

A Living Hope

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[0 : 00] 1 Peter 1 to begin.

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So some of these words will be familiar to many of us, hopefully. I'm just going to read from verse 3 onwards, and then we're going to turn to chapter 3. Just a few verses here.

Verse 3, now hear God's word. 1 Peter 1, verse 3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven by you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

1 Peter 1.

[2 : 19] I'd like you to go down to verse 13. And the context is that Peter is writing to Christians who are having a hard time in the world simply for being a Christian.

They are suffering for their faith, and they could be suffering for a whole number of other reasons. You know, they're opposed, but they're opposed because they're God's people.

So, in verse 13, we read, Now, who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed.

Have no fear of them, nor be troubled. But in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for the reason for the hope that is in you.

Yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

[3 : 25] For it is better to suffer for doing good than it should be God's will. If that is God's will, than for doing evil.

Sorry for the little mess up there. Well, may God bless that reading. We're going to be spending time in chapter 3, but chapter 1 sets its context, of course.

And we'll come back to that after this next hymn. Thank you. If you have your Bibles, please open to 1 Peter chapter 3.

It'll at least help you to understand where I'm getting what I'm saying from. And when a person belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ, Peter wants us to know that they're born again into a living hope. Hope is not something that they simply have in their mind, but it is something that they have been born again into. It is something from God and something which they have.

[4 : 44] And this is what Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 3. That you, by God's grace, have been born again into a living hope.

Meaning, in short, if I can put it this way, that you have something to look forward to. There's more to come in your Christian life than what you have right now.

And there's more to come when the reconciliation of all things takes place. Then you'll finally realize what Christ has fully accomplished.

We recognize much by faith. We recognize much by experience. But there's just so much more that you have coming to you because God has already given you Christ Jesus.

And it's really as simple as that. That you are a blessed people because God has given you his son. Now, the tone changes not in the sense that Peter is saying something different, but because of the world in which Christians have to live their faith.

[5 : 51] And in the day of Peter, Christians were suffering for their faith. Because they were Christians in a world where Christianity was not accepted, they were persecuted for the beliefs that they held.

But no one's really persecuted for a belief held privately. You can get away holding a belief privately and therefore avoid the persecution.

The reason they didn't avoid the persecution, the reason they didn't avoid the suffering, is because their beliefs were not private, but on show through the way that they lived.

And that's the definition of a real Christianity. One that has this visible witness to it. And in that context, Peter recognizes that these Christians who are living in this way will be asked questions by people who are not living in this way.

Why do they still have hope when those around them want them gone? Want to cause them nothing but trouble. He does say that if you're able to do good, then you're going to be in less trouble than if you do bad, which is a general principle.

[7 : 09] But Christians, from the time they were Christians, have people in the world, other people, who don't like them. There are people in the world, institutions in the world, organizations in the world, that do not like God, Christ, Christianity, or those who belong to Christ.

And so, as the Christian lives his life, her life, in that kind of environment, there is, of course, an opposition that comes. Most of us have never experienced being a Christian in Scotland, or England, or Cornwall, or anywhere else.

You just don't have it. In other parts of the world, you do. You may get the snide comment every now and then. You may get, you know, some things that come against you every now and then. Sometimes there's opposition within the church itself, which is more painful than the opposition that comes from outside of the church. And what I mean by that is that when a Christian lives according to the ways of God, as revealed in scripture in the church, and another Christian doesn't, there becomes an automatic opposition.

And that opposition is far more painful than someone who's not a Christian telling you that you're making a mess of your life. And this is why that Christianity must be distinct in the church first before it can ever be distinct in the world.

[8 : 49] So the internal opposition is often a lot more painful than the external one. In the Western church, in the Eastern church, they don't seem to have these kind of issues quite in the same way.

The point here is that a person who's really going to live for Jesus cannot retain that simply in a belief alone. That a person who's actually going to live for Jesus out there in the real world cannot do it only in belief.

They'll end up doing it in actions. It'll affect the way that they work in the workplace. It'll affect the way they treat their wife, their husband, their children, their next door neighbor.

It cannot help but have an overflow effect into the lives of other people, whether they realize it or not. And all of this is what it means to be born again into a living hope.

That what you have in Christ Jesus is that you are living the life of the way it's going to be in the future now. That this is how it ought to be, and so I'm going to start doing it now.

