

Sermon for April 16, 2023 – Easter 2

1 Peter 1:3-9 EHV

Theme: Your Hope Lives with Jesus!

- 1) What your hope is.
- 2) How it helps you in life.

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you. ⁵Through faith you are being protected by God's power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time.

⁶Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials ⁷so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

How important is hope for life? Consider what Luther once said, “Everything that is done in the world is done by hope. No farmer would sow one grain of corn if he did not hope it would grow up and become seed; ... no merchant or tradesman would see himself work if he did not hope to reap benefit thereby.”

As you can see, hope is essential. But that invites the question: what is hope? Basically, it is the expectation of a positive outcome. The stronger the evidence is for that outcome, the stronger our hope becomes.

Hope is powerful – sustaining people through life's worst trials. How does it do that? By convincing us that the evil we experience will end. Good will come. I once heard a Nazi concentration camp survivor talk about how hope sustained him and others through the horrors of that place. Sadly, those who lost hope died in despair.

So, let me ask you: how are you doing regarding hope? Can you see past the mental and/or physical anguish you may be suffering today – expecting a brighter future? Or do you see no way forward and imagine that no good can come from any of the evils you are experiencing?

Unlike the world, we Christians have every reason to expect a brighter future – regardless of how grievous, intense, or seemingly unending the trial you are currently experiencing may be. With the apostle Peter as our guide, let us consider: 1) What your hope is, and 2) How it helps you in life, under the theme: **Your Hope Lives with Jesus!**

Part One: What your hope is.

Our sermon text stands at the beginning of a letter the apostle Peter wrote to Christian congregations scattered throughout Asia Minor. The Roman Emperor Nero started his state-sponsored persecution of Christians. Even though these persecutions were not in full swing, Christians were facing all sorts of societal pressures and hardships for their faith in Christ; and things were about to get a lot worse. A long dark road lay ahead.

But the apostle Peter encouraged them not to fear what would come. Why? Well, let's listen to him tell us:

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Yes, you have every reason to rejoice in God and not be afraid of him. Why? Because He is the divine Father of Jesus. In other words, everything Jesus claimed about himself is true. He is God the Son, who came to save us from our sins and reconcile us to God – all in accordance with his Father's will.

By his great mercy he gave us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

Why did God choose to save you from your sins? Not because you deserve it, but simply for his mercy's sake. Even though you, according to your sinful nature, have rebelled against him, God loves you. He doesn't want you lost to the everlasting hopelessness of hell. This is why he sent Jesus to pay for your sins and reconcile you to himself.

And this is precisely what Jesus accomplished, as proved by his resurrection from the dead. Because he rose, you can be confident that all your sins have been paid for in full, death has been defeated, and heaven won.

Why can you be sure that these things apply to you specifically? Because God has given you a new spiritual birth through holy baptism. He has awakened new spiritual life in you through his Gospel, even though you were – like the rest of humanity – dead in your sins. Your baptism has connected you to Jesus to such a degree that whenever God looks at you, he sees Jesus and loves you as much as his son. And because he sees Jesus, every promise he made to Jesus also belongs to you. You are a coheir with Christ.¹ And your inheritance? Oh my, it is so beyond our comprehension that God must tell us what won't be there: sin, death, pain, struggle, sorrow, fear, evil, etc. There will only be good things, happy things, and joyous things. Your inheritance is to spend eternity with your gracious God from whom all goodness flows. Not only that, but you get to spend eternity as his children – raised to live forever with him in his wonderful paradise that, unlike the world, will never die, never fade, and never become corrupt!

That, dear Christian, is your hope – the positive outcome you can expect in all confidence at the end of your life. And how do you know this hope is not just a pipe dream? Because Jesus rose from the dead.

Yes, because Jesus lives, so does your hope. Not only that, but he also promises: ⁵*Through faith you are being protected by God's power for the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the end of time.*

Do you see the beauty of this verse? The LORD is basically saying that, as you trust in him (that is to say, believe his promises and seek refuge in him from sin, death, and the power of the devil), he will stand as your shield – protecting your soul from Satan's onslaughts.ⁱⁱ He will be your fortress: a wall of divine fire that keeps the armies of evil from harming us – just as he did for Moses and the Israelites at the Red Sea.ⁱⁱⁱ

That, dear Christian, is your hope. And it is not some mere wish based on fickle feelings or human contracts that can easily be broken. No, your hope comes from the unchangeable LORD who never breaks a promise and whose track record is 100%! Your hope comes from him, who defeated sin, death, and the devil for you – proving his victory by rising from the dead! Yes, dear Christian, your hope lives with Jesus - regardless of how “hopeless” our earthly lives might seem.

