

A LIVING HOPE

1 Peter 1:1-12

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....”

At the beginning of this New Year we want to study the book of 1 Peter, which is known as a letter of hope. Peter wrote this letter to the early Christians who were going through fiery persecutions. We are not in a similar situation as they were. So it may not seem fit for us. Some people asked why we are studying 1 Peter. There are at least three reasons.

First, we should be prepared to overcome all kinds of persecutions. When we think of persecution, we tend to limit our concept to the physical. But there are also spiritual or psychological persecutions. Brother Yun, a Chinese evangelist, endured serious persecutions, including imprisonment and torture. Later, he moved to Germany. He thought there would be no more persecution. But at the very time he began an evangelistic campaign, he was slandered in writing. He was shocked. Later, he was told by his translator, “In China Christians are persecuted with beatings and imprisonment. In the West Christians are persecuted by the words of other Christians.” Based on this experience, Yun commented, “This new kind of spiritual persecution was no easier than physical persecution in China.”¹ This reminds us of Paul’s words in 2 Timothy 3:12: **“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”** If anyone lives a godly life, they will surely be persecuted in the workplace, on campus, even in their homes in various ways. So we need to be prepared to overcome all kinds of persecutions.

Second, we need a clear Christian identity in our times. There is pressure in our society to conform to relativism in regards to truth and morality. This causes many to hide their identity as Christians in order to blend in. But it is not time for Christians to “blend in” but to speak up about our faith. Recently, Phil Robertson of “Duck Dynasty” publicly affirmed that sexual immorality, including homosexuality, is sin, referring to 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. As a result,

¹ Yun, Brother, 2002. *“The Heavenly Man: The Remarkable True Story of Chinese Christian Brother Yun.”* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Monarch Books, p. 308-309.

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the A & E network decided to cancel his television show. At that time many Christians expressed their support of Robertson, giving 1.5 million “likes” on Facebook. Within nine days the network executives reversed their decision and reinstated the show. This reveals that it is not easy to live with a clear Christian identity in our times. But it is most important to do so.

Third, we should not be deceived by false hope, but hold to the living hope. We human beings must have some kind of hope. The question is, “What kind of hope do we have?” Many people are deceived by the glittering things of this world and set their hopes accordingly. These hopes mislead them and bring misery. How can we not be deceived by these false hopes? We need to have a living hope in God. Through 1 Peter Bible study let’s learn the meaning of our sufferings, have a clear identity as Christians, and fill our hearts with living hope in God.

In today’s passage Peter encourages scattered Christians, who were suffering for the sake of Christ. In his greeting, he proclaimed how God saved us (1-2). And he praised God for giving us new birth into a living hope (3-5). Then he taught the meaning of suffering in all kinds of trials (6-12).

I. How God saved us (1-2)

Peter introduces himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ (1a). He was Jesus’ top disciple among the Twelve whom Jesus had appointed as apostles. Everyone acknowledged his apostleship. So he did not need to defend it, as Paul did. Then he addressed his recipients: “God’s elect” and “exiles.” To God they were precious, but the world regarded them as nobodies. When they believed in Jesus they were rejected, marginalized and scattered by persecution throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia (1b). They had been outcast from their societies and were living as foreigners. But how did Peter see them? Verse 2a says, **“...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.”** Peter saw that they were precisely where God wanted them to be to carry out his great purpose. In verse 2, Peter explains the work of the Triune God in salvation. Before we had done anything, good or bad, God chose us according to his sovereignty based on his grace alone. God gave his one and only Son Jesus, who shed his blood for our sins. The Holy

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Spirit sanctifies us and leads us to obedience to Jesus. Peter greeted them: “Grace and peace be yours in abundance” (2b).

II. Praise be to God! (3-12)

In verse 3, Peter burst forth: **“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”** Why did Peter begin his letter to suffering Christians by praising God instead of sympathizing with them? It was because his mind was not consumed by their problems, but he was deeply aware of God and what he had done. What were his praise topics?