[9 : 58] But there's many people who can retain the mindset of, well, if I don't have to change until the last minute, then I'll carry on the way that I am until the last minute.

But that's why salvation is put in the context of past, present, and future. That one of the ways of being assured that you're a Christian is that you persevere now in the way that you will do in the future.

That you live your life in Christ now as you will in the future. You're not going to be able to do it perfectly now like you will do in the future when Christ comes.

But there is that pattern to your life that should be seen. Now what follows from this is that as you do it, there will be unbelievers out there in the world who will look at how you're living and be opposed to it, but at the same time want to question why you live the way that you do.

So Peter says, make sure that when that happens, you are ready to give a reason for the hope that is in you. When the Christian lives properly, as they are meant to, not just in belief alone, but those beliefs overflow into their life, people are going to come and ask you about your faith.

[11 : 17] Now they may ask it in absolute opposition, but they may ask it because they genuinely want to know why you have hope when they don't.

Peter talks about giving a defense, and then he talks about, make sure it comes across, verse 15, with gentleness and respect. And this is because he recognizes that this is going to come across into a world that is already hostile to Christianity.

Now, for anyone who has any relationship with enough unbelievers, which I hope all of you do, you'll realize that somewhere the hostility can be greater or lesser depending on who those people are.

And of course, there's a way to avoid that kind of hostility. But a belief retained only in the mind does not cause any kind of opposition at all.

But when you live in a way that is different from someone else, the classic judgment is, do you think you're better than me? And the answer is, yes, of course I do.

[12:29] Of course I think I'm better than you. But the answer to why I think I'm better than you is not because I'm better, but because of what Christ has done for me. So I'm not better because I'm better than you.

I'm better off than you because of what Christ has given to me. But we're too afraid to say that. No, no, we're all the same. We're not the same. We can never be the same.

We cannot reduce what Christ has given us down to the same as what everyone else has in how they live their life. It's too different. So we are better, but we're not better because we've made ourselves better than them.

We're better because of what we have received. We're better because of what we have been given. We can still do the same things that they do.

They don't really have a leaning on Christianity whatsoever. But at the end of the day, if we nullify that there's not real any difference between us, then what we're actually doing is we're removing the very witness that God has given us.

[13:41] So we have been born again into a living hope. Peter says that by living in that way, people will ask you for the hope that you have. But if we nullify it down as though, oh, it's no different, then what we're actually doing is we're destroying the very witness that we have been given of that hope.

And that's what we're not meant to do. That's why we live in a world where people can look at Christians and don't see anything different from them to non-Christians.

Now, that is a fair judgment, but it's not what I'm happy to live with. When people say, well, you're right, I'm not wanting to admit it to you, but it seems fair.

John Stott said that the worst thing that can ever be said to a Christian is that you're no different than anybody else. Because the truth is you are.

You're very different from other people. But again, not because you have brought this upon yourself, but because you have been born again into a living hope.

[14:49] You're different because God has made you different. And we shouldn't flatten those differences out or hide them in a belief alone. Because what it does, Peter says, is that it removes your ability to be able to witness to other people and it removes an opportunity from them to be able to ask you the question of why you live in the hope the way that you do.

So not only are you reducing what Christ has actually done for you, you're removing the opportunity for an unbeliever to ask you about the faith that you have.

So it just destroys everything in a negative kind of way. So what does it mean to live in hope? Well, the first thing it means is that a Christian lives in the promises that God has made.

Some of these promises we experience and we realize, some of them we have to wait for. When Jesus said that he would rise again from the dead, he said it and then he did it.

He said that it would happen and then it happened. So the promise was made, hope was there in the minds and hearts of people and then hope was finally realized when it actually happened.

[16:02] And we understand this, of course, in faith. We understand this as we read God's word to be true. And therefore, we also recognize that God has made many other promises that we still have to wait for.

And therefore, what that means is that the world will not be addressed completely until it is addressed completely. There won't be a reconciliation of all things until that time there will be a reconciliation of all things.

This means that we get to live in the mess until the day that the mess is finally cleared up. And the job of pastors, which, you know, pastors have two jobs.

In many ways, they have to start fires and they have to tidy rooms. It's tempting for all Christians, especially in churches, to behave like they do in their homes when things get in a mess.

And that is that sin is a bit like dropping things on the floor. And one of the things, you know, asking for forgiveness can be done just as quickly as sinning.

[17:10] I just want to put that out there. Got to give people time. Well, I can assure you that asking for forgiveness from a person or from God takes exactly the same amount of time that it does to sin in the first place.

