

Dear friends in Christ,

We continue our Easter celebration. Remembering and rejoicing in Christ's resurrection is not something we can do in just one Sunday. Last week we recalled the fact of Christ's resurrection as we followed with the women to Jesus' tomb. Today we concentrate more on the meaning of the resurrection of Christ in our lives today.

Today I want to talk to you about hope, and I want you to leave today with hope... a living hope... the kind of hope that changes your outlook, affects your behavior and reorients your life. The Bible tells us that for the Christian, having hope is essential.

Would it surprise you to know that Psychology Today also says that hope is essential? I always find it interesting how secular science, psychology, sociology, etc. end up confirming what was already written in the Bible long ago. Should it surprise us that they the Bible is proven right again and again? It's God's Word, given by our Creator so naturally he knows us, and how we think and how we work. So modern psychology has "discovered" what Peter knew and wrote about in his letter to Christians 2,000 years.

WE NEED HOPE. People with hope do better in academics, sports, business... pretty much in every area of life.

The article notes that talent, skill, ability, and resources are important, but they are not the vehicles that will get you to a given goal. The most important vehicle that transports you is HOPE. Without hope, skill, talent, abilities and resources are just finely tuned race engines that are revving in neutral... they're not going anywhere. Without hope, there is no forward drive... nothing to get to your goal.

So what is hope? Psychology Today says: **People with hope have both the will to achieve a given goal and the pathways and strategies necessary to achieve that goal.**

So doesn't hope depend a great deal on the goal? What is it that you are desiring to achieve? For you to have hope, the goal

- must be real... so you have the will to continue.
 - While having a pot of gold which resides at the end of a rainbow would be something you desire, you likely don't believe it is real. And so when you see a rainbow, you don't have much hope that a pot of gold will be yours.
- It must be comprehended.
 - Imagine having a job in which you don't understand what your company does, nor do you understand exactly what it is your role is. You will quickly lose hope, and probably quit that job.
- Valuable and valued. Must be highly desirable and so worth pursuing.
 - A child is excited about find a quarter in a vending machine. For them a quarter is desirable, and so they have hope that there may be one. And so they check all machines. For me, the quarter is not highly desirable. I don't have hope, no will and so I don't see or design the strategies needed to find such quarters.
- Must be attainable – the pathways and strategies are clear to achieve it.

- While piloting a fighter jet is desirable for me, and it is something real, I don't believe it is attainable for me. So I don't have hope that I will some day fly one. I don't have the will to achieve the goal, nor do I believe a strategy exists to attain it.

All of this to say, if we don't have the real goal in mind as Christians, if we can't comprehend what God has in store for us, if we don't see the value in what God promises, if we doubt that it truly exists, or if we doubt we can personally attain it, we will lose hope!

To give us a true, living hope that endures to the end (because it IS so important!), Peter writes a letter we call "1 Peter" to a group of Christians.

The Christians who first received this letter were going through a really rough time. They were being persecuted for their faith in Christ. They were suffering. Daily life for them was a great struggle... not at all fun. In fact, for some of them, this was now their second persecution. Some in this area had been in Jerusalem, and a part of the church that sprung up there at Pentecost. But a persecution there from the Jews led some of them to flee to Asia Minor. And now it was starting all over again... this time persecution not from the Jews, but from the unbelievers around them. Can you imagine how they were feeling? Not only had their daily life not gotten easier as Christians, it had actually gotten considerably worse... directly because they were Christians. They were losing hope. They were getting discouraged. And so Peter wrote this letter to them to encourage them. He wanted to tell them. "Life isn't hopeless! You have a lasting, living hope because we have a risen Lord Jesus.

God wanted Peter to write these words so that you will have hope too, because hope is essential. Listen to what he wrote. Let's start with verses 3-5.

1 Peter 1:3-9 (NIV84)

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, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

Peter can't help but start with words of praise to God because he know the reality of the comforting truth he is about to share. "**Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.**" His praise stresses the reason we even have a connection with God. He is the God and Father of OUR Lord Jesus Christ. God became man and lived among us as our brother, and died for us. That makes him "ours." But he is also "the Father's." Jesus is the one who connects us to God.

Then Peter lays out the big goal... the most important thing we focus on in the future to give us hope. And he makes this goal real, comprehensible, valuable and attainable. Sometimes there are so many clauses added we lose track of the core of the sentence. Here is the essence:

God has given us new birth into a living hope and into an inheritance.

"New birth" means you are given a new relationship. When a family celebrates a new birth, it means a new family member was added. God gave birth to you... that is, he made you a member of his family through your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This means you have (1) entered into a living hope and (2) into a new inheritance.

Living hope: What's the opposite of hope? Despair. God has given you hope. What's the opposite of living? Dead. Is there such a thing as dying hope? Or dead hope? There is. And it's the kind of hope most people have.

