

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.⁶ In 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 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. (1 Peter 1:3-9)

What is a Living Hope?

“I hope you like it.” Have you ever said that when you gave somebody a gift? If you did, didn’t that imply a little bit of doubt about whether they would like the gift you gave them? Maybe you worried that the color was too wild for your conservative mother or that your kid would think it was really lame or that your spouse would’ve really preferred something else. Yet, you gave them that gift and you hope they like it. You believe there’s a chance, even a good chance they will. But you just don’t know for sure. That’s the way hope usually works in our lives. It looks forward to something we can’t see yet, and of course, there’s an element of doubt. The word of God that we have before us today is all about hope. It’s about the power of hope in our lives. It’s about the greatest hope that any of us will ever have, a hope that Peter calls a living hope. But what does that mean? **What is a living hope?**

I.

Well, a living hope is not a doubtful hope. Peter was not talking about situations where we just don’t know if it’s going to come out the way we want it to. He’s talking about certainty. In fact, “hope” might not even be the best way to translate the Greek word he uses here. Perhaps a better word would be “expectation.” An expectation is something that you believe is going to happen. Even that word might not be strong enough for what Peter tells us God has given us. He’s given us a certain hope, an expectation that cannot be denied.

What is that expectation? Peter calls it **“an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you.”** An inheritance is a good example of an expectation. Most of the time, you know it’s coming even if you don’t know the full extent of it until it arrives. Yet, there is an element of doubt even with an inheritance. It may turn out to be a lot smaller than you thought it was. It might be ruined or lost before you ever get it. But the inheritance that we’re expecting from God is not like that. It can never perish – it can never die. It can’t spoil or be ruined by age. It can’t fade or disappear. The inheritance God will give us is the one thing in the universe like that. Here in the Detroit area, we see many homes and hotels and schools that once were beautiful. They were the heritage of this community. Now it would cost so much money to make them beautiful again that most of them will be torn down some day. Time takes its toll on all that exists here. But the inheritance that Christ has won for us is immune to time.

That inheritance is kept in heaven for us. My wife and I have a safety deposit box at a local bank. We keep valuable documents and a handful of other things there. The theory is that even if that bank burned down, the safety deposit box would protect the contents. Well, God has the ultimate safety deposit box in heaven. That’s where he keeps this inheritance that he has for us – there where time doesn’t have any effect, there where he’s always watching to protect and preserve what he is giving us. Nothing is more secure than this certain hope that God has given us.

Of course, that inheritance is eternal life. That’s our living hope that can never perish, spoil or fade. And that living hope comes to us through the resurrection of Jesus. What does that mean? Well, what is the source of all the decay that stalks this life? Why does time ruin everything here but have no effect in heaven? Because death rules here. You and I are all dying. Everything and everyone around us is dying. This whole world is dying. That’s why we need a living hope.

Why is the world dying? God designed it to last forever. But sin has ruined it. Sin brought death into this world and it touches every aspect of our lives here. Think how much time we spend trying to preserve our

homes, our cars, our possessions from the destruction that time brings. Think how deeply our society worships youth and how hard we try to deny the effects of age. My wife keeps insisting that she can see gray hairs on my head. But when I look in the mirror, I don't see any. So apparently, she's conspired with the place where I get my hair cut and she has the stylist sprinkle gray hairs down on my lap because every time I get my hair cut, those gray hairs are there. Why is youth so important to us? Because we fear old age. We fear surgeries and health problems. We fear dementia and nursing homes and a declining standard of living. And behind all that, we fear death itself. We fear the pain of it and we fear what will come after it.

Death is the punishment for sin – for our sin. We good, church going people have to face the fact that we are sinners, pure and simple. No matter how many times we tell ourselves that we're good people, we can still feel the years take their toll. We feel the aches and the pains. We see people we know and love age and know it's coming for us, too. Even our children, day after day, take another step closer to death. That is God's incontrovertible proof that every one of us is a sinner. Every one of us has failed to love God perfectly, to trust him absolutely, to live for him every moment of our lives. We are all guilty of sin. And we will all die as a result. And deep inside, we know that after death, we deserve to face the consequences for all that sin. We deserve hell.

That's why Jesus died. He was perfect. He did deserve to live forever. But he died for all our sin, even the sin that we have trouble admitting we're guilty of. He died for the sin we don't know about. He died for the sin that's killing us every day and destroying the world we live in. He died and he suffered hell itself while he was dying. Then he rose. His resurrection gives us that living hope. His resurrection promises that all our sin is paid for and wiped away. His resurrection promises that we will be freed from death. We will go to heaven, not hell, when we die. And when the time is right, Jesus will return and he will raise these dead bodies from the grave. He will renew this dying world. He will kill death itself and we will live forever in a world that's totally free from death and decay and destruction forever.

