

Living Hope

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[0 : 00] Please be seated. And would you please keep your Bibles open to the first letter of Peter, chapter 1. We'll be looking particularly at verses 3 through 5 this morning.

We're starting a new series of nine weeks on this wonderful letter. St. Peter is, this is the Apostle Peter, writing with apostolic authority, and he is writing under difficult circumstances.

It's around the year A.D. 63, he's writing from Rome. And Emperor Nero's persecution is a few months away. Persecution in which there would be much suffering.

Peter himself will perish. He is writing to Christians in Asia Minor, part of Turkey, who are under pressure for being Christian. Calls them exiles of the dispersion.

They are numb with fear at the prospect of persecution that they too are facing. What does Peter do in the face of pressure and persecution? Does he pat them on the knee?

[0 : 58] No, he praises God and says you can handle it. Look with me at verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. By His great mercy, we have been born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for our salvation, ready to be revealed at the last time.

See what he does? He focuses their attention and ours upon the one thing and upon the one person who can make all the difference. He focuses our attention upon Jesus, His death and resurrection.

He praises God and at the center of His praise is Jesus, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. And that makes all the difference to them and to us today.

We have our own circumstances today. As Christians, we too live as exiles in a world that is hostile to Christ, the world that does not understand Christ or His values.

And we pay a price. And all of us face pressures in our lives. Grief and fear at times in our lives. We face uncertainty. We all face the death of our bodies.

[2 : 27] And now as then, the one thing we need to do is turn our hearts in praise and adoration to God for raising Christ Jesus from the dead.

To place our faith in God, who by His power has raised Christ Jesus from the dead. It makes all the difference. There are just four implications I want to draw out from this this morning.

The first thing is that it means for us a new birth. I heard of a young boy who did a biology project on birth. So he went to his grandmother and asked her how she was born, how she came into the world.

Grandma told him that a stork dropped her down the chimney. So he asked his mother and she said that a stork dropped her down the chimney also. And anticipating the next question, she said, and a stork brought you too.

The boy's report began with the words, there hasn't been a natural birth in our family for three generations. Now, it's like that with the Christian life. It begins with birth, but not a natural birth, not birth in the natural world, but in the supernatural, in the spiritual world.

[3 : 34] It begins not with us, but with God. In the Greek text it says, God has caused you to be born again. So you see, this is not something we do, it is what God does.

He causes us to be born again, to be regenerate. The Bible tells us that we are by nature enemies of God, children of wrath, as God, as Paul puts it.

But in mercy, God acts, and causes us to be born again into eternal life. The eternal life that Jesus now lives, we are born anew into, by God.

He is a God of mercy. He withholds what we deserve, and gives us what we have no right to.

Looking at us, God did not foresee any merit on our part, but in His mercy, as verse 3 puts it, He

causes us to be born anew, when we turn to Jesus Christ.

Physical birth gives us a transient, temporary life, but God has acted to give us new and eternal life. See, Christianity is not about personal achievement, it is about divine mercy.

[4 : 45] Being born again is not a moment, that I do. It is God's work in me. Just as a baby contributes nothing to its conception, but is the product of its parents' love, so a new birth is entirely supernatural.

People quite wrongly think that being a Christian is just a Sunday part of their lives, or reduce it to a series of righteous things we do. The Christian life is far more radical than that.

It is a supernatural, it is a spiritual act of God's power, which brings us to new birth, to eternal life.

And that occurs, verse 3, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Jesus' life starts a new life in us. We are born anew because we die and rise again in Christ.

We die to this world. We die to sin. We die to human expectations. And we rise in Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul puts it this way in Romans 6, verse 4, We were buried, therefore, with Christ by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

[6 : 06] You see, God gives eternal life, not only to Christ, but also to us, in and through the death and resurrection of Jesus. The resurrection is God's vindication of Jesus.

It is saying that Jesus, who was born to die, has accomplished what He came to do. And so when we link our lives to Jesus Christ, God causes us to be born anew in His eternal life.

