

Living Hope

1 Peter 1:1-12

19 July 2020 | Grace Bible Church Corinda | Ben Shannon

Big Question: What hope can we have for the future?

Big Idea: Praise God for salvation in the midst of suffering.

Prayer

God of Grace and Mercy,

We praise you as the God who came down to meet us where we're at. You've shown us your mercy and given us hope. Lord, please reveal your glory, through the preaching of your word. Soften our hard hearts and fill us again with wonder at who you are and what you've done. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Introduction

You don't need me to tell you that we're living through a significant moment in history.

This pandemic is a once-in-lifetime event that will shape our future.

If you listen carefully, you'll hear people expressing all kinds of hopes about what that future might look like.

Hope looks forward to something.

"I hope that we'll be rid of this virus soon."

"I hope we can return to life as it was a couple of months ago."

"I hope that this will be a key time when people start living differently."

"I hope that they'll discover a vaccine."

I can't see into the future, so I don't know what it's going to look like.

Maybe some of those things will happen and maybe they won't.

What I know for sure is that they can't all be right.

You can't return to the way things were AND have the world radically changed for the better.

What hope can we have for the future?

With all this doubt, is it possible to have SURE hope for the future?

That's the question that's addressed by our passage today.

God gives us sure and certain hope for what the future will look like.

Series Outline

We're going to be spending this term looking at the New Testament book of 1 Peter.

It was originally a letter, written by the same Peter that we know from the gospels.

The fisherman who became one of Jesus' disciples and spent three years living and studying under him.¹

Peter stands out as the one who got to walk on water and kept putting his foot in it, even denying Jesus three times.

Peter was key to the gospel going out and the church being established.

Can you remember back to the beginning of the year (it feels like a lifetime ago, doesn't it), when we were looking at Matthew's gospel?

Peter made this great confession about who Jesus is and so Jesus changed his name from Simon to Rocky, promising:

Matthew 16:18 (NIV11) ¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

Peter probably wasn't that well educated, but he gave one of the ten greatest sermons of all time on the Day of Pentecost.

When he wrote this letter, he was in Rome, capital of pretty much the whole known world.

The churches he wrote to weren't planted by him (or Paul for that matter).

He hadn't met them and they were far away:

1 Peter 1:1 (NIV11) ¹ Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,

If you have a look at this map, there's the boot at the bottom of Italy.

There's Rome.

And if you come across here, you get to Turkey.

Peter wrote to the churches in these areas.

He says three things key things about them in the first two verses.

Elect

Firstly, they're people who're elect, or chosen, verse one.

Every couple of years, we have a popularity contest to work out who'll represent our area in the government for the next few years.

We call this an election because we get to choose the candidate.

Being chosen gives you a special status.

Whether that's being chosen for a team, chosen for a promotion or chosen to hand something out in the classroom.

It's not always a good thing to be chosen – sometimes you can be given the special status of doing something you don't want.

Being chosen by God is always a good thing though.

The people of Israel in the Old Testament weren't chosen because they were big and impressive.

God gave them a privileged position because of his love and promises.

And the same thing is true of the Christians Peter's writing to.

God chooses people because of his love to show love.

They were chosen by the foreknowledge of God.

That doesn't JUST mean that God knew these people would accept him (although that's true too).

The word means that he chose them to choose him.

We know from other parts of the Bible that he did that before the world began.

Exiles

Secondly, they're exiles.

There's lots of different ways that this word can be translated: aliens, exiles, foreigners, sojourners, strangers.

Exiles are often forced to leave their home, but that's not an essential part of this word.

Strangers suggests people that don't have anything to do with those living around them, and that's not the case either.

The word simply means being a temporary resident in a foreign place.

The idea of being an exile doesn't really feel like something we do.

Australia is meant to be the country that welcomes everyone in, but that's only partly true.

We give people what we call temporary protection visas that allow them to come here for their own safety but they're never allowed to become Australian citizens no matter how long they stay.

Those people will always be exiles, strangers, sojourners, foreigners in this country, never quite belonging.

Peter's writing to foreigners of the diaspora – that's a bit of a strange word, isn't it?

It's hard to know exactly what Peter meant because in his day it was used to describe Jews who didn't live in Israel, but were scattered all around the world.

