

1 Peter 1

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 08 March 2020

Preacher: John Ross

[0 : 00] to have said something about the last stanza that we sang there. It introduces the idea of judgment. And that might seem slightly incongruous and perhaps jar a little with the earlier thoughts of praise and gladness and worship.

But of course you have to sing that through the understanding of the psalmist himself. Old Testament believers very often saw judgment not as something to be feared. Far, far from it. They saw it as something to be welcomed. They wanted God to come in justice and to deal with all the injustices in this world and to vindicate his suffering and trampled on people. So that's the idea of judgment. It's not something about cowering before a judge who's going to condemn us. It's welcoming the final vindication of God's people.

We may be downtrodden and despised in this world, but God will come with justice and we look forward to that. That's how you have to sing those references to judgment in the psalms.

[1 : 12] But that's the psalms. So it's 1 Peter that we're in this morning and chapter 1. Now we're thinking of our living hope as it unfolds in these first 12 verses.

It's a great theme of the whole book, in fact, but here particularly. I'm sure we're well aware of the reality of the status of the church of Jesus Christ in Britain today.

It's declining more rapidly than previously thought. Some people are pessimistically predicting a catastrophic collapse. We've faced onslaughts from pluralism and militant atheism that even took a reference to God from the Girl Guide's pledge and promise.

We know that across Scotland that church attendance continues to decline. It's good to come here this morning and see a well-attended church.

And there are churches bucking the trend, but the trend is still downwards. We Christians are in a minority, and it's becoming an increasingly smaller minority, and we're somewhat despised in the eyes of many.

[2 : 29] As Christians, we have little social or political power, but it's good to know of Christians in positions of influence nevertheless. And in many ways, what was once central Christianity, in the UK, what was once central in society is now at the fringes, at the edges.

Well, if I hadn't made, if I just described that situation without making reference to our particular circumstances, you could say that that pretty well describes the world in which Peter lived and the experience of those to whom he wrote, with this exception, that whereas the church is declining here, it was hardly even rising in his day.

And in the small inroads it was making, it was struggling, and there were many obstacles and difficulties. Peter was living at a time when the gospel was apparently struggling to make a toehold in society.

And so Peter's letters, first letter and the second letter, are letters to Christians living under pressure. And it was his aim to show his friends scattered throughout the ancient world. He mentions places like Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, Bithynia, most of them largely in what is now Turkey. And he's writing to encourage them.

[4 : 12] And to tell them that in the face of all the adversity, nothing has gone wrong. Nothing has gone wrong. It may not have been the way that people thought it would work out.

When their hearts were touched by the Spirit, when they received the gospel and did so with enthusiasm, they thought it would be a short time perhaps before everyone's heart was moved in the same way.

And there was a general enthusiasm for the message of Jesus. But it wasn't working out like that. And there was harassment and there was difficulty and there was criticism and there was even overt persecution and physical suffering and death.

And you can imagine people think, it shouldn't be like this. What's gone wrong? And Peter's writing to them to tell them, nothing has gone wrong.

This struggle, this living in a world of tension, opposition and persecution are all part of God's purpose for the furtherance of the gospel.

[5 : 24] It would be sometime later, a couple of hundred years later or so. One of the great North African Christians would use that expression, which in a way encapsulates what Peter is saying, that the blood of the martyrs is seed.

That as the blood of the martyrs is spilled, so the seed of the gospel is planted. Nothing has gone wrong. The suffering is all part of God's plan and purpose.

Now, on the face of it, that's not a very welcome message to receive. But Peter had more to say than that. Everything is still under God's control and God will bring good out of evil.

So, he reminds them and he reminds us in our context today that it is dangerous out there and that God's people need to be guarded.

He says that in verse 5. He talks about those who through faith are shielded, as it is in our version here, or guarded by God's power until the coming of the salvation, ready to be revealed at the last time.

[6 : 41] Why? Because the next verse tells us, you are grieved by various trials. You suffer grief in all kinds of trials. But he's insisting that with every trial, there is God's grace.