I was raised in the church and always went to church, but I wasn't born again until I was a teenager and gave my life to Jesus Christ at an evangelistic meeting. And what I expected would happen when I was born again is that a white, a lovely heat would start at the top of my head and pass through my body and I would glow forever after.

It hasn't quite happened that way. But what did happen is that God placed His Spirit in me and opened up that relationship and my life was linked to Christ's.

And the Bible tells me that I have been born anew and that that will come to its completion in heaven. It began that day and it will continue into eternity.

[7 : 14] See, the origins of our new life begins with God. It is His work. Look with me over at verse 23 in the other column. He says, You have been born anew not of perishing seed, but of imperishable.

This is the quality of our new life. Through the living and abiding Word of God. See, it's God's Word that engenders new birth that gives new life.

It begins in our lives now, but it is also primarily towards the future, which is why we turn to my next point, from a new birth to a living hope. Consider, if you will, the glory of the ancient Greek and Roman civilizations.

They achieved great heights in art and philosophy and power, city planning, engineering. Yet their lives lacked hope. No hope after death. The thought of death chilled them to the bone.

And I suppose it would, for us too, if we thought we were going on a Mediterranean cruise and found ourselves in the underworld on a boat going across the river Styx, that would chill me to the bone also. There was no hope for the afterlife.

[8 : 17] But the modern world has a similar despair in the face of death. One writer said, death is the new pornography. Despite all the advances of our own society, we cannot escape the destruction of our bodies.

We live with the illusion of control over our lives, our careers, our money, our health. We control our fertility. We are encouraged to take responsibility for our health and well-being.

Yet we are all aware of the corrosion of time in our lives. And that time marches on in one direction towards the grave. Modern men and women are very confused about their identity and they are even more confused about their destiny.

For the collapse of Christian belief means that millions have no hope and people are haunted as never before by the specter of death. Which is why it is so good to turn to the New Testament and find that the Christian hope is not a false optimism.

He says, by His great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. See, the resurrection of Jesus shows us that death has no power over Jesus and that the Christians is a living hope because being linked to Jesus opens for us the vista of an endless future.

[9 : 42] So suddenly that makes our lives here look very different. Take on a very different perspective. But ours is not a vague and empty hope.

Ours is a living hope. Because Christ is alive. Because God raised Him from the dead our hope is in Him. Even as our own physical lives ebb away.

Even in the pressures that we face. Even in uncertainty. Christians have a living hope in Christ. And that changes everything.

See, we don't see Him yet, do we? We don't have the fullness of it. And yet we have this living hope because Christ is alive. And that changes everything. Clement of Alexandria himself, a convert from paganism said, Christ has turned all our sunsets into dawns.

Christian brothers and sisters, do we live in that Christian hope? Because of what Christ has done. The end of our physical lives is but the beginning of a life more glorious.

[10 : 50] And our hope, it's not vague and empty, it has an object. And that object is my next point, our heavenly inheritance. I'm looking at verse 4. The Christian has been given an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us.

The object of our living hope is our heavenly inheritance. See, being a Christian is not all about your best life now. There is more, much more, much better waiting for us.

And the word kept, kept in heaven, is a perfect participle. It means it has been reserved most certainly. It has been carefully set aside for us.

It awaits us for our enjoyment. It has been accomplished. See, there is a certainty there. It's our heavenly inheritance. In the Old Testament for the people of Israel, the land of Canaan, the promised land, was their inheritance.

Leviticus 20, 24, God said, you will possess this land. I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey. Every tribe, every family had a portion of this inheritance.

[12 : 04] and what happened to it. The Assyrians, the Chaldeans, and the Romans ravaged it. And their own sin defiled it. In the Old Testament, their inheritance was also fellowship with the Lord Himself.

And this is what Peter picks up here in verse 4. Our inheritance is heavenly. It is spiritual. Our inheritance is fellowship with the Lord.