It can be done that quickly. So the idea of, well, you've got to let people... No, it's just rubbish. It's just not true. It's an excuse made up.

So when things get dropped, what happens? Well, if they get dropped like toys everywhere and you're constantly saying, look, before you get out a new one, pick up the old one. Put it somewhere. And then it doesn't happen and you think, well, I'll address it later. But then you think, I'm too tired. So you shut the door and suddenly it's not there anymore. All the other rooms are nice and tidy until you open that one.

And what happens in the world is that Christ is coming into it and he's opening the doors that everyone else is shut to hide the things that they don't want to pick up. And this is true with Christians.

[18:14] We must demonstrate to the world that one of the reasons why the world continues to perpetuate sin is because no one picks anything up.

We have litter bins out on the streets. It says, please recycle your waste. And we have a gospel message here that says the reason why there's so much sin in the world is because no one picks anything up.

No one asks God for forgiveness. The reason why things get so worse, so much worse, is not with sin. Of course it is. But no one's dealing with it. No one's actually picking it up when they should be. So why do things get untidy? They get untidy not because you drop things. Okay? Your house is not untidy because you drop things.

Your house is untidy because you don't pick anything up. Why is the world in a mess? It's not because you're dropping things. It's because nobody's picking anything up.

[19:14] That's how it gets in a mess. So God is coming, God has sent Christ Jesus to come into the world and his call is, pick it up, repent and believe and follow me.

That's how it gets addressed. And that's what the Christian does in the world. We're effectively living in a way where we're demonstrating to the world what it means to pick sin up and deal with it and bring it before God.

That's how the world becomes tied. That's how the world becomes reconciled. God does it through his people and that's how he does it. And people will look at you and go, I don't see anybody else doing what you're doing.

Why do you do it? And there's your opportunity. That's what God has given to you to make, to prompt those people out there to ask that question.

God has given you a way of life that will prompt questions in unbelievers' lives. Live this way, they will ask. They may want to ask through gritty teeth.

[20:20] They may want to ask in a spirit of opposition. They may want to ask just because they're curious. But if you live in this way, in this living hope, then what will happen is that people will turn to you and ask, why do you do it?

And there's your opportunity. And you can just give them the same illustration that I've given to you and say, have you ever noticed why your house gets dirty? And they will say automatically, yeah, because people drop things.

And you go, no. It's not because people drop things. It's because no one picks anything up. Why is the world in a mess? Because people drop things.

No. It's because no one deals with anything. And what the Christian is demonstrating to the world is how to deal with sin. Confess.

Believe. Live differently. Why would you do that? Well, because I have a hope. What is that hope? Well, because this is what things is going to look like in the future.

[21:21] Does that make sense? Hopefully it does. Now, as we say this to people, we're to do it with gentleness and respect because some people like asking questions not because they're looking for an answer, but because they're stalling for time.

So, one of the ways that people will stop you from asking them a question is by them keep asking you a question. And if they can bide enough time, what about this?

What about that? They know. They know they're stalling you off. You've got the question that they're not going to be able to answer or that they don't want. They know you're going to ask it and they don't want to be faced with the question.

So, what do they do? They keep asking you questions. How do I avoid a question that I don't want to answer? Well, I ask lots of questions of you.

And if I can keep you busy doing something else, then I can avoid what I know is eventually coming my way. Don't do that.

[22 : 25] Stop and take responsibility and answer the question. And so, in a world where we have to give our answers with gentleness and respect is because some people question us just to find a chink in the armor, just to find something to go there, see, Christianity isn't worth living after all.

This isn't about perfection. This is about the perfection that will come. This is about reflecting what God will do for each and every one of us.

but none of us are there yet. So, the Christian is different. Do you think I'm better than you? Yeah, but let me tell you why. It's because of what God has given me.

It's because of what I have in Christ Jesus. It's not because I'm a better person than you. It's because I've been made better because of what I've been given by God. Don't flatten it out as though we're just the same as an unsaved person.

We're not. That's to ignore everything that God has given you in Christ Jesus. You are not the same as a person who's not saved.

[23 : 40] That would be to not consider everything that you have received. And that's why that when you speak what you have been given by God, you're supposed to do it with gentleness and respect because you're demonstrating to them, yeah, the difference that you see is because of Christ Jesus.