More than adequate to face that. There is hope. Indeed, three times in this chapter, we read the word hope.

Find it there in verse 3. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy has given us a new birth into what? A living hope. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

And then if we just go beyond where we finished reading the verse 13, it crops up there as well.

Therefore, prepare your minds for action. Be self-controlled. Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you.

And then he carries the theme on to the end of the chapter. And to verse 21. Through him you believe in God who raised him from the dead and glorified him so that your faith and hope are in God.

[7 : 51] Hope. Christian hope. Hope. Now, we don't have in normal English usage such a positive spin or a positive reality in connection with that word hope.

When we use that word hope, it's not usually a statement of confident assurance. If we were confident, we would say, not I hope, but we would say, I am sure.

And when we use that word hope, it describes some sort of vague optimistic feeling that we have that things will work out and plans will be fulfilled.

But in the New Testament, there isn't that element of contingency and uncertainty with regard to the word.

In the New Testament, hope always carries a note of well-grounded assurance. It's faith writ large.

[8 : 56] It's confidence. There's certainty. A ring of certainty in the New Testament term hope.

You remember the story, those of you who are maybe my generation and maybe a little bit younger, maybe even doing the rounds now for all I know, the little children's story of the little train.

And it's to deliver a cargo of toys to children living on the other side of a steep little hill. And as the story goes, it sets out and it looks at the big hill and it's got its big load behind it.

And it says, I think I can. I think I can. I think I can. I think I can. And as it climbs closer and closer to the summit of the hill, confidence grows and it says, I knew I could.

I knew I could. I knew I could. I knew I could. With a Christian, there's no, I think I can. I think I can. I think I can. There's confidence.

[10 : 01] There's assurance. Paul says, and it's not absolute carte blanche. It doesn't apply to folly.

It doesn't apply for us deciding to try to walk across the harbor on the water. But Paul says, with regard to everything God wants us to do, I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

It's great to be reminded of that. Now, Peter bases that hope, bases that confidence and that assurance here in this chapter on four great realities.

And I just want to touch on them all this morning very briefly. The first thing, our hope is based on the grace we have already received. The grace we have already received.

Verses one and two. That's not just a nice wishful thought.

[11 : 21] That flows from Peter's kind heart. It's a prayer that he makes. But it's a prayer inspired by the Spirit of God who intends to fulfill and answer that prayer.

Christians are those who are the recipients of grace and peace. We've already received God's grace.

Now, Peter's writing to genuine Christians, authentic Christians, real Christians. It's perfectly possible to be a nominal Christian, Christian in name only.

And he emphasizes the fact that they are real Christians because he refers to them in verse one. There is God's elect. In other words, they've been chosen by God.

Now, of course, it's the Christian's experience that we choose to follow God. There's no doubt about that. He invites us to follow him. He calls us to follow him. And we choose to follow him.

[12 : 28] But the amazing thing is that as we grow in the faith, we discover that behind our choice lies another choice. There's a choice of God. That he's chosen to set his love upon us.

You did not choose me, but I chose you. We love because he first loved us.

And that doctrine of election and predestination ties many people in knots. But the simple truth behind it is the love of God, that he set his love upon us.

And it's an interesting thing. This isn't a topic for those who are not Christians to puzzle themselves over. It always crops up in the New Testament in the context of reassuring Christians that behind their weak faith and their lack of confidence and the coolness of their love lies the infinite love and the grace of God.

And we know that. We know that God's initiative always comes before our response. In his infinite love, God provided through Christ forgiveness and a way back to a proper relationship to him.

[13 : 49] We know that in his grace and in his love, he's conquered our rebellion. Not to crush us, but to do the best thing you can ever do with enemies. Make them your friends. Make them your friends.

Make them your friends. Make them your friends. So instead of being disobedient rebels, we want him. And we want to be like him and we want to obey him and we want to follow him.

And we're unhappy when we fail him. And what makes us like this, Peter tells us, is the grace that flows from each member of the Trinity.

Chosen according to the foreknowledge, God the Father, through the sanctifying, setting apart work of the Spirit.

