

Quality Time

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 December 2004

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Now our heads for prayer. Our Lord, your word is perfect, reviving our souls.

It is sure, making wise the simple. It is more to be desired than gold, even much fine gold. And so we pray together that the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts might be acceptable to you because you are our rock and our redeemer.

Amen. If you would open up your Bibles to the reading that was read, 1 Peter, chapter 1, on page 216.

I have a question for those of you who go to Learners Exchange. It's a long question. Who is this? He was born in 1628 in a village in England.

He was lucky to learn to read and write. He fought for the king in the Civil War and was deeply conscious of his own passions that he did not know God.

[1 : 23] He married a godly woman who encouraged him to read the scriptures where he met God and was profoundly transformed and became an effective and passionate preacher of the gospel.

The only problem was he was a Baptist. In 1660, it became a crime to preach without the king's license.

And just before Christmas, he rode to a village called Samsel to preach. He left at home a wife and four children. And when he arrived, he was seized, arrested, tried and incarcerated in a filthy prison for 12 years.

That's what you get for preaching without a license. While in prison, his mind turned to heaven. And in the darkness of his cell, his heart grew strong with the vision of the light of the city of God and the living hope of the resurrection. And he began to form in his mind an allegory.

[2 : 27] And he began to write it, which then became a book. And the book is called? Very good. Very good. Those of you who didn't know that, that was Pilgrim's Progress.

And his name is John Bunyan. And this allegory of the Christian life is the story of a man called Christian who leaves the city of destruction under great torment of soul and moves toward the celestial city.

And the journey is very hazardous, extremely treacherous, and it's a brilliant portrayal of the Christian life, not just because we see ourselves so accurately through the episodes of the pilgrim, but because the whole notion of being a pilgrim and a stranger in this life is thoroughly biblical. In fact, as Christian leaves the city of destruction and heads out, he quotes this passage that we're reading this morning. Verse 1, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the exiles, pilgrims of the dispersion all over Asia Minor.

The letter is addressed to people who are refugees, resident aliens. Like all the New Testament, it's not written to a group of people who are huddling together in a safe religious ghetto, but they're scattered throughout the country of Asia Minor.

[4 : 04] And the point is not their physical geography, the point is the spiritual reality that something has happened to those people, like something has happened to you, that has put them out of step with the world in which they live.

And they know they will never really fit in. They are exiles. And that, friends, is the permanent condition of every single one of us who has placed our hope in Jesus Christ.

We have a sense of alienness in this world. We are strangers in a strange land. We have a profound sense of homelessness in this life.

Not a wanderlust and a travel bug. Not a sense of, you know, I'll miss out unless I experience more of life. But living in this world, knowing we belong to another world.

We live in this world which is constantly telling us to place our hope in this world, but our hope is elsewhere. A living hope.

[5 : 11] A different hope. Whenever I open my mouth in conversation, people know I don't come from round here and that I don't really belong.

Actually, when we go back to Australia, people say my wife is Canadian and she's greatly honoured by that. But if I don't fit in here, neither do you.

Because this is not your true and permanent home. You are a pilgrim. You are a spiritual migrant. And this life that you are living and I am living is a pilgrimage in which we walk to heaven and you and I will always in this life be something of outsiders.

In the second century, the epistle of Diognetus describes Christians like this. Christians are not distinguished from the rest of mankind by either country, speech or custom.

They reside in their respective countries but as aliens. They take part in everything as citizens and put up with everything as foreigners. Every foreign land is their home and every home is a foreign land.

[6 : 27] They find themselves in the flesh but do not live according to the flesh. They spend their days on earth but they hold citizenship in heaven. And so I say to you again, your most fundamental and basic identity if you belong to Jesus Christ does not come from where you belong, from where you were born or where you grew up but from whom you worship.

From the first time you became a Christian you have had a growing sense of dis-ease. Something has happened to us that has made us strangers. And Peter describes that thing in verse 2.

We have been chosen, destined by God the Father, sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood.

This is how we set out on the pilgrim path. God has chosen us and knows us. You don't discover the pilgrim path by lucky accident. It doesn't just happen.

It's part of God's purpose which he formed before he made the world. And when we set out on the path we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit. It's not a word we hear much of, is it?

[7 : 38] It just means made holy. And I want to say this is very important for us. This is one of the reasons why our non-Christian friends and family members look at us as a little bit weird.

Because the Holy Spirit is intent on making us not happy, not wealthy, not well adjusted in the first place. He is intent on making us holy.

Something has come into our lives which is profoundly different than the values around about us. It is the order of heaven. It is the beauty of God.

And we can see it in one another. It's very hard to see it in ourselves but we see it in each other. I think that's sometimes why Christians, when you look at Christians and how we behave, sometimes it looks to the world as though we're incredibly gracious and incredibly loving.

and at other times it looks like we're the opposite. The reason is because we are not defined by what's normal, we're not defined by social etiquette but we are gradually being defined by the character of God.