In the Old Testament, first the northern kingdom and then the southern kingdom of Israel were taken off into exile first by the Assyrians and then by the Babylonians.

Some of them returned with Nehemiah, but not all of them, so from that point on there were Jews spread all over the world and that might be who Peter's talking to.²

I think it's more likely that Peter's talking to Jews and gentiles.

He's using the term like we still do today.

People sometimes talk about the Chinese diaspora – how Chinese people are scattered all around the world.

Even in the first century, Christians were scattered all around the world.

He's writing to Christians, scattered around the world who are foreigners no matter where they are.

But more on that a little later.

Obedient to Jesus

Thirdly, they're obedient to Jesus.

They've been sprinkled by his blood, which seems a little bit icky, doesn't it?

Peter's picking up on what happened in Exodus 24:8.

God's Law was read out by Moses and the people responded by saying that they would be obedient to it.

Moses took some of the blood from the sacrifices they'd made and sprinkled it on them as a sign of the covenant or agreement between them and God.

Christians believers are obedient to Jesus, but that's only possible because Jesus died for us.

His blood has washed away our sin.

And because the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives to make us more holy and obedient to him.

He's changing them and growing them in Christ.

What's the point?

At this point – perhaps a little while ago – you might be thinking that while some people might find this a really interesting word study, you're not really sure what the point is.

Well, Peter's writing to encourage these chosen exiles who probably feel like they're on the outer because of their faith.

Many of you know what it's like to move from one culture to another.

You find that people in the new culture do things differently and that seems strange to you.

Some of you – quite strangely, I might add – even think that some of the things I do are strange!

Unless you grow up in a culture, you often, maybe never quite feel like you fit.

There are always subtle hints that you're a foreigner.

And the people in the culture you move into will see you as being different as well.

It might be because of your accent or having different skin, but it's just as likely to be because of the way you do things.

As Christians, we're foreigners because we change cultures without even moving.

Following Jesus means we have different ways of living and doing things.

If you're following Jesus, you'll never quite fit in almost any culture.

Peter's saying that they don't really fit with everyone else, even if they grew up in the culture.

My passport might say "Australian", but I'm a Jesusite before I'm an Australian.

Living as a Christian means that the people around you will find you a little bit strange.

Faith in Jesus makes us stand out.

I think we could add another translation of this word for strangers and foreigners – weirdos.

People will find it a little bit off-putting to have you around.

Well, at least they should find you a little bit weird.

If they don't, you might need to ask whether you're really living in obedience to Jesus.

One solution is to become a chameleon and try to hide into the background.

But that's not what followers of Jesus do because it never really works if you're being faithful to our Saviour

We live distinctively by faith.

Being different makes you the target for a bit of persecution.

We're all a little bit suspicious of people who are different.

It doesn't matter whether we're part of the dominate culture or a minority, we're all racist to some degree or another.

Probably not burning at the stake kind of stuff, but looks, comments and snide remarks to your face.

There's not much evidence of extreme, state-sanctioned persecution in that part of the world at that time.

These Christians probably felt a bit like they were a little bit on the outer.

There would've been all kinds of pressure to be like everyone else.

That's an important part of this letter.

Peter's writing about how you keep your faith alive when everyone else ISN'T doing it.

Keeping alive your allegiance to Christ and not culture.

He wants them to have hope, consolation and encouragement.

He wants them to have hope – that's why he writes praying that they'll have grace and peace "in the fullest measure".

As people chosen by God, we have a privileged position, but this isn't our home.

We have a better hope.

I'm calling this series, "Living for Jesus".

That might sound pretty generic – like it could be applied to any book of the Bible – but I think that's what this book is all about.

The other reason for looking at these three words is because verses one and two are a bit of a summary for the whole book.

These three words are important for the whole letter because they're how the whole book is divided up.

The letter breaks up into three parts:

- Living as Chosen People (1:1-2:10)
- Living as Strangers (2:11-4:11)
- Living in Obedience (4:12-5:14)

Sermon Outline

We're going to spend the next few weeks in that first section – living as chosen people.

Today, we'll focus on the chunk that goes from verse three through to verse twelve.

This section isn't about the wonderful plan that God has for your life, but the wonderful position he's given us as Christians.