First, he praised God for giving us new birth (3). Who is God? God is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is our Lord, so God is our Father also. Jesus said to his disciples: **“I am ascending to my Father and to your Father...”** (Jn 20:17b). Now we can call God the Creator **“our Father.”** What has our Father done for us? **“In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead”** (3). Because of our sins we were cut off from God and lost the source of life. We were doomed to die and suffer eternal punishment. We had no hope. But when we accept Jesus as our Savior, he gives us new birth into eternal life. “...if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” (2 Cor 5:17) When we are born again we enter a new world. It is like going from the darkness into the light, from prison to freedom, from sorrow to joy, from fatalistic defeat to hope and victory. It is because God’s seed of new life is planted in our hearts and begins to grow. God’s seed of new life has power to transform any sinsick person into a child of God in the image of Jesus. Praise God for giving us this new birth!

Second, he praised God for giving us a living hope (3-5). New birth has many implications. But Peter emphasizes the result of having a living hope. Peter liked the word “living.” He repeats it in this letter: “living hope,” “living and enduring word of God,” “living Stone” and “living stones” (1:3,23; 2:4,5). What does it mean to have a living hope? A living hope is in contrast to a dead hope or a false hope. A living hope is vibrant, dynamic and life-giving. It fills us with joy and strength that enables us to overcome all kinds of hardships. Living hope is not a theory or illusion that does not affect our practical lives. Rather, it is real and effective; we begin to experience in our hearts what is to come, even while living in this world. Living hope shapes

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our character, value system and lifestyle. It does not disappoint us because it is based on God's promise and power, revealed when he raised Jesus from the dead as the first fruit of all believers (1 Cor 15:20). It is an unshakable hope which resides in our deep inner being. No one can snatch it away.

Verse 4 describes the contents of this hope. It says, **“...and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.”** An inheritance is a passing of wealth at the time of death, generally from parents to their children. It is based more on relationship than on the merits of the inheritor. In the Old Testament God gave the Promised Land as the inheritance of Israel. But this pointed to an inheritance that was even greater, one reserved in heaven for those who live by faith, like Abraham. Hebrews 11:9-10 says of him, **“By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”** When we have God's inheritance in our hearts, we are rich, and we lack nothing. God himself is our reward (Gen 15:1). God is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us (Eph 3:20). God is able to bless us abundantly, so that in all things, at all times, having all that we need, we will abound in every good work (2 Cor 9:8). We will never lose this inheritance because it is kept in heaven by God's power (4b). Gaining this inheritance is more certain than withdrawing money from a bank. It is untouched by death, unstained by evil, and unimpaired by time. While we live in this world, God shields us by his power until Jesus comes again (5). All we have to do is keep our faith.

There is a great contrast between inheritance in heaven and on earth. Earthly inheritances perish, spoil and fade. Trying to hold on to them causes stress, anxiety and fear. They become catalysts of greed and envy that break relationships. Many people have been deceived by false hope in earthly things and it has led to their ruin and misery. For decades many held on to the American Dream². They worked hard for a better life economically and socially. But family relationships have become very dysfunctional, and most people struggle just to survive. Many college grads live with their parents

² <http://222.truth-out.org/news/item/16291-the-american-dream-is-dead>.

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against the wishes of both. The American Dream is over. In the days of silver mining, there lived a beautiful and artistic woman named Baby Doe Tabor. When her husband proved unfaithful, she divorced him and married a rich mine owner in Cripple Creek, Colorado named Horace Tabor. They enjoyed the high life for a while and she became known as the best dressed woman in the West. But a turn of fortune led to the sudden demise of Mr. Tabor. He lost his wealth and then his health. Near death, he told Baby Doe to “hold on to the Matchless mine...it will make millions....” She did for 35 years. But it produced nothing. In the end, she died in a cold, lonely shack without any money or friends. She confessed that she had lived a life of vanity. This can be the story of anyone who puts their hope in earthly things.