[8 : 50] It's holiness, it's a different thing. See, the New Testament is not interested in how spiritual you and I are, how mystical, but it is interested in how holy we are and there's only one power that can transform us inwardly to make us like God and it is the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus, the forgiveness and the cleansing which we're going to celebrate again today in the Lord's Supper.

Okay, what does that mean in practical terms? It's all very well to speak about a longing for heaven and a desire to be holy. What does it look like? And in verses 3 to 13 the Apostle Peter says there are two marks of holiness.

There are two things that ought to mark your life and my life if we are pilgrims heading towards heaven. And the first is a living hope.

A living hope. Verse 3, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ by His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It's very important. Hope is not a personality trait. In the New Testament hope isn't a sort of positive disposition towards life that Christians become the kind of person we'll see on the cover of the Opera Winfrey magazines.

[10 : 21] You know, the most hopeful person in Vancouver. It's something that every Christian pilgrim receives through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

It is a living hope. It is a hope that has life within it. It's not a hope that dies. Everything you and I put our hope everything that we put our hope in in this world will fade and in the end will disappoint us.

The living hope is eternally fresh. It comes from the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It produces a new birth within us. It sets us on the pilgrimage and it draws us to heaven.

And as Neil so wonderfully illustrated with the children, in verse 4 Peter says it's an inheritance. It's kept in heaven for you. It is imperishable. It is undefiled.

It's unfading. Everything in this world perishes. Clothing, food, human bodies, civilizations.

[11 : 30] But our inheritance is beyond the reach of decay. It is beyond the reach of what can damage and destroy. It is uncontaminated from within. It is unfading.

It is permanent and undiminished. Now, you need to know that Peter is writing to a group of people who have begun to feel the cold winds of persecution. They are suffering physically for their faith.

They do not feel secure. And Peter says that inheritance that God has given you in Jesus Christ in heaven, nothing can change that.

It is guarded by the very power of God. And then he wraps his arm around the people and he says and so are you. you are being guarded for that salvation which will be revealed.

That's why having a living hope is an essential part, an indispensable part of being a Christian pilgrim. It's not that we will have a sugary temperament.

[12 : 32] Not that I think that's a temptation for many of you. but when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it enters our life and it draws us, pulls us, pushes us towards heaven and toward the day of Jesus coming.

That's the first mark of the Christian pilgrim, a living hope. But there is a second mark in the passage from verses 6 onwards and it is a joyful faith.

A living hope and a joyful faith. And I hope as Fiona read it that you can see the flavour of this passage is deep joy.

It's very important. You see, some of the songs I have sung picture the Christian pilgrimage as a grim and dreary, dry, drudgery and there's nothing good until we get to heaven.

The picture that Peter gives us here is that the Christian life is a life of joy in the midst of very difficult circumstances. See verse 6.

[13 : 42] Speaking of that salvation, in this you rejoice though now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, which though perishable is tested by fire, may redound to the praise and glory and honour of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

The Christian life, brothers and sisters, is a life of joy in suffering. Suffering is never accidental. It's never bad luck. It's never blind fate. It's part of the Christian pilgrimage and it comes to us purposefully from the hand of God.

And let me just say the Bible never gives any trite answers to the issue of suffering. It doesn't deny suffering and say it's just illusion, be detached. It's never fatalistic and says, well, you're just going to have to suffer, you know, what can you do?

What it does is it constantly connects our suffering to the person of Jesus Christ and in this passage to his coming. This is very important for us because as Christian pilgrims we live in a culture that has become very touchy about suffering.

[15 : 05] suffering. We are irritated by the very existence of suffering. Somehow it's an offense to us particularly when it's our suffering. And you can see this in the way that the old idea of being right and wrong has now been replaced with the idea of what makes me comfortable or what makes me uncomfortable.

uncomfortable. So when we suffer we begin to think God doesn't care or God is punishing me for something that I've done or I haven't done and that completely misses the point.

Suffering is a vital part of our pilgrimage and if what Peter is saying is right it is great help in this life and helps us toward the life to come because what's God doing in our suffering?

God uses our trials and our difficulties to prove the genuineness of our faith. So if you are suffering now what God is doing is he is sifting and he wants you and I to have a genuine faith.

A joyful faith is a genuine faith. A genuine faith is a faith which has suffered. And when we experience trials and difficulties God is testing the genuineness and why to him genuine faith is more precious than gold.

[16 : 39] And I want you to know how ridiculous that sounds. I mean imagine making that statement today that genuine Christian faith is more precious than gold.

I mean go down Robson Street and do a poll and ask people to choose between a truckload of suffering and a truckload of gold. Which one are they going to choose?

I mean it's an absurd idea. When the Maclean's magazine comes out at the end of the year with the great ones it's those who've got gold. It's not those who've learnt to suffer. But to God genuine faith is worth more than all the money in this world.