Part Two: How your hope helps you in life.

Peter continues: ⁶*Because of this you rejoice very much, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various kinds of trials* ⁷*so that the proven character of your faith—which is more valuable than gold, which passes away even though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

Life was hard for Peter's first readers and continues to be for us. While there are many joyous occasions in life, there are also trials that hurt us immensely – so much so that we might waver in our faith, thinking our hope is in vain. Why does God allow not only bad but sometimes very evil things in the lives of Christians?

Why is not a question I can answer because only God knows his reasons. But I can say this: God never promised Christians an easy life on this earth. He said: *“In this world you are going to have trouble. But be courageous! I have overcome the world.”*^{iv} That goes back to the point Peter makes in our text. Even though we may face great trouble, we can take heart because Jesus has overcome all evil. His resurrection proves it.

Moreover, when God allows great trouble in our lives, he promises two things: First, he will only allow them *“if necessary.”* Even though we might not understand why, none of our hardships are pointless; they all have a purpose which God will use for our good.^v The other thing God wants us to know is that they are temporary. Like this past winter that sometimes seemed like it would continue forever, our trials will end. Spring is dawning. Christ is coming.

Now, this is not to say that the trials we face aren't that bad. They can be excruciatingly painful. Like a blast furnace that smelts gold at 1100F, our trials are intense - seeming like they will ruin us completely. But, as we place our confidence in Christ, they won't overcome us. Instead, God will use them to purify our faith, to help us let go of the world and cling to Christ all the more

tightly. He uses them so that we, through the comfort we received in the Gospel, might comfort others with the same hope we received from Christ in our trials.^{vi}

And what is our comfort in all the trials we face in life? It's our living hope in Christ. It's our certain future with him in paradise. As we keep our eyes fixed on him, we not only endure through trials, but we also rejoice. Our salvation is real and coming with Christ. And, as we keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we can't help but persevere in faith and love, as the apostle Peter continues:

⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet by believing in him, you are filled with a joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹because you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

How does our living hope affect our lives? It fills us with love for Jesus, our God and Saviour! And even though we have never physically met him, we trust him. We know he sees us. We know he hears us. Even though we don't feel his presence, we trust he is with us – just as he promised.^{vii}

Yes, the more we, like the moon facing the sun, look to Jesus, the more overwhelmed we become with his love. We can't help but surrender to his light of grace - reflecting it in the surrounding darkness. He is why we keep loving family members who have betrayed our confidence. He is the reason we do not despair when a loved one dies. He is the reason we continue loving all the people in this world who mock us, hate us, and slander us. He, our living hope, is why we don't lash out when bullied, don't despair when financial ruin befalls us, and continue to seek life when our mental condition wants to do nothing but give up and give in. In any and every excruciating trial of life, we press on. Why? Because Jesus lives, and with him lives our hope. He will keep his promise to deliver us, working in all things for our everlasting good. Because He lives, so will you *into an inheritance that is undying, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.*

Therefore, we pray: Lord Jesus, you live, and because you live, so do I. Thank you for the great salvation you have won for me. Whenever I face dark and dismal times, keep the great hope of everlasting life before my eyes. Help me remember that you are my living Saviour who stands with me in my sorrows and works in them for my good. This life is temporary. The paradise to come is eternal. May these truths move me to cling to you in hope – willingly letting go of every earthly thing as we look forward to the endless treasures you are bringing with you for us on the last day. In your name, we pray. Amen.

ⁱ Cf. Romans 8:17

ⁱⁱ Cf. Psalm 34:7

ⁱⁱⁱ Cf. Exodus 14:19-20

^{iv} John 16:33 EHV

^v Cf. Romans 8:28

^{vi} Cf. 2 Corinthians 2:3-6

^{vii} Cf. Matthew 28:20