The really amazing thing about all this is that the hope itself gives us life. Jesus died and paid for everyone. But not everyone has the living hope. Not everyone trusts in what Jesus has done. The way that God gives us faith is through the promise of forgiveness and eternal life. God's promise has his power built into it. When I make a promise, I have to work to keep it. And whether you believe it or not depends on my track record with you. I have to earn your trust. But not only do God's promises always come true, God needs no track record because he built his power into the promise. God's promise that Jesus has taken away our sin and given us life reaches into our hearts and creates faith there. God's promise feeds that faith and continuously renews our expectation of eternal life. So in that sense, our hope and our faith are really the same thing. Trusting in Jesus gives us eternal life. So, **what is a living hope? It's a hope that gives life.**

II.

Expectations change our lives. College costs tens of thousands of dollars. Why do we send our children to those colleges? Why do they go into debt to attend those schools? Why do they spend four or more years jumping through hoops and living on caffeine and doing a mountain of work that they'd never do otherwise? Because they have an expectation that it will all be worth it. They'll have a job they like, instead of one they hate and a lifestyle that's better than what they could achieve without a degree. Expectations of what we will get in the future change the way we live now. That's true even when the expectation is uncertain. Lots of people graduate from college without having the payoff they thought they were going to get. But that doesn't stop kids from going. If a hope that's as uncertain as a college education can move us to spend that kind of time and money and effort, what about a hope that's absolutely certain? It changes who we are. It changes everything that we think and feel and say and do.

Peter tells us that our living hope gives meaning to suffering. He says, **“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 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.”** God says that your faith is worth more than refined gold, because gold is finally going to perish. Now, gold doesn't actually decay. It doesn't rust. Go to any natural history museum and you'll see gold that was refined thousands of years ago still glittering in the light.

But gold is a part of this world. This world is dying while faith survives the ending of this world. Faith carries us to heaven. Suffering is God's way of refining faith. It's the fire that our faith has to pass through to

burn out the impurities. Clearly, God is not saying that suffering is fun or easy. Fire hurts. Every hurt is a part of God's work to refine our faith. When we hurt, we realize how weak we are, and we turn to God, who alone can help us. When trials come, it reminds us to cling to Jesus who alone will conquer them.

Peter also says that sufferings prove that our faith is genuine. It's easy to trust God when nothing bad is happening. The test comes when we're lying in the hospital and we don't know how it's going to come out. The test comes when stress robs us of sleep and our thoughts won't stop racing. In those moments, the child of God turns to Christ who rose from the dead for proof that even the worst that we face here is only here. When we go home, we will be free. That child of God prays to him for relief and deliverance while we live here. He or she trusts that God will answer that prayer – that he will take the hurt away or he will give us the strength to endure it until we reach eternal life. When our faith stands during those trials, we see that faith is real.

God sees that faith is real. He promises us praise, glory and honor when Jesus is revealed. On Judgment Day, Jesus will hold every believer up as if as if our faith were as perfect as Jesus' faith was. He will praise us for remaining with him when every logical argument said that we should just give up because no loving God would ever make us suffer like that. Now, we won't deserve God's praise. We're still sinners and our faith will only survive because God keeps it alive. He should get all the credit. But on Judgment Day, God will honor us for remaining true to him.

Peter says, **“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 goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”** The people who received this letter were like us. They only knew Jesus from the Bible. But they still believed him. We still believe in him because God has given us a new birth into a living hope. Because of that faith, we do love Jesus even when we hurt because we do know where we are going. We do know what God has promised us. As we wait for heaven, as we come and we hear about our Savior's love for us, the Holy Spirit gives us a joy that cannot be explained to an unbeliever. Sometimes, we can't even really state it clearly to each other. But the joy is real. We know Jesus and we will live with him forever. **What is a living hope? It's a hope that clings to eternal life.**

Hope is an important part of life. Even the ordinary hopes of this life are necessary. When life seems hopeless, depression sets in. If we need the ordinary, uncertain hopes of this life to endure each day's challenges and difficulties, what does that say about the certain hope, the expectation of God's love in Christ? All the hopes of this life are cheap imitations of the greatest hope that we have: the expectation that we will live forever with Jesus; the confidence that every challenge is working for our good; the trust that we are forgiven and we will see him soon. May Jesus' resurrection renew that hope in you! Amen.