

Praise God for a Living Hope

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Date: 15 January 2012

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[0 : 00] This evening I would like to take as the basic theme of the sermon, Praise God for giving us a living hope.

Praise God for giving us a living hope. Hope is an important thing to experience and to have. And in increasingly cynical society, hope is still important. The people you live amongst, even we ourselves, desperately need hope.

We want things to turn out for the best. We want the Hollywood ending to our every situation. David Aikman, the Time Magazine journalist, describes hope as the heart's deepest longing.

This passage in Peter gives us a clear explanation of where this deep longing for hope can find its satisfaction. And it is found in a personal relationship with the resurrected Christ Jesus.

[1 : 06] And as we begin to explore this theme tonight, we must begin by making ourselves aware of the situation that the people, the recipients of this letter, found themselves in.

This letter is addressed to Gentile Christians. And these Gentile Christians are scattered throughout what is now modern-day Turkey. These believers aren't going through physical persecution.

They're safe that way. However, they're Christians who constantly compete with the cynicism, with the jibes, with the discrimination, the bad mouthing of their faith, and society had basically turned against them and all that they believed in.

And in many ways, it's not dissimilar to the situations we find ourselves in modern-day Edinburgh. The taunts of the media, the pressure of living by a different worldview in front of your colleagues, the friends and family who are slightly dismissive of your worldview.

It's so easy to become discouraged. It's so easy to give up hope when we feel ourselves swimming against the tide all of the time.

[2 : 27] It so often feels like we are aliens and strangers in a world which doesn't understand us and which doesn't want to tolerate us.

In this environment, it's easy to lose hope. It's easy to take your eyes off Christ. It's easy to become so demoralized and so depressed.

However, Peter is here coming to us and saying, praise God because you have a living hope. You have something worth living for.

You have a hope that will last and will last you into eternity. And this evening, I am going to look at this passage under three headings. And we're going to be looking from verses 3 to 12.

And firstly, I want to look at verses 3 to 5 under the heading, praise God for establishing a lasting hope.

[3 : 25] Praise God for establishing a lasting hope verses 3 to 5. Secondly in verses 6 to 9, we find that hope remains even in suffering.

Hope remains even in suffering. And then finally in verses 10 to 13, praise God that the promise of hope is fulfilled in Christ.

Praise God that the promise of hope is fulfilled in Christ. And what I want to do is to tie all these headings together so that you and I go out of fear this evening knowing that our hope is secure, that nothing can take it away.

First off then, praise God for establishing a lasting hope verses 3 to 5. I don't know about you, but I have always found it slightly bizarre how I can continue to sing and to have hope that every time Scotland play that something good might happen, that we might nick a goal somehow against Brazil, shut down and then just wait for 90 minutes hoping against hope that things will go well. Every game I do that. But we all know as Scotland supporters that within two minutes the hope goes, the dreams crumble and we're back at square one.

[4 : 50] Hope is short lived if you're a Scotland fan, it doesn't hang around for very long. We want it to linger, we want it to last maybe even to the first half, but it goes so quickly.

But what we find in the sporting arena is also reflected in other arenas of our lives. Hope comes for a while, but it doesn't stick around very long.

We want to sit down, have a chat with it, let it come in, but no, it comes and then it goes before you know it. It vanishes so quickly, it kind of evaporates before our very eyes so often.

Yet this passage indicates that lasting hope is possible. It is within the grasp of all people and this eternal hope comes because Christ is risen from the dead.

Christ is risen from the dead and through this event we can have new birth. Our response to this lasting hope as believers is that we should be, verse three says it, praising God.

[5 : 54] That is how we display our thankfulness to God for the hope that we have. We have to express to God our thanks and what do we give Him thanks for? Our new birth.

Look at verse three, 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 through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Now, we are given new birth. This indicates that Peter believes that there was a point in time where we were spiritually dead.

And this is true. And it's not just Peter who states this fact, it's throughout the Bible. The Bible teaches that we are born spiritually dead, that we are born as those who have no desire to focus our lives on God, that we are born as those who seek to live for ourselves rather than for God. We are born as those who have little thought or who have little need for God in our lives. However, the spiritual deadness that we experienced is overturned by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

[7 : 09] God gives us new birth. He fathers us by the resurrection of the Son Jesus Christ. Our new birth gives us tremendous status as believers.

