

# Communion

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[ 0 : 00 ] This morning I want to consider with you the theme of a living hope, a living hope, as we find that theme developed in the first letter of Peter, chapter 1.

So, the focus of our attention is identified in verse 3 of the chapter, 1 Peter 1, verse 3, where Peter writes, 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.

He has given us new birth into a living hope. We started thinking about hope last night and recognized that hope in Christian terms is not hope for the best, as that is commonly used as an expression in day-to-day life, a kind of hoping against hope, hoping despite all appearances. Rather, it is a hope that is founded with confidence on what God has done, on what we experience now of God's grace and forgiveness, and on future expectation that He will bring all things to completion.

As we continue to think about hope, that basic pattern will recur. So, there will be a measure of reinforcement of those ideas.

[ 1 : 51 ] But I hope we'll also see that as we move from Paul's letter to the Colossians to Peter's letter here, that we will have also some fresh angles put on this theme of hope.

And one of the distinctive aspects that Peter brings to us is this notion of a living hope. He emphasizes that it is a living hope, a hope that is lively, that is animated, that is full of life. But as we saw yesterday also, the idea of hope is not restricted to the reference to that word. And we'll see also, I think, in this passage that there are aspects of hope which are brought out, which don't link to the particular term, but which point us to the richness of that idea of Christian hope. So, what I want to look at with you today is that, first of all, hope is expressed in praise. Secondly, I want to think about hope in the faithfulness of God.

Thirdly, I'll look at hope in relationship with Jesus, and then hope for future fulfillment. So, as we begin to look at this passage, I want to start by noticing that hope is expressed in praise.

[ 3 : 23 ] Peter begins in verse 3, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. That outbursting of praise is one of the characteristics of a number of the letters of the New Testament, where in the midst of theological reflection, the writer, whether it's Paul or whether it's Peter or whoever it might be, is overwhelmed with the truth that he's considering and bursts into praise, a declaration of praise.

We might sometimes call it a doxology. And so, that, it seems to me, is a good indicator of whether we have grasped Christian hope.

If we have a true understanding of what Christian hope means, if we have got a good sense of its reality, then it will lead to an attitude of praise.

The more we understand the theology that is reflected in the Scriptures, the more we will be pressed to express that in declarations of thankfulness and praise.

Sometimes the notion of hope, especially when that is emphasized as very much a future hope, is portrayed as being something rather otherworldly, a bit dreamy, a little bit detached from reality.

[ 4 : 56 ] There's the old phrase, he's so heavenly minded that he's no earthly good. And we want to avoid that sort of stereotype. But in fact, we find that a writer like Paul, who was a driven servant of the church, he was active in mission, he was active in pastoral care, he thought very deeply, he is often thinking about the aspects of hope, both the present experience of hope and the future reality to which it points.

And I think that we need to be aware of being told that, in fact, it's dangerous to be thinking about these things, that it will just distract you from the task of the day. It seems to me that the more we reflect on who God is, what He has done, and what He will bring to completion, the more that will

bring life to our church fellowships, to our Christian witness.

So, hope is expressed in praise. Why does Peter praise God? Well, he praises God because he has been good to him.

He has acted in his life. Paul, sorry, Peter, makes it very clear that this relationship that he has with God is the foundation of an attitude of praise.

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter, I'm going to struggle with that.

Peter has come to know God through Jesus Christ, and that bursts out in praise.

[ 6 : 46 ] What particularly has he discovered? Well, that brings us to the focus of Peter's attention. Hope is found, hope is placed in the faithfulness of God.

There's a variety of places that we see this in this passage, and so I want to look at different aspects of the faithfulness of God here.

I want to notice that He is a merciful God. I want to notice that He is a life-giving God. A God who protects.

A merciful God. A life-giving God. A God who protects. Peter begins by saying, In His great mercy, this God has given us new birth.

It is because Peter understands the character of God that he has reason to give thanks, that he has reason for praise. He's recognized that this God is characterized by mercy.

[ 7 : 53 ] Now, that, I think, is far from a common perception of God. The common perception in the world is that God is there to, if He is there at all, He is there to judge, to be against people, to spoil their fun, in inverted commas.

And there is a sense that the less you can have to do with Him, the better. And that's sometimes portrayed as being the picture in Scripture.

But, in fact, it is far from the truth. We find instead that God is consistently presented as a kind and merciful God.

A God who is slow to anger. A God who is faithful and consistent. And so, Peter praises God and has hope in God partly because of this sense of understanding of His character.

As we come together to reflect on this aspect of the Lord's Supper, a key aspect of Christian experience, it's important to realize that the God who has given this gift to us is a gracious God, a merciful God.