For obedience to Jesus Christ. Each member of the Trinity united in lavishing their love and their grace upon us.

[14 : 44] For obedience to Jesus Christ.

If God is for us, the opposition doesn't count for anything. If God is for us, who can be against us? How can we possibly fail? All will stumble along the way and will sometimes think we're going to fail. But God will keep us.

And it is the knowledge of God's generosity to us in Jesus that causes Peter to pray confidently that all his people will experience God's grace and peace in abundance.

So our hope is based, our confidence is based on the grace we have received. And secondly, it's based on the new birth that we have undergone. Verses 3 and 4. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in his great mercy.

[16 : 07] He has given us new birth into a living hope. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

Kept in heaven for you. So the second ground of hope for every true Christian is that they have been born again. By this mysterious process of the new birth that operates beneath the level of our consciousness.

The Holy Spirit comes and he changes our nature. He gives us new life. He renews our perception. He gives us power.

And he gives us new desires. Now, just as natural birth leads to growth and life, so the goal of new birth is eternal life in the spiritual realm.

And this is guaranteed to us, Peter says, by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. He's overcome death. And we share in his victory.

[17 : 13] His resurrection guarantees our eternal life. And it is the means of our optimism, our hope. I think that Stuart Townsend's resurrection song sums it up brilliantly.

And we are raised with him. Death is dead. Love has won. Christ has conquered. And we shall reign with him. For he lives. Christ is risen from the dead. Christ is risen from the dead. This is the new birth. And the hope into which we've been born by that new birth. And this eternal life, Peter speaks of it as an inheritance. It's our legacy. It's what Jesus left to us when he died. And secures for us by his resurrection. It sounds wonderful. But there's a nagging question. That's my inheritance. It's safe and it's secure. [18:20] But am I safe in order to receive it? I came across a legal case a few years ago when I was thinking and preaching through 1 Peter. There's a story of an action in court taken by a Mr. Alan Shurt who lost his appeal over a promised inheritance.

Alan claimed that his father, a Mr. Stanley Shurt, had promised him the farm back in the 1980s and said he had committed his whole working life to keeping the farm running. And Alan was not paid proper wages, but he expected that it would all work out because the farm would be his after his father's passing. However, when Stanley died, Alan discovered that in his father's most recent will, the entire estate had been left to others. It's a nightmare. It's a nightmare. Is there any chance that we might lose our spiritual inheritance? Is that a possibility?

Well, Peter says, no. There's no chance of that happening at all. Our inheritance is absolutely safe and secure in the vaults of heaven.

[19:47] An inheritance, verse 4, that can never perish, spoil or fade, kept in heaven for you.

It's locked in the vaults securely. Surely, you'll have it. It's there. So the logic of that surely is, if that is true, what does it matter?

What happens to us in this world? Nothing really. 29-year-old Jim Elliot understood that very clearly when he gave his life in seeking to reach the indigenous Uykha people of the Ecuadorian jungle with the gospel.

If he grasped the principle earlier, when he wrote in his journal as a young student, he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, this life, in order to gain what he cannot lose, eternal life.

What a perspective it gives us. And its cares and its demands and its complications. He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep in order to gain what he cannot lose.

[21:18] Our hope is based on that new birth into that inheritance. And then finally, no, not quite finally, but thirdly, our hope is based on the protection that surrounds us.

Okay, my inheritance is safe and secure. It won't perish, it won't spoil, it won't fade. It's kept in heaven. And then, will I be kept for it?

That's the question. Peter's anticipating that kind of pessimistic thought. So, he adds, verse 5, 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.

The salvation is the full inheritance. That's what he's talking about at that point. And you are being kept. It's being kept for you.

And you are being kept for it. Poor old Alan Schertz.

[22:36] Problems wouldn't have been resolved even if his father had included him in his will. If Alan had died before his father.

It's all very well to be told that our inheritance is secure. We want to know that we are secure. And that's what Peter is assuring of us, assuring us of here.

The salvation that is ready to be revealed. New Testament, of course, describes that salvation.