The big idea for this morning **praise God for salvation in the midst of suffering.**

Through Christ we have been given a glorious salvation in the future which cannot be taken from us.

- Joyful hope in your future inheritance (vv3-5)
- Faith in your current suffering (vv6-9)
- Amazement at your privileged situation (vv10-12)

Joyful hope in your future inheritance (vv3-5)

How good is the gospel?

I mean, seriously, how GOOD is the gospel?

Isn't it just the best news?

Let me remind you of what God's done.

God's shown mercy to people – people like us – who, quite frankly, don't deserve it.

We drove away, leaving God in our rear vision mirror and yet a Christian is someone who's been reborn into his family.

We're reborn as a sons and daughters of God.

Being born isn't something you can take credit for – it's something that God's done for us.

Verse 3:

1 Peter 1:3 NIV11 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,

An inheritance is a blessing that's passed on in a family.

As family members, we get an inheritance, verse four.

In the Old Testament, the people of Israel were given an inheritance – the Promised Land.

What's our inheritance as Christians?

A new heavens and the new earth, according to Peter's second letter.³

A new and better future than the present we're currently experiencing.

We could be disappointed as we wait and wonder, but we rejoice because this one's in the bag.

There are lots of things we might inherit and all of them can be lost, except one which is absolutely secure.

A flood can come through, a fire could destroy your house and you escape with just the clothes on your back.

Your parents could spend every last penny of your inheritance.

But as a Christian, our heavenly inheritance is something will never, ever perish, spoil or fade.

It won't go off in the sun or mouldy in the fridge.

There won't be a time where it's out of fashion, become moth-eaten or get its colours washed out in the sun.

It's guaranteed, it's coming because God is storing it up for us.

It might be imperishable, but are WE going to make it there?

Well, not only is our inheritance being kept for us, we're being kept for it, verse five.

You can't squirm out of it and can't be pulled out of it.

Just like God guarded the Israelites as they wandered through the wilderness, God's protecting us so that salvation will be ours when Jesus come back.

That's why our hope is described as 'living' in verse three.

A living hope isn't empty and vain.

It's based on the resurrection, when God showed his might and power in the past.

The resurrection shows that Jesus really has defeated death.

I've been listening to the radio in the car over the last few weeks, hearing people talk about what they see the future being like post-COVID.

Many of them are very smart people, but even as they give their vision for what the world should look like, it's so disappointing.

You hear them talking about a future when wrongs are corrected and they can't see the gaping holes in what they're saying.

For everything they want to fix, you can hear how they'll break something else.

I find myself yelling at the radio as I drive along, "Don't you understand that none of this will work unless you fix sin. Sin is the problem!"

We wait with great joy while we're waiting for our salvation to appear.

The gospel is so good, it's worth rejoicing in because it's guaranteed.

Do you have joy when you anticipate that salvation?

Perhaps you might be missing the joy because you're not even looking at the salvation.

Our gaze drifts from our heavenly hope from time to time.

It's easy to get caught up and put our focus on things that are right in front of us like work, school, university, holidays.

Real joy comes from looking forward to Jesus coming back.

Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Faith in your current suffering (vv6-9)

Don't think for a second that Peter thought that the Christian life should be all smooth sailing.

He was a man who knew what it meant to suffer for Jesus.

He was gaoled and then beaten for preaching the gospel in Jerusalem.

Many of his friends, and ultimately he himself, would give their lives for Jesus.

That's the kind of man who you can listen to when he says that you can have faith in your current suffering.

The gospel is so good and the hope is so sure that it's worth rejoicing in even if you have to suffer a bit for it.

In fact, even if you've got to suffer a lot for it.

Suffering is painful by definition. Otherwise it wouldn't be suffering.

Going through trials isn't a barrel of laughs.

It's not a lot of fun, but it's worth it because of how good the gospel is.

We can have joy **DESPITE** suffering, knowing it's not forever.

Why does God allow us to suffer?

Do you sometimes feel yourself asking, "Why did God allow that to happen to me?"

"Isn't he on my side?"

Perhaps it's because he doesn't care or doesn't like me very much.

At the end of the day, we can't know exactly why we suffer.

Suffering isn't a sign that you won't see Jesus.

Job went through a lot and never found out the exact reason and we need to learn from that lesson.