[ 9 : 13 ] He is seeking to give us that which will aid us, that which will encourage us, that which will support us. He is not seeking to find fault, but rather to provide a way out of the desperate situation that humanity, that we have brought ourselves into.

God is a merciful God. And that's where Peter begins. In His great mercy, He has acted. How has He acted? Well, we're told that He has given us new birth.

Now, that's quite striking language, which perhaps you immediately associate with John's gospel. If you think about John chapter 3 and where the account of Nicodemus coming to Jesus by night, you'll remember that Jesus said, you must be born from above or you must be born again.

And this caused Nicodemus all kinds of complications and questions. But we find the same kind of idea expressed here by Peter.

He has given us new birth. I think it's valuable for us to reflect on what it means to be a Christian. It is hope in a God who brings about a new creation.

[ 10 : 41 ] Paul uses that language also in 2 Corinthians. If anyone is in Christ, He is a new creation or just new creation, as the text barely puts it.

God brings life where there was no life. John, again, in his gospel begins by saying, In Him was life. He brings life where there is no life. God is the one who brings creation where there was no creation. In the beginning, God said, Let there be.

John, again, echoes that language. In the beginning was the Word. So God is characterized by being the creator and being the life giver.

When someone becomes a Christian, it is not that they make an intellectual change in their way of thinking. It is not simply that they change philosophical systems.

[ 11 : 45 ] It's not simply that they change from being, in political terms, left wing to right wing. It's not just that they move around their mental furniture.

It is that something that was not a reality before has become a reality. It is, as the scriptures put it, the move from death to life.

Or it is the move to a new birth. And so, when you think about what it means to be a Christian, don't think primarily in terms of your association with a particular church.

Don't think primarily about your involvement in a human structure. Although it's good to belong to a local church. It's good to be involved with a community of God's people.

To be involved in the various activities. These things are good. But the heart of being a Christian is a fundamental spiritual change of being born again.

[ 12 : 53 ] Of new birth. A spiritual reality that takes place. Now, that is a strange thing for us to wrestle with. It's a difficult thing for us to wrestle with.

Because, of course, as a human being, we remember what we were when we were younger. We remember what we were five years ago, ten years ago, whatever time when we weren't Christians. And we can see that, in many ways, we are the same person. We are, we can recognize ourselves in the mirror. We can see the continuity. But that shouldn't disguise that God has acted, if we become Christians, in a fundamental way.

At the very root of our being, He has changed us. Jeremiah puts it in terms of a new heart. A heart of stone is taken away. A heart of flesh is put in there.

So, when you think of your standing before God, Ask yourself, do I believe that it's not just that I've improved my behavior or changed my thinking or just pulled up my socks a little bit.

[ 14 : 08 ] But is it rather that I know that God has created in me a new life. That He has given me a new birth. That is our Christian hope.

That God has done something so radical that only He could do it. That He has transformed us. And that transformation happens, so to speak, from the inside out.

So that the change is a deep-rooted change in our heart, which then starts to show itself in various aspects of our life, and will eventually, for believers, show itself in the full renewal, recreation of all that we are in, so to speak, the resurrection from the dead.

So, we have hope in a merciful God. We have hope in a life-giving God. He chooses to give life not on the basis that we deserve to have life, not on the basis that some have acted in a way that obliges Him to give life, but just because He is merciful.

But then He is also a protecting, a shielding God. We find that expressed in verse 5 of the chapter.

[ 15 : 38 ] We'll come to other aspects of these verses, But just notice that Peter describes the Christians as those who, through faith, are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed.

Peter's very aware that life can be hard for believers in Jesus. He's very aware that life is not straightforward, and it's very worthwhile for us to recognize that being a Christian does not protect us from the realities of life.

It does not protect us from suffering. We live in a fallen world. It does not protect people from the impact of an earthquake. It does not protect people from illness.

We are not put in some kind of cocoon where these realities of life do not affect us. But the promise of God, which believers grip by faith, is that He is protecting us in the sense that that relationship which God establishes with human beings is not going to be ruined, is not going to be damaged by any external forces.

If believers keep their eyes on Jesus, if believers trust in Him, then they will be kept secure. It is not up to us.

[ 17 : 17 ] It is not up to us to grit our teeth and press on. Rather, it is our responsibility to entrust ourselves to God's care, to seek His protection, and to trust that He will indeed give it.

So, Peter's hope is expressed in praise, and that praise arises because he focuses on a God who is merciful, a God who is life-giving, and a God who shields His people.

I want to notice now that this hope is hope that is focused on a relationship with Jesus Christ. Right throughout the verses that we read, and particularly in this section from verse 3 through to verse 9, we see an emphasis on Jesus.

That's particularly the case when we get to the end of verse 7 and into verse 8, where Peter says that there is 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.

[ 18 : 48 ] Focus on Jesus. Peter here reflects on the experience of these Christians, which matches our experience in a couple of ways.