It is the completion of our salvation. It is the fullness of what it means to be born again. The Westminster Shorter Catechism rightly reminds us this.

Man's chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. See, that's our heavenly inheritance because of what Christ has done in His death and resurrection.

And notice the quality and durability of this inheritance. It is imperishable. It is not subject to decay over time. It is undefiled. It can never spoil.

[13 : 11] It is not affected by human sin. It is unfading. It can never disappoint us. God is not going to change His will and leave it all to charity. It won't depreciate in a stock market crash.

It is secure. It is ready for us. Kept in heaven. But, it is future. See, look at verse 5. He says, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Or, verse 9, he says, as the outcome of your faith, you obtain the salvation of your souls. See, it begins here in this life when we turn to Christ. And it will come to completion when we are with Him in heaven.

We are saved when we turn to Christ now. But, we look forward to the fullness of what it means to be born in you. to have eternal life. We look forward to the consummation of our salvation in heaven.

And the climax of that salvation will be in a personal revelation of Jesus Christ. Look at the last part of verse 7. It talks about praise and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

[14 : 19] That's where it's heading. See, we don't see Him now. We love Him now. We will then see Him face to face because Jesus has been raised from the dead and because He is alive forevermore.

We will see Him face to face in glory. He is right now seated in heaven on the throne at the right hand of God. We will be with Him.

And one day, every eye will behold Him, King of kings and Lord of lords. We have so much more to look forward to.

Christian brothers and sisters, do our hearts long for that, for our heavenly inheritance, even as we journey through this life and through the trials of this world.

You see, Christians do not pass on, pass over, or pass away. We pass into, the presence of the Lord we love and serve.

[15:23] It's our heavenly inheritance. Which brings me to my last point and my conclusion, a certain protection. See what he says in verse 5, who, by God's power, are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed.

By God's power, are guarded through faith. See, we do not possess the fullness of our new birth yet. We hope in our inheritance kept for us. And reassuringly, verse 5 tells us, we are kept for it. It would be very small comfort for us this morning to know that nothing could destroy our inheritance if we ourselves could be destroyed along the way, are swept off, and lose it at the end.

But verse 5 here speaks of certain protection and security. We are shielded. It is a military metaphor. We are kept under guard. We are garrisoned by God.

God. The same power of God that keeps our inheritance keeps us. The same power of God that raised Christ Jesus from the dead protects us. The God who works for us is also working in us through faith.

[16:34] God uses faith as an instrument of His keeping power. Faith is not an achievement. It is trust in God's achievement. Look with me over to verse 21. Through Christ you have confidence in God who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory so that your faith and hope are in God.

See it's the resurrection of Jesus that causes us to put our faith in God. There is a power without that corresponds to the faith within. We are not exempt from pressures, griefs, and pains in our own lives.

As a Christian community we are exiles. We are as if strangers in a world that is hostile to Christ. We all, every one of us, struggle with sin in our own lives and our own weaknesses.

There is a price to pay for being Christian. But the biggest mistake we can ever make as a church or as individuals in our lives is to despair of God and consider Him powerless and so take matters to our own hands.

See, the assurance is here is that we will be brought through everything to our inheritance by God's power guarded through faith. And so it is in our lives and in the trials and uncertainties of our lives now that our faith is tested.

[18:03] And our faith will bring glory to Jesus because He will be proven to be true and trustworthy. His protection will not let us down. Brothers and sisters, we can face any trial by God's power guarded through faith.

Let us rejoice in our new birth and hope in the final outcome. Hope towards the inheritance that is ours. Have faith in God's power. We are shielded by the power of God that raised Christ Jesus from the dead and brings us new birth.

Yes, He died. God, yet He rose again. And Christ is our guarantee. And so Peter's words call out to us this morning.

Blessed be. Blessed be God for bringing us new birth. Blessed be God for our living hope. Blessed be God for our heavenly inheritance. Blessed be God for our certain protection.

He has raised Christ Jesus from the dead. Blessed be.