We are adopted into God's family. He is our Father and we are His children. We go from orphans to heirs, all because Jesus rose from the dead.

Christians are heirs of God. That is incredible. However, what does it mean to be a nearer of God? What does it mean for me and you to be heirs of God?

Well, Peter wants you to make you aware of two things that you have as heirs and which are for your encouragement.

The first thing you have is in verse 3 and that's the living hope. The second thing that you receive as a believer, as a nearer of God, is an inheritance and that's found in verse 4.

[8 : 13] The first benefit is living hope. The hope of every believer is a genuine hope. It is not a hope against hope. It is a hope that is well founded. It is a hope that is firm and true.

It is a hope that cannot be quashed. We do not hope in vain. We are not entering into some cosmic lottery desperately hoping against hope that our numbers will come up.

No, our hope is certain and it's living. Our hope is grounded and secured in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Peter and the early church knew that there isn't Jesus brought hope, that there isn't Jesus brings life to those who were united with him.

We praise God for the fact that the resurrection crowned Jesus as victor and as those united with him, we participate in that victory.

When Jesus rose that Easter morning and knew Don was beginning, it meant death could no longer hold its victims forever. Easter meant life for all those who were united with Christ.

[9 : 18] It meant that death was not the end for those of us who believe and trust in Jesus. This is our living hope. Jesus stands triumphant over the corpse of death and if we place our hand in his, he will take us through death to a new perfect life with him forever.

Death has lost its sting for those of us who are united with Christ. So in verse 3 we have the living hope. Verse 4, we have a great inheritance.

Christians, you and I, brothers and sisters, we have a great inheritance. That is how Peter describes what is in store for us as we depart this world into the next.

Throughout the Bible, the Christian has promised a great inheritance. In the Old Testament, when the word inheritance was used, it referred to a land.

Israel wandered for 40 years and they kept on wandering and they kept on going because they knew that at the end of their journey, at the end of their wanderings, a land was there awaiting them.

[10:36] A land that God would want them to dwell in. Listen to what is said in Joshua 11 and verse 23.

So Joshua took the entire land just as the Lord had directed Moses and he gave it as an inheritance to Israel according to their tribal divisions.

Then the land had rest from war. Peter now understands that the promised inheritance of a land was going to be superseded.

No longer was Peter looking for a strip of land somewhere in the Middle East, but he knew that the promise of an eternal home at the end of the pilgrims journey here on earth was in view.

We like the children of Israel have a hope of a physical home. Heaven will be a physical home for all those of us who are believers.

[11:43] Peter makes this plain. In 2 Peter 3 and verse 13 he states, But in keeping with his promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where righteousness dwells.

Then again John takes this idea of a promised land and he expands the vision again. As he sits on the island of Patmos he receives incredible views of what our heavenly city will look like.

We have a greater promised land to come. We have a land that we will rest eternally in. We have a land which will be free from war. We have a land which will be free from suffering.

We have a land which will be free from pain, from death, from tears, from mourning. We have a land that will be full of joy, full of gladness, full of righteousness. We have a land where we will reside with our heavenly Father and with all the saints past, present and future.

That is our inheritance. That is what we are going to receive. This is yours. Believer this is yours.

[13:01] This is guaranteed. This cannot be taken from you. This is great news. This is why Peter wants us to praise God for he's given us an inheritance and he's given us hope.

We are heading home. We are heading home to be with Jesus. Let these words be an encouragement to you. Let them fill your head and your heart as you seek to live a Godward life here on earth in the midst of the tons, in the midst of the difficulties, in the midst of all the battles.

Remember what awaits. Remember what you have and all because Jesus rose from the dead.

Remember we know that we receive them at the end of verse five, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be filled in the last time.

God's power is protecting our faith. Our faith cannot leave us. God is shielding it. God will protect it. Nothing the devil nor man can damage it.

God protects it. That's how we can say with confidence we are going home. The second thing that I would like to look with you this evening is found in verses 69.

[14:31] So we said we've got to praise God for giving us hope, but we also have to remember that hope remains even in suffering.

Hope remains even in suffering. How do you approach suffering? How do you respond to it? Do you go the way of trying to avoid at all costs, whether through prescribing away a problem?