If you are not a Christian then you may have hope, but your hope is either dying or dead. People have hopes in relationships, career, money, technology, health. How long does that hope last? May you have placed your hope in those things from time to time. Did your hope die? Even if it didn't die, it will die... when you die. Anything of this world that you place your hope in will eventually be a dead hope. You don't get to take it with you. Naked you came into this world, naked you will leave. Someone once said, you never see a Hearst pulling a u-haul.

Have you ever engaged yourself in dying hopes? Have you ever given up hope and despaired. This is not what God has called us to. In fact, this is sin. Lord, forgive us for misguided hope, and the times we lost hope entirely.

CONFESSION AND ABSOLUTION

Now look at this. God has given us a living hope... a hope that will not die and will never fail. Our living hope is one we are born into when become a child of the most high God. And it comes "**through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**" Because Jesus lives, this means all of your sins are forgiven and your relationship with God is right. He loves you. He accepts you. You are his child. Because Jesus lives, you know that you will never really die. You get to live forever! And that's why he says you are born into a living hope AND...

"into an inheritance." To get an inheritance you have to be a child. Through the resurrected Lord Jesus, you are a child of God, and so you inherit something from God. What? You have an **"inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time."**

Amazing, isn't it? You have an inheritance from God himself of a blessed eternal future with him. Your best life is yet to come!

Osteen book:

Almost 10 years ago, a Christian megachurch pastor named Joel Osteen published a book called, *"Your Best Life Now: 7 Steps to living to your full potential."* The book became a best seller. In this book, the author makes the claim: *"God wants this to be the best time of your life."* He also says, *"Happy, successful, fulfilled individuals have learned how to live their best life now."* And *"As you put the principles of found in these pages to work today, you will begin living your best life now."* All of these statements are completely true... if you are not a Christian. If you are not a Christian, then this book is a must-read because it is true that this life truly is your best.

Apart from Christ, the life to come will be one of utter misery. Separated from God because of sin, it will be a "life" (if you can call it that) of perpetual dying. No hope. No relief. No satisfaction. No meaning. No future. No joy. If you are not a Christian, then it is absolutely true that this is indeed your best life, so you might as well make the most of it while you can.

If, however, you are a follower of Christ and are connected to him, then whatever life you have now is most certainly not your best life. Your best life is yet to come.

Whatever you strive for in this world spoils, rusts, breaks, depreciates. Or it can be taken, or stolen by another.

But not your heavenly inheritance! Listen to this. **can never perish, spoil or fade"** The prize of heaven, the joy, the peace... it's just as intense, just as brilliant, just as awesome as the

day you arrive. Some people say, “living eternally would get boring.” No it wouldn’t. I never get tired of being happy. I never get tired of enjoying beauty. I never get tired of seeing creativity... and being creative. Why would anyone imagine that the joy of heaven might fade over time? God says it absolutely will not. Not corrosion, no food going bad, no breaking. Just perfect.

But can it be lost? Anyone who has ever lost something, or had something stolen knows what a horrible feeling that is. Last summer on our family vacation, we stopped at a park for lunch. Turns out we were in a pretty bad neighborhood in Denver... I think we may have seen a drug deal go down during our lunch. We packed up, in a little hurry, and left. 3 minutes later, Anna says, “I forgot my purse!” We turned around and went back. Someone had already gone through her purse and stole the \$40 of vacation money she brought with her. She was devastated. I gave her \$20 but wanted her to remember an important lesson: The things of this world can be lost or stolen.

But the eternal inheritance is different!
—**kept in heaven for you.** No one can take it since God holds on to your inheritance for you!
who through faith are shielded

But what if Satan robs me of my faith? What if I don’t have the strength?

who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”

God assures you that the faith you have was created in you by God and he will protect you to the end. The power of God himself is at work defending you against whoever or whatever would try to rob you of faith and steal from you the inheritance that is now yours!

God wants you to know that when it comes to your faith, Almighty God, Creator of all things, has your back. HE is the one defending you. And there is no underdog that defeat him. He holds all power, and he promises that that power is at work for you to keep you strong in your faith **until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”**

Let me just quick read the remaining verses:

6 In this [that you have new birth into a living hope and into an inheritance that is out of this world] 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 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 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,

9 for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

So you rejoice... in spite of suffering! Because you know what is to come.

You rejoice... because of suffering. It proves your faith. That it is genuine. It refines it. It strengthens it.

You rejoice... not because you see Jesus (like Thomas did), but because you see that the goal of your faith, the salvation of your soul, is secure.

Do you have hope? Today I pray that you leave having received a real, living hope from your Father in heaven. The goal he has placed before you is no less than heaven itself. This is the glorious inheritance that he promises is yours, and you will receive it when your life is done, or Jesus returns. That is your goal! If you have this living hope, then you will have **both the will**

and the pathways and strategies to achieve this goal. ... This eternal goal becomes your highest priority. It means you can rejoice no matter what you face here on earth. It means you will persist in the faith, remaining close to God through his Word and Sacraments. It means the time you spend being encouraged by God's people, and encouraging God's people is the most important time you can spend.

Friends, Jesus Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. So God has given you birth into a living hope and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven, secure. You are protected by God's almighty power.

Go with living hope! Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.