But what's also clear is that God uses our suffering to grow us.

If you're suffering, it could be that's what he's doing.

Peter uses gold, of all things, as an analogy.

If you take gold and you heat it up really, really hot, lots of the impurities burn off.

And then you scoop off all the dross that's on top so that what's left is pure gold.

God uses suffering to refine our faith.

Faith is even more precious though, because gold will perish.

Gold and money is only for this life in this world.

But faith lasts into eternity.

God is refining our faith so that we'll give praise and glory and honour when he comes.

Gold is perishable but God's inheritance isn't perishable.

God is working in those trials to show us that our faith is genuine.

Sometimes Christian faith is really fragile and it breaks down at the first sign of things being difficult.

Genuine faith will keep clinging to Jesus, even when it's hard.

God is growing our faith during suffering.

We can sometimes feel dissatisfied that God doesn't have our best interests at heart.

Which means we can be quick to accuse him, can't we?

People like us who don't know everything, can't see everything, don't know the end from the beginning think that in our great and unmatched wisdom that we should sit in judgement of God.

Stop and think. Perhaps he just might know what he's doing.

Actually, he DOES know what he's doing.

Jesus isn't just our imaginary friend, like some people think.

He's our hope in the tough times.

He's more than just an idea, a way of thinking to get us through.

He's someone who will get us through.

God will strengthen our faith to make it to the destination.

We can have joy – even in tough times – because of the hope we have.

We look forward to seeing Jesus, but we don't see him now.

Peter saw Jesus, but not all the people who came after him including those he's writing to and us as well.

The only solution is faith. We must trust him without seeing.

OT people looked towards the coming of Messiah with faith.

We look forward to the return of Messiah with faith.

You don't have to see Jesus to trust in him.

Christians believe and are full of joy.

We have faith in our current suffering.

Amazement at your privileged situation (vv10-12)

Finally, be amazed at the privileged situation you have.

Peter compares those of us who stand this side of the cross with the Old Testament prophets.

They were the mouthpieces of God, speaking his words to the world on his behalf.

An important part of their job was to point to Jesus.

What they said wasn't their inventions or hunches, what they said about the Christ was predicted by his Spirit.

But they didn't know the details about Jesus.

They knew that messiah would come and possibly even that he would suffer from passages like Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22.

But they didn't know when.

They didn't know the time and the circumstances, verse eleven.

It wasn't for want of trying.

God said that's what he was going to do.

He sent prophets to speak on his behalf and they spoke about how God would save.

Even as they were saying this stuff, they were wondering when it was going to happen.

Surely God would do it in their lifetime!

They wanted to know the details of when and where it'd happen so that they wouldn't miss out.

But they were serving us.

We've seen what they hoped to see – that God's only Son Jesus would come and die on a cross to pay for our sins.

The prophets spoke of God's promises, but we've seen them fulfilled and so know that we can be forgiven.

We stand this side of the cross and we've seen God's plan actioned.

Angels long to be in our shoes.

Peter makes this curious comment about angels at the end of verse twelve.

Angels have no first-hand experience of God's plan of salvation because they didn't need it.

We're in the privileged position of knowing God's saving purposes.

Conclusion

How good is the gospel?

It's the reason that we, as Christians can have great joy and hope in good and difficult times.

We have a living hope – God has saved us for a better future.

The privilege position of being called into God's family and tasting his salvation is ours.

That means we can praise God for salvation in the midst of suffering.

¹ The disciples became Jesus' apostles (Luke 6:13; Acts 1:25)

² Or he could be writing to Jews that were kicked out of Rome, for instance under the emperor Claudius.

³ 2 Peter 3:13

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Big Question: What hope can we have for the future?

Big Idea: Praise God for salvation in the midst of suffering.

Discussion Questions

1. What qualifies Peter for writing this letter?
2. How does Peter describe the people he's writing to?
3. What is the cultural situation the people receiving this letter were facing?
4. What reasons does Peter give for Christians having hope?
5. How is Christian hope different to other people's hopes?
6. Is suffering a bad thing? What role does it play in the Christian life?
7. Why does God allow us to suffer?
8. Why do Christians need to have faith? Is this reasonable?
9. What gives Christians a more privileged position than the OT prophets and angels?