Do you shake off suffering through shopping? Do you indulge in intoxicants? Do you try and ignore the issue of suffering? Just put your head in the sand and hope for the best.

Alternatively, do you hold on to it? Do you cling to suffering? Do you wear it like some kind of badge, seeking to get attention or sympathy from it?

Most people go one way or the other, and sometimes even we kind of mix things up over a lifetime. However, the Christian response to suffering is different to the world's response.

[15:32] The Christian response to suffering is found in these few verses. We go from ecstasy to agony very quickly here. We've been in the highs of praise in God for all he's given us, and now we're back into the reality of living in a broken world.

First we have been praising God for establishing our hope, but now Peter reminds us that just because we are Christians does not mean that we do not suffer, that hardships don't come, that life doesn't get tough.

As we do life here on earth, suffering is inevitable, but the Christian has hope.

We are hopeful that even in our sufferings that God is at work. Look at verse 6, In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.

For a little while, remember that phrase is very important. A little while they do not last long.

Suffering may be with you throughout your life here on earth, but Peter is saying, look eternally.

[16:52] Put it in an eternal perspective. Take your suffering and then view it eternally. It will last for a little while.

It is not around for a great deal of time, a little time. However, why would God allow us to suffer at all, even for that little while?

What is the point in it? It only brings distress, it only brings pain, and it only brings heartache. Why God do you allow your people to suffer?

Peter says in verse 7, These have come, these are the sufferings, so that your faith of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

The answer to the question, why does God allow the Christian to suffer? He uses suffering to test the genuineness of our faith.

[18 : 08] He uses suffering to purify it, to refine our faith, to make it more beautiful, to make it brighter, to make it more vibrant and to strengthen our faith.

The illustration that Peter uses is of a goldsmith refining gold, to rid the gold of impurity, to rid gold of its impurities. He must blast it in the furnace, he must expose it to the heat, and he must leave it there until the impurities are removed.

Peter argues that we too must go through a similar process. God wants to refine us, he wants to remove the impurities that lie within us, he wants us to better reflect the glory of God, and the way he chooses to do this is through the crucible of suffering.

Just as gold has its impurities, so too does our faith. You have faith, yes, absolutely you have faith, that is not in question, but sometimes that faith can have impurities within it.

Pessimism and mourning can be a trait, a self-reliant attitude can be a trait, a desire to do our own thing, a trusting in money, a trusting in people, can all be mixed up in our faith in God.

[19 : 32] Gold and our impurities get mixed up, they become entangled. These impurities hinder us, they prevent us from having a full relationship with God.

These impurities hinder us from total fellowship with God. They constrain our relationship with our Father. They can dampen our desire for God and His glory.

God designs the sufferings that we receive to refine our faith with the fires of trial and distress. His aim is that our faith will be more pure, that our faith will be more genuine.

Remember though that the fires of affliction that we go through do not reduce our faith to ashes. Where does not destroy gold, it only removes impurities.

Do we respond to suffering this way? Do we have an eternal perspective when it comes to suffering? If we do, we will be encouraged.

[20 : 46] We will continue. We will cling on to the hope that God wastes no tears, that in every trial and test there is a purpose.

God is using these experiences to make us people who will bring even more glory to God, who will enjoy a richer, fuller relationship with our Father in heaven.

One of the best illustrations of how this works in real life is found in the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 1, verses 8 to 9.

Paul describes this refining process in his own life. He says these words, We do not want you to be unaware, brethren, of our affliction, which came to us in Asia, that we were burdened excessively beyond our strength so that we despaired even of life.

That was the fire, that was the suffering. Indeed, we had the sentence of death within ourselves in order that we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead.

[21 : 55] That's the gold. That's the gold. God took away from Paul an ordinary prop of safety and let him live with that almost overwhelming sense of abandonment.

This was the fire that Peter speaks about. And Paul didn't go through this because God didn't love Paul, but because God saw Paul's faith as gold worthy of refining.

The result of this purification process is found at the end of verse 7. There we read, It may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.

When Jesus Christ comes again, when he comes again to this world, two things will be visible. Two things will be visible.

One, Christ's glory will be beautifully reflected in the mirror of our faith. And the more pure and refined our faith, the more glorious and clearly his beauty and his worth will be reflected in our lives.