And you're right, I am different. And you're right, yeah, this, but it's not because of the reasons you think it is. It's not because I'm a better person than you. It's because I've been made better by Christ Jesus.

It's because of what I have been, what I have been given. All the emphasis goes to Christ. You live in this way, in a Christ-centered way, in a way where you're living for Jesus, and then all your answers is, is Jesus.

Just Jesus. I can remember back in the days of my theological training, I was given a hint that if you don't know the answer to a theological question, just say Jesus, and the teacher could never tell you off, could never say you're wrong.

How can you say that Jesus is wrong? So, of course, my hand always went up, or when I was picked on, I didn't have the answers half the time. Jesus, okay, thanks Daniel, anybody else?

[24 : 54] You can't actually be told off for it. It's Jesus. It has to be Jesus. Everything has to be Jesus. He has to be the center of everything. And that's what Peter is saying here, that don't flatten out the difference that God has made in you.

Because by doing so, you remove the God-given design of that prompting people asking you for the hope that's in your life. You are so different.

And also, you have to believe it first. You have to convince yourself that you are totally different because of what Christ has done for you.

Or else, you don't live different because you're not convinced that you really are. And this isn't this sort of, you know, fake it till you make it type of mentality.

I mean, I can't believe how famous that mantra has become. That teenagers are convinced that they can fake being rich until they're rich.

[25 : 59] You know, it's apparently been quite big. I was reading about it the other day, that this fake it till you make it. It's completely the other way around for the Christian.

We don't fake it at all. You are it, therefore live it. But you are it because Christ has made you rich. Christ has made you great. Christ has made you sons and daughters of God.

You ought to be walking around with your head held high. But not in a way that it's looking down on people, but in a way where you're not embarrassed about what it is that Christ has actually done for you.

Who cares what people think if they think that you think they're better than them. It's true. What they need to understand is the reason for why it's true and that's your opportunity to speak.

So as we live Christian, the call is a fairly simple one and that is to live distinctly Christian. Because if we don't, this is what happens.

[27 : 06] The lines become blurred and it becomes very difficult to tell the difference between what is Christian and what isn't Christian. Who is a Christian and who isn't a Christian?

And they're real issues. Jesus spoke about these issues. The issues are addressed all the way through the New Testament. In history, we see the same thing.

This isn't about judging who is in and who is out. Ultimately, there are going to be people who belong to Jesus and people who don't belong to Jesus. Rather, the issue here is the reason to be distinctly Christian is so that people in the world are able to tell the difference between what is Christianity and what isn't.

And we're not there anymore. You are kidding yourself if you think that Christianity is distinctly witnessed in the world. Christianity isn't distinctly witnessed within the church.

And therefore, it can seem very judgmental for me to stand up and say, these things that are happening in the church, they're all wrong.

[28 : 14] And you're going to go, well, they're happening in the church. How can they be wrong? Well, I'm not going to go into them this morning. But how do we know what is distinctly Christian from what isn't distinctly Christian?

Well, it comes down to learning. what God has actually taught. And not only that, the change that God actually makes in a person's life that doesn't contradict itself.

And what I mean by that is what I've said for the past couple of weeks. That if what is important to God is important to you, you'll do something about it. If what is important to God is important to you, you will do something about it.

And so as I stand here and I look out on different lies that are lived differently, and, you know, how am I to conclude all these things together?

Well, only in one way, and that is those who belong to God will live for God, because what is important to God will be important to them.

[29 : 27] God will be important to you. Now, if, however, you're in the position where you have lost the assurance that you are actually a person of God, then I can understand why your Christian life is such a struggle.

Because when you lose your identity, you don't know who you are, and therefore you don't live according to who you are. Therefore, you live almost any way you choose. So, knowing who you are in Christ Jesus is absolutely central to living like that.

You cannot live in a way that contradicts who you are. But you can when you forget who you are in Christ Jesus.

And so, the Christian who transgresses, that has to be brought back, the person who brings them back has to know looking at that person that what they're doing in their Christian life is not what a Christian ought to be doing.

That's not judgmental. That's recognizing that that's not Christianity and this is. So, whenever you talk about being distinctly Christian, it sounds like you're drawing lines in hard places.

[30 : 45] So, I'm going to give you a simple example. I've used this one hundreds of times. I've often done it when we've done...

So, back in the day, when I used to do counseling sessions regularly, and even here, I'm not going to go into who, and you have marriages and you have that, I always use the line drawing because it's the best one to use.