On the other hand, those who put their hope in the inheritance in heaven find the deeper meaning of life and can freely use their resources for a better purpose. They are generous and willing to share. They are rich in good deeds. In this way they lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age (1 Tim 6:18-19). They leave a good legacy for their descendants. John D. Rockefeller left this testimony: “I had to begin work as a small boy to help support my mother. My wages started at \$1.50 per week. I took the first \$1.50 home to my mother. She held the money in her lap and explained that she would be happy if I would give a tenth of it to the Lord. I did, and from that week until this day I have tithed every dollar God has entrusted to me.”³ At age 53, he was the richest man on earth and the world’s only billionaire. Then he developed a sickness called “alopecia.” He lost all his hair and became like a mummy. His weekly income was one million dollars, but he digested only milk and crackers. He could not sleep, stopped smiling, and enjoyed nothing in life. The doctors predicted he would not live over one year. At this critical moment, he realized that he “could not take one dime into the next world.” A living hope in the kingdom of God sprouted in his heart. He began to help churches and the needy, donating \$550 million. He established the Rockefeller Foundation which discovered penicillin. He began to sleep well, eat and enjoyed life to the age of 98.

Those who hope in heaven give generously not only of their money, but of their youth, time, energy and talents. Many among us put their hope in God in their college days and lived sacrificially for his world mission purpose.

³ <http://222.library.generousgiving.org/articles/>

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Many left promising careers with high salaries in their home country to live poorly and preach the gospel in other nations. They had to start on the bottom of society delivering pizzas or newspapers, or even as chicken killers. After establishing fruitful ministries, they could have enjoyed retirement. Instead, they went out again as silver missionaries. How could they do that? It is because they have a living hope in the kingdom of God in their hearts. This living hope enables us to overcome all kinds of hardship and to sacrifice comforts for Christ and his kingdom. At this moment, let's ask ourselves, "What is my hope?" Is it the living hope in God, or something else? Let's pray to rekindle living hope in the kingdom of God in our hearts.

Third, he praised God for using trials to refine our faith (6-12). When we reflect on what God has done for us, we can greatly rejoice in the midst of all kinds of trials (6). These trials last for "a little while," but the inheritance we have in heaven endures forever. Moreover, God uses these trials for our good. Verse 7 says, **"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."** Before knowing Jesus, trials were nothing to us but meaningless sufferings. Not only did they bring pain, they could destroy our minds and character. So we tried to avoid them at any cost. But when we face trials in Jesus, we can find great meaning in them. Peter uses the analogy of refining gold. Gold is taken from the ground in the form of ore which also contains many other elements. This ore must go through a fiery refining process which destroys everything but the gold. The refining fire must be extremely hot, over 6,000 degrees Fahrenheit. On average, out of one million grams of ore, refiners can expect about 1-2 grams of gold. Fire does not destroy the gold; it only removes the impurities. Likewise, persecution does not destroy the life of God in Christians. But it does purge away all that is dirty and impure, such as false hopes and our sinful nature. So these trials should not surprise us or cause us to doubt God's love. Rather, they purify our faith and strengthen us and shape godly character (Ro 5:3-5). It is noteworthy that gold will eventually perish; but our faith never will. Rather, it will result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. Why is genuine faith so valuable and precious? It is because it produces love and joy within us. Verses 8-9 say, **"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**

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your faith, the salvation of your souls.” When we realize that trials produce this kind of fruit, we can be thankful and praise God in the midst of them.

Look at verses 10-12. Salvation did not come about at random. God told the prophets thousands of years in advance of the grace that would come through Jesus (10). The prophets predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow (11). They could not fully understand the message, but they believed it and tried to find the time and circumstances. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but future generations who would hear the gospel and believe through Spirit inspired preaching (12a). This salvation is so precious that even angels long to look into these things (12b). The salvation that has come to us was very costly. It came through the suffering, death and resurrection of the Messiah Jesus. Suffering came first, and then glory came. Without suffering there is no glory. In order to receive praise, glory and honor when Jesus comes, we must go through sufferings.

Living in this world we go through many trials, both small and large. Job said, **“Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward”** (Job 5:7). We can be discouraged, become angry, and blame others. Even though we live by faith, we lose joy and peace. We need to look at God and think of what God has done for us. In his great mercy, he has given us new birth into a living hope. He uses trials to refine our faith so that we may grow in his likeness. When we think of this, we can praise God from our hearts and have real joy. Let’s have living hope in our hearts and live victoriously in 2014.