I mean ask yourself which would you choose for yourself? A life with all the money in the world and no suffering but an imitation faith or a life without financial resources but with suffering and genuine faith.

God would choose the latter. if you're a parent the genuine faith of your children is more precious to God than the success or income or health that this world has to offer.

[17 : 51] And we need to be teaching our children what a pilgrim life looks like. A life that places its hope in Jesus Christ that values genuine faith in him above the awards and grades and self esteem and all the other things the culture points to.

I went Christmas shopping this week which was an interesting experience. Do you know families go through different stages as their children get older in terms of Christmas shopping.

We have teenage sons and we're in the electronic stage of shopping. And so I went to one of those temples to the electric gods and I was browsing headphones and the salesman directed me straight to the latest and most expensive pair assuring me that my son absolutely needed this pair because they have a feature in them I don't know if you've ever heard about this which cancels out background noise noise and like a fool I said how does it cancel out background noise and he explained to me what it does is this it picks up the background noise and then plays into the earphone the opposite the sound inverse of the background noise so that you hear nothing I don't understand it and you'd be glad to know I didn't buy it but I thought it was a great picture of what it is to be a Christian pilgrim you see we're being bombarded by the message all the time the background noise all the time that says gold is more precious than faith gold is more precious than faith do not suffer do not suffer gold is more precious than faith and what we need to do is we need to listen to what the opposite is we need to listen to what the word of

God says before we can even start to think clearly or we'll be just taken in I had a wonderful brochure come under my door this week probably came under yours as well on the front of the brochure is a very attractive couple in front of a very beautiful house with a water view and it says have the happiest new year in your 2.4 million dollar ocean front home that you must buy now do not suffer do not suffer gold is more precious than faith in the east when Peter was writing when a goldsmith was purifying his gold he kept it in the furnace until it reached a certain point and only then did he know it was ready and pure and the way he knew it was ready was when the surface of the gold clearly reflected his face his image back to him just so

God is making us in his image in our sufferings and in our trials he's removing everything that's false and everything that's superficial so that we will reflect his holiness which will rebound to his glory and honour when Jesus is revealed that's what he means by verse 8 he says without having seen him you love him though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy a pilgrimage is not just about the inheritance and the future it's about walking now not by sight but by faith have you ever thought about how opposed those two things are sight and faith and the readers who Peter writes to had not seen the earthly Jesus as Peter had and yet they loved him and they believed in him and they rejoiced with a joy that was unspeakable and inexpressible we are in exactly the same position that they are we have not seen Jesus with our physical eyes but we love him and we believe in him and because of the hope of seeing him at the revelation on that day we rejoice now with an unspeakable and wonderful joy faith is a kind of seeing it's a kind of sight when God opens our eyes to see the wonder of the Lord

[22 : 42] Jesus Christ I think that's probably why Peter wrote verses 10 to 12 about the Old Testament the Old Testament is there to keep our eyes open to keep our eyes focused they're amazing words the path of hope that we walk towards salvation isn't something that we're making up as we go along God has been speaking about it since deep in the Old Testament and Peter says that the Old Testament prophets searched and longed to look into this they inquired about salvation they knew that the servant would come and suffer that the Son of God would be here but they didn't know the details and amazingly these verses tell us God told them that they were serving us have you ever thought about that before Moses and Isaiah and Jonah somehow God allowed them to know that they were not serving themselves but they were serving us and at the end of verse 12

you have this picture of angels in heaven stooping down the word is like this they're all gathered around looking down trying to see what is going on they long to see what's happening with God in this world whenever the

Bible is opened and taught whenever the gospel is preached the angels are watching with awe as they watch us now we're strangers and aliens we are pilgrims in the path of Christ and we walk this path not just in the presence of angels but in the presence of Christ himself and I want to leave you with this let me read to you verse 13 therefore gird up your minds in other words get your minds ready for action be sober set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ have you noticed three times this passage is spoken about the second coming of the Lord Jesus and every time it refers to his coming as the revelation of Jesus what's so important about that is that when he comes it's not that he is now absent and will be here it is that he is now here but invisible it is the revelation of the one who is

Lord and King though we don't see him and as we move towards Christmas and as we remember his first coming in weakness and as we look for the revealing of the King of Kings will you ask God to pour into your hearts that living hope and that joyful faith that comes from him because we are pilgrims we are exiles now we don't belong to this world we belong to him and we belong to one another and in the midst of the difficulties and the circumstances of our lives we know his love and we know his guidance and we rejoice with unspeakable joy and if there is no joy it means we are losing touch with the hope he has given us an inheritance which is imperishable undefiled will never fade away and the power of God will guard us through faith for that salvation which will be revealed therefore brothers and sisters get your minds ready for action set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming at the revelation of Jesus

Christ Amen