**Jesus Christ our living hope**

April 26, 2020

1 Peter 1:1-25

Key Verse 1:3 “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.”

Today we will look briefly at the first chapter in the first letter of the apostle Peter. The Bible contains two of Peter’s letters. He did not write as much as Paul. Writing two letters is such a magnificent accomplishment if we learn more about Peter. When the apostle Peter first met Jesus, he was an unschooled fisherman. Peter had a brother, a wife and a mother-in-law. He would have been around the age of Jesus. As we know, Peter was an impulsive disciple who denied being a disciple of Jesus despite saying that he would never forsake Jesus. When Jesus met with Peter after the resurrection, he reinstated Peter and gave him a new role: to feed Jesus’ sheep. Peter was a recipient of such wonderful grace. The book of Acts records his famous sermon at the Pentecost. On that day 3000 people were added to the church. Peter did not really have one turning point just as most of us in life. Still in Acts, and Galatians Peter was still learning and unsure about his ministry. He distanced himself from the Gentiles because he did not want to lose his credibility in his Jewish community. Much like many of us, Peter is a mixed bag. But God used his confession of faith to build up His church.

Part 1: Our Identity with a Living Hope

Look at verses 1-2. “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God’s elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia, 2 who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to be obedient to Jesus Christ and sprinkled with his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.”

The Peter we read now has come a long way from where he once was. Peter is now a seasoned Christian. He was firm about the identity that was given to him by Jesus and he was also firm about the role that was reinstated by Jesus. Not an apostle to the Jews or the Gentiles but he is an apostle of Jesus Christ. It took him many years to understand that he was feeding Jesus’ sheep, no matter where they were from. He was addressing the sheep of Jesus Christ; Born again Christians. At that time, the gospel travelled and had spread to places like Turkey and Rome. The Christian communities were made up of many clusters of house churches. Peter’s letter was written to those specifically who were going through a special period of suffering. Up to now, Peter endured physical and emotional suffering for Jesus. He was imprisoned and flogged before. This is how he addressed his listeners: They were chosen, elected by God only by His foreknowledge. What? Chosen to suffer, chosen to be an exile?

We are a chosen people. God in his foreknowledge has prepared for us a life here and for eternity. As Peter mentions here, the Holy Spirit is at work within us to make us aware about the person of Jesus Christ. The work of sanctification, as Peter describes is to be obedient to Jesus’ teachings and to understand better why we are sprinkled by his blood. This is the nature of a Christian. And this, as Peter mentions, also makes us exiles in this world. Our present sufferings are a sign of this calling. We have our main citizenship in heaven. Our citizenship in Canada, Ecuador, Korea is just secondary. In this world, we are foreigners, aliens even, very peculiar to the outsider. Jesus mentions that His Kingdom is not of this world. The life of an exile is a lifetime of loneliness against the world. We no longer delight in what we used to and we are eagerly waiting for something else. Nothing of this world will understand us or receive us as their own. This is a hard truth. Oftentimes, we want the church yoked with an unbelieving culture and still retain its values. I am always tempted to use other means besides the gospel of Jesus to attract people. This cannot happen. We are chosen to be born again into a new kingdom and a new way of life. The world will not be able to understand us and we must be comfortable with it. How can we be encouraged?

Look at verses 3-4. “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, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.”

In our suffering and loneliness, Peter switches our attention to something we possess as born again Christians. One clue Peter gives us is: Look at Jesus, our great and only example. Don’t look at me or Paul or anybody else, we are in the same boat as you. We are also suffering and waiting. Jesus humbly accepted God’s plan and endured the true suffering of being torn apart from his Father. This was the only way to give us the joy of a reconciled relationship. Because we know his death and his resurrection, we have a living hope. All of our sufferings, all of our pain and our loneliness will be answered in heaven. Not here. I had to really remind myself that the answers to my deep prayer and longings won't be fulfilled here. One pitfall we fall into is our need for instant gratification. Now what if I told you 50 years of patience for something is also an instant gratification when compared to an eternity with our savior? I hope this frame can help you reflect on your living hope. To be clear, the living hope given is for the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom and the redemption of our bodies. A place where we will understand our suffering for Christ. The wrong things will be made right and we will get to see Jesus face to face. Today this message is desperately needed. The COVID-19 pandemic has had us quarantined in fear. Many people are afraid to die. Their life will be over once they die. There is a deep fear of becoming nothing. But to us, death is just a step in our eternity with Jesus. Sometimes we may fall back and fear the same things but let’s snap out of that and remember the living hope we have as born again Christians. Something that is to look forward to. Also this inheritance is not something we can lose. The Bible says that the Holy Spirit is given to us in our hearts as a deposit that guarantees that we will be receiving it.