[23 : 14] Secondly, the second coming of Jesus will also exalt those who were faithful servants right until the end.

He will say to us all, well done, good and faithful servant. He will give us, as Paul says in Corinthians, the unfading crown of glory.

At the end of the day, our suffering reveals Christ and his glory more beautifully. And we will see finally that the purpose of God in our suffering has been the extraordinary joy of sharing in the very glory and praise and honour of God himself.

That is why we go through suffering so that God gets more glory. He gets more praise and more honour. And thirdly, finally and briefly, verses 10 to 12, praise God that the promise of hope is fulfilled in Christ.

Praise God that the promise of hope is filled in Christ. Now, I'm sure many of you are aware that in November of last year, the Bank of England released a new 50-pound note.

[24 : 36] Unfortunately, I don't earn enough to show you one as an example. But thankfully, with the commissioning of new money, the Bank of England gives us some very helpful guidelines to determine if the 50-pound note is authentic or if it is a fraud.

And what it says on the Bank of England website, and yes, I did look, and yes, I do need to get out more. There is a unique number printed horizontally and vertically on the back of the 50-pound note.

It also has the images of James Watt and Matthew Bolton. And there are loads of other little things, little security marks, that the Bank of England has placed within that note to show that it is authentic.

And just as our local Tesco cashier will check our 50-pound note to determine if it's authentic, Peter is urging us as believers to check the authenticity of Jesus' claims by examining them in the light of the Old Testament prophecies.

Peter is giving us the basis for placing our hope in the resurrected Jesus. He is urging us to look for signs of authentication, which God gave those second-century believers and us today through the prophets.

[25 : 58] He authenticates his claim by pointing us to the prophets of old, God's messengers who described the work of God's servant as being one who suffered but who was then glorified in verse 11.

Peter points out that we are a privileged people in that the predictions of the Old Testament prophecy have all been fulfilled, that what they only saw dimly back in the Old Testament has been clearly revealed to us through the Spirit.

What they pointed to, what these prophets pointed to was a suffering servant, one who would suffer much but who would then be glorified. Isaiah, the classic example, stated that a suffering servant was to come but that this servant would in the end receive glory.

With the benefit of a New Testament perspective, Peter can say that what was prophesied about the suffering servant was fulfilled in Christ and we too acknowledge that Peter is correct.

We know that Jesus' work on the cross and his resurrection enabled believers to enjoy glorification. Peter wants to emphasise to us, like the early church in Asia Minor, that the Christian, as one who is united with Christ, can expect to follow the same pattern, suffering and then glory, not glory, then suffering.

[27 : 34] Jesus Christ, our Saviour, had to endure the pain of the cross before he knew the glory that would await. Our life follows that same route.

We must suffer for a little while in this broken and sin-sick world, but one day we will receive glory and that will be the salvation of our souls.

The pattern of life that Peter has outlined to us here has huge significance for us as believers today. When you suffer as a Christian today, when you go through hardships, this is not a sign that God has abandoned you.

This is not a sign that God doesn't care for you, that He does not love you. This is not a sign from God saying you're worthless. No, it's the very opposite of this.

It demonstrates that you were in fellowship with the risen Lord who had to first suffer many things before he was taken to glory. In the midst of Jesus' suffering, God wasn't there, but Jesus willingly endured the aloneness so that in the midst of your suffering, God would always be there with you.

[28 : 51] What a privilege, what a hope we have that God holds our hand through the times of suffering and through the time of blessing, and that the suffering we endure is designed to ensure that our faith is refined and purified.

If tonight you do not accept Christ as Lord over your life, He gives you a lasting hope. He defeats death so that death may not defeat you. When we are united with Christ, we are victorious over death.

We are heirs of God. We are taken into a special relationship. That is what is an offer. The world cannot give you the lasting hope that you need.

Only God through Christ can do this. Christian, go out with hope, remind yourself of the hope that you have even in the midst of your suffering.

[29 : 58] Go out knowing that when examined, the hope that we cling to is found to be authentic. Live like Christ. Display the living hope that He offers and that He has given us.

That living hope which is desperately wanted by the world around you. Hold out the promise to everyone that hope can be satisfied.

Hope can remain in Jesus Christ. Amen. Thank you.