Three phases. Past, present, and future. We have been saved from the guilt of sin.

We are being saved from the power of sin. And we will be saved from the very presence of sin. So to reassure us and confirm that what God has promised he will deliver.

He gives us a foretaste of it. Here and now. Of what he has in store for us. So now we can experience pardon. Now we can experience God's peace.

[23:39] Now we can know protection. Now we can be guided. Now we can have joy and hope this isn't all left to the end. We get a little foretaste of it.

But we only get a glimpse. We only get a taste. We don't have the full thing. As we travel through this hazardous world. That little taste.

That little reminder. That little anticipation. Is there to assure us. That we will reach the goal. We will arrive in heaven.

We will enjoy our inheritance. It's kept safe for us. We are kept safe for it. Shielded. Says our version. Guarded. Says other versions.

Protected. The word's very interesting. It's very much like the word that crops up in the book of Philippians. Where we're told that the God's great love to us.

[24 : 36] Which is beyond imagining God's. Our hearts and our minds. In Christ Jesus. The idea is a description of a garrison of soldiers.

Protecting the city. Protecting the citizens from panicking in the face of danger. And engaging the enemy to protect the citizens too.

That's what God does for us. He keeps us. He guards us. He watches over us. Yes, we may and we will stumble and we will fall.

But God keeps us safe. For that secured inheritance. And then finally we come to what we've already touched on. That anticipation. And particularly in the joy that we now experience.

Verses 6 to 9. 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.

[25 : 39] Which perishes even though refined by fire may be proved genuine. May result in praise, glory and honor. When Jesus Christ is revealed. 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. If we realize and grasp just how secure we are in God's loving protection.

It puts a song in our hearts. It fills us with joy. Of course, it isn't a joy that banishes pain.

The pain and the joy. The pain and the struggle. The joy and the struggle. They coexist side by side.

[26 : 40] There is difficulty. There are trials. But there's joy. And the difficulty doesn't totally eclipse the joy. Whilst the joy at the same time never totally edges out.

The more negative experiences. They coexist side by side. We're not yet going to experience a life without pain and trials and personal failure.

You could call that kind of joy that we're going to experience. Even though joy. Even though I fail. I can rejoice. Even though I suffer.

I can rejoice. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. I will fear no evil.

Because you are with me. Even though for a little while.

We are grieved by various kinds of trials as Peter says. Yet we can still know real joy. Are you familiar with the story of Anne Steele?

[27 : 48] She was born in 1716 in Broughton in Hampshire. Her mother died when she was three. At 19 she suffered a severe and permanent injury to her hip.

At 21 she was engaged to Robert Ells Court. But the day before the wedding he was drowned while bathing in a river. For the last nine years of her life.

She was crippled. And unable to leave her bed. But even though. She was as her friends said.

Joyful. And always helpful. Her outlook of faith and hope. Is wonderfully reflected. In the little poem she wrote. Let me read three stanzas of it.

Father she says. Father what air of earthly bliss. Thy sovereign will denies. Accepted at thy throne. Let this my humble prayer arise.

[28 : 49] Give me a calm. A thankful heart. From every murmur free. The blessing of thy grace impart. And make me live to thee. Let the sweet hope.

That thou art mine. My life and death attend. Thy presence. Through my journey shine. And crown. My journey's end.

We see a contentment. Despite all that you experience. A contentment that is suffused. With a quiet. But very real. Christian joy.

Peter shows us. That whatever happens. Even though. We face threats. And persecution. And problems. And difficulties. Whether in the wider world.

Or in the community. Where we work. And live. In our family. Or even at times. In the depths of our own personal life. God's grace.

[29 : 46] Always. Guards us. And all this. Comes to us. Through the resurrection. Of Jesus Christ. From the dead. Because.

He is alive. We can know. Confidence. And optimism. And have a quiet heart. In the face of all that grieves us.
And all the tests. That try us. Well may God bless his word to us. This morning. Well it's appropriate we sing. That day.
So long. I'll we talk.
You. Right. For the resurrection. For the resurrection. You. You. Oh. I love.