Look at verses 6-9. “In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”

It’s interesting that Peter notes that the exiles are greatly rejoicing in their suffering; he is not telling them to rejoice but telling them he knows that they are rejoicing. Peter explains that their living hope is the catalyst for that joy. I am sure each of you have experienced the joy of the living hope when you are in your painful moments. I have been in pain for the past 16 months, as most of the church members know what I went through 16 months ago. I lost a piece of myself. This loss revealed that my hope had been in my own desires and plans. To replace that lost hope, I desperately tried to cultivate a community in the church to help fill that void. However, I found out that I put too much expectations on my church members and that was unfair to them. So during these 16 months I have thought many times about trying a different church community. I make a daily decision to be a shepherd to campus students but there are many days where I want to just be a nominal Christian in larger Christian communities without any responsibilities. I want to move on in my life and pursue friendships and family life. I have heard advice saying that no matter where I go I will not be satisfied. Am I trying to replace the dead hope with another hope of my own making? This ministry really brings me face to face with my loneliness. The crux of the matter is that I continue to pray for joy from God. Peter says that joy is a reflection of our faith in Jesus. When we have a living hope in Jesus, God gives us joy that no human circumstances can take away. And that faith is being refined daily in our sufferings for Christ. When you struggle because of your faith, Peter says that the moment when Jesus Christ is revealed would be all the more better: You will give him the glory, praise and honor. This is coming from a person who has experienced great suffering for Jesus. Missionary Jacob mentioned a few weeks ago in his reflection that he had a tough time with accepting the resurrection of Jesus. However, he humbled himself to receive the gospel of Jesus and confessed his love and vulnerability in his reflection. This is an example of a living hope. We personally have not seen Jesus before and we do not see Jesus now but we are given this Love for him and listening to the gospel brings us much joy and redemption.

Part 2: Our calling to be Holy

Look at verses 13-16. Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. 14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

The Apostle Peter is no stranger to self-pity. He was admirable because he really did not hide his guilt and wept and he looked to Jesus many times and admitted his unworthiness. “Stay away from me Lord, I am a sinner”. In suffering, many of us go into a pit of self-pity. Pain is a feeling. My friend Rajaie says, “misery needs company.” We want others around us to sympathize with our sufferings and cheer us up. Even sometimes, we can use our suffering as an excuse not to serve God. “God is making me go through this pain, he will understand my need to vent.” This is a form of spiritual drunkenness. We let our emotions control our faith and lose sight of the purpose of suffering and bearing sufferings for Jesus Christ. Peter says, “Don't spend your time thinking deeply about your suffering. Instead be sober and set your eyes on Jesus Christ. Set your living hope on the inheritance that Jesus will bring you when he comes again.” One way to remain sober and not lose sight is to identify who you were before you knew Jesus and who you are after you are born again. Do not go back to your old way of life. Many of us have been Christians for many years but we still remember our old life. Do not conform to that way even though you have some nostalgia. Peter calls them evil desires when we live in ignorance of our sinful nature and the holy God. Usually in our reflections we write deeply about our struggles and our pain. I would like to encourage each one of us to spend less time thinking about our condition and more time thinking about Jesus’ work and second coming. When we look solely to God, we notice his character more and more. God is a holy God. He is set apart from every creation. There is no one like him. Yet, Peter reiterates this message. “Be set apart. Be holy”. This is only possible when we die to ourselves and remember that it is not us that lives but Jesus that lives in us. Calvin cannot be holy. Calvin must die and Jesus lives. That is how we are set apart. We are not set apart by following the law or working hard. We are set apart by identifying with Jesus Christ.

Let’s look at verses 17-21. “Since you call on a Father who judges each person’s work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.”

God is just and fair. Whatever we do on earth for the Gospel he will remember and reward us accordingly. Do not think that if you are doing Bible study weekly and people do not show interest, then it is wasteful. Remember that you are serving God out of reverent fear. Don't be mistaken. Peter is not telling the believers to be afraid of God’s judgement. Instead look at it this way. We have a solemn respect for God and we deeply trust and know that he will give us more than we ask for and he will always keep his promises. When we live on this earth, let’s set our living hope that God will reward us for our work in heaven. God kept his promise to redeem us. He did that through Jesus Christ. Only through Jesus can we believe that God will fulfill his promise to us. The Apostle Peter once thought he would never abandon Jesus. He said “Even if I have to die with you I will never disown you.” After his long tenure in his ministry for Jesus he realizes that that quote is the other way around. “Can a mother forget a baby at her breast? Though she may forget, I will not forget you” (Isa 49:15). You see when we look more at Jesus in our suffering we can see how much he is holding us. He never forgets us nor does he abandon us. When we look at ourselves we will lose sight of our faith and hope in God.

Today I encourage you to look at Jesus and accept his identity and set your living hope in the right place.