And I have two pictures, often, of two flowers. They can be hand drawn, it really doesn't matter. And I draw two pictures of flowers on a piece of paper, and I ask the couple in front of me, or the person in front of me, to color in both.

Now, I absolutely love coloring in. I don't know what it is about coloring in. You want a coloring in book for Christmas? Yeah, it's going to be the best present ever. You know, big, you know, not the detailed ones, the ones, you know, just big flowers and that.

No, not the idea. Here's the idea. You ask them to color in the first picture, but just go over the lines. Go over the center of the flower, go over the petals, just go over the lines, go over the stem, over the leaves, and then in the next picture, color it in, but stay within the lines.

[32 : 09] And then as you look at both pictures, say which one's more beautiful? And is it more beautiful because of the absence of lines or the presence of lines?

And then ask them this very simple question. What lines do you live your life within? Because if you cross those lines, it's going to look like a mess.

Christianity has lines for a very good reason. Because it keeps what is beautiful distinctly beautiful people. And the moment you cross them, it looks like my coloring in.

A mess. And the reason why we have lines is the same reason why you enjoy tennis. Because if there were none there, there'd be no point to the game.

The lines are there for the purpose of the game, the enjoyment of the game. And so I can stand here and say, these are the lines that you ought to live your Christian life within.

[33 : 13] And you can say, well, it's not where I would put them. Okay. But it's going to look very different. What are the lines that God gives us to live within in order for our life to be distinctly Christian?

That's most of what scripture is teaching us. To live within the lines that God has given. Some of them are hard and fast. Some of them are dotted, granted. But they are there to increase the distinctive look of what God has made you in Christ Jesus.

Well, here's a few considerations then as we close. Peter is getting us to consider that to live a Christian life in this world is difficult.

But nonetheless, we have to live the Christian life as God wants us to. so that we don't rob the world or God of his glory and we don't rob the world of the questions that they might ask when they look at our life.

Today, it seems that people are more concerned with the world and what's happening to the world than they are almost with anything else. And I think Christians of all people should be the first to say how the world ought to be looked after, seeing that God made it.

[34 : 34] I think that that goes without saying, that we should demonstrate to the world how to look after it because we recognize who made it. But on the level of the person, we must recognize that attention has to be drawn to what life needs to look like or what life ought to look like.

And a person isn't complete outside of Christ. It's as simple as that. A person is not complete outside of Christ.

Here's the exhortation then. Are we living the Christian life in such a way where the people around us who are asking us the question, why do you do it?

Are we living the Christian life in such a way where our unbelieving wife is saying, why do you do that? Are you living the Christian life in such a way where your unbelieving husband is saying, why are you doing that?

And the same with your children, your next door neighbors, your aunties and uncles. Is your life prompting those questions? Because Peter seems to suggest that if you live your life within the lines of the living hope, that's what will happen.

[35 : 54] And therefore, if people aren't asking us those questions, I think it would be fair to say that we can take a good, hard look at ourselves before we're even fit to look at them. That'd just be the way that I would understand it.

That does my life prompt questions about Christianity, about faith in God, about how wonderful God is and how great Christ Jesus is and what he has done for me.

And then, and then, am I able to explain that? Because Peter, and I won't go into this, but Peter says this quite clearly, that the Christian life is not just lived as a witness, but it's also one that can be explained.

Because he says, make sure you're able to give a reason, this is verse 15, for the hope that is in you. Not only are you to live the Christian life, you're called to be able to explain it.

You're called to be able to know it well enough to explain it to someone else who doesn't have this life, what it actually means to have this life. So we live this way, and then we explain why we live this way.

[37 : 10] The distinctions are clear, and our answers also should be equally clear. So I'll finish with this. You're different. And you're different because God has made you different.

He has born you again into a living hope. Something that cannot perish, something that cannot be taken away from you, something that you cannot lose.

You have it, and you have it forever. Peter's call here to you as a Christian is be the most beautiful Christian you can be by living within the lines that God has provided.

In other words, be distinctly Christian for two reasons. Number one, so that you are assured of your identity, and by being assured of your identity, you will then live as a Christian.

And number two, which will then bring glory to God. And number two, by living that way, you will prompt the questions as a means of witness to the world. You will not rob the unbelievers that you live with, that you live next to, or that you work with, of their opportunity of a witness, and to ask the question about faith, hope.

[38 : 28] Amen.