because it's not the real thing.

It's plastic. Take a real gold bar and put it in the fire and what will happen? Well, if there's any impurities in it, they will be burnt off and the gold will be strengthened and refined.

[21 : 18] But the gold will not burn up, it will not. And tested by fire, this gold will come through. Shining and precious and proved genuine.

Peter's saying here that our God and Father is merciful and good and now for a little while he will put our precious faith in the fire.

He will allow his children to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. You will suffer as a Christian and he does that to strengthen and refine your faith so that you may cling ever more tightly to Jesus because that is what trials will do.

They will burn away your self-reliance and they will push you to depend more and more on your loving Saviour until on the future day when Jesus Christ is revealed, you, having come through the trials of life, tested by fire, you will stand before God, your faith shining and precious and proved genuine.

And Peter says it will result in praise, glory and honour. Because on that day, you will receive a crown of glory that will never fade away.

[22 : 42] And all praise and glory and honour will go to our loving Father who saved us. That is how it will be. Well, if you're a Christian believer this morning, let me ask this.

I don't know how your week or your month or your year is going. We asked at the beginning, in your trials and through your tears, will you praise God?

As God's chosen ones and exiled foreigners, whatever is going on in your life, praise God. Praise God for an everlasting, secure, living hope that is yours.

And you can praise God even while you suffer distressing trials. Know that your merciful God has given you new birth. Know that he's got you.

Know that he will shield you. Know that he will test you. Know that your God will certainly save you on the day when Jesus is revealed. And if you're here this morning and you'll know you're not yet a Christian believer, don't continue on without hope.

[24 : 05] Come to Jesus. Believe in him. Receive this trial-filled life and living hope that is offered. And have hope.

Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And then finally, to all of us who believe in him in these verses. Finally, love Jesus with joy.

Peter ends his little paragraph talking about this resurrected saviour, Jesus Christ, whom you cannot see now, but whom we cling to in faith and will one day see.

Look, verses 8 and 9. Though you have not seen him, you love him. And even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Don't try to fake joy. But know that right now today we are receiving and we will certainly receive the salvation of our souls through Jesus.

[25 : 16] Like what hope-filled joy that brings. Doesn't it? Love Jesus, your saviour who will take you home. Let me lead us in a prayer.

We'll pray together. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope. Our Father, we were at one point, all of us, without hope in the world.

Yet you are a God of such stunning mercy. You sent your Son to redeem us from our sins. Your Son rose from the dead.

And now we may have living hope through him. And this certain future inheritance that you promise freely and certainly to all who belong to Christ.

[26 : 36] Please make us those who understand our lives now in their grief and trials and moments of happiness. and make us those who cling on to and love our Lord Jesus Christ.

Help us together in our lives to lift our eyes to you. Help us look forward to this glorious future that we may continue now with lives of tears and also joy.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.