Many of the early believers had some kind of direct connection with Jesus. The apostles had met Jesus, had spoken with Him.

Some of the early believers would have been people who had heard Jesus preach, had heard Jesus teach, and they had some direct eyewitness experience. Luke tells us that he was able to draw on the experience of eyewitnesses who were able to provide him with information for his gospel.

But the people that Peter writes to had not had that experience. He says in two occasions, though you have not seen Him, and even though you do not see Him now, in verse 8.

These believers had to go by faith. They had to trust in the testimony that they had received. They had to trust in the gospel that had been preached to them.

[ 20 : 09 ] But they did not have direct eyewitness experience to go on. And so that tells us that hope, hope for us now, is not dependent on physical sight.

It's not dependent on being able to prove something. We trust testimony. There's a very helpful book a little while ago written by a man called Richard Bauckham called *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*.

And he emphasizes in that book the role of testimony. Sometimes you will hear people in the modern world say, how can you prove that the Bible is true?

How can you prove that these things happened in the gospels? How can you prove this to me? And what we are given in the Bible is not proof but testimony.

We are given the word of people who have a particular character, who have shown themselves in their actions and shown themselves through the reliability of the word to be faithful witnesses.

[ 21 : 32 ] We have to decide which testimony we are going to trust. We will hear all sorts of testimony in this world.

We will hear people who say, well, I have discovered that belief in God is pointless. It is nonsense. I used to be a Christian, but I've discovered that that's all just nonsense.

And then you will get other people who will say, well, I used to reject all belief in God, but then I came to meet him.

Think of someone like C.S. Lewis, who was a determined atheist for much of his early life, and then came, as he describes it, the most reluctant convert in all of Christendom, to the conviction that indeed God was who he claimed to be.

More modern example is someone who wrote on C.S. Lewis, a man called Alistair McGrath, who was a scientist and again a convinced atheist, but who came to be convinced through the testimony of others, through the testimony of Scripture, that indeed Jesus Christ was the Savior.

[ 22 : 54 ] We don't have the option of being put in time travel back to the realities of the first century. We will not have the option of evaluating Jesus through a face-to-face encounter.

And so we are faced with multiple testimonies. Some testimonies of people who have encountered God and come to faith. Some testimonies of people who claim that it's all nonsense.

We have to learn to discern which testimony to listen to. That's not an easy decision to make. It's not something that I can tell you how you will do it.

But what I think we find in Scripture is the sense that God enables those who seek to hear true testimony to perceive it.

He enables. He gives by His Spirit. He gives by His power. That new birth. Those new eyes. To see what once made no sense suddenly makes sense.

[ 24 : 01 ] It's a little bit like when you go to the opticians and He puts these frames on your nose and puts various bits and pieces of glasses in and it doesn't help at all.

And then He twists. And suddenly you see. It needs that twist. And in a sense that is what God enables the heart to do.

Not to see what is physically there but to perceive that the testimony that you're hearing from Scripture and from other believers is in fact the truth.

And that is where hope can come from. But in spite of not seeing Peter says even though you do not see you love Him.

So we see that Christian experience is not just an intellectual issue. It's not just a matter of arguments and addressing facts but it's a matter of the heart.

[ 25 : 06 ] It is understanding from Scripture who God is as revealed in Jesus Christ. It is reading the Gospels and seeing that portrait of Jesus as the one who gives Himself for others.

And God in His grace through that new birth stirs in our hearts a love. A love that is drawn to this figure of Jesus who is suddenly for us an object of devotion an object of our praise and our delight and our gratitude and it becomes the case that we love Jesus.

Is that your experience today? Have you grasped enough of what it means for Jesus to enter into our experience to give Himself freely for a people who had rejected Him?

to enter into the dire situation of our world so that He might bring us into a relationship with God?

Have you grasped that sufficiently? That in fact as was the experience of John Wesley your heart is strangely warmed that you are enraptured by Jesus and by His great gift to us.

[ 26 : 41 ] Hope is not just a matter of the mind it's a matter of the mind shaping the emotions. So hope is expressed in praise hope is found in the character of God hope is a relationship with Jesus when we come to the table we're coming not to say we have figured out all of theology we're not coming to say we have the answer to everything but we're saying we have discovered that God has provided a Savior and we trust Him we believe that His that the Word of God is true and we believe that Jesus has given His life for us and so we respond in love.

Jesus said if you love me you will keep my commandments so in a real sense love is not just a fuzzy feeling but it's responding to what God has called us to do.

Finally hope looks to future fulfillment. One of the things that you'll see in this passage is that there is a strong emphasis on the return of Jesus so you will see that expressed perhaps most clearly at the end of verse 7 where Peter says 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.

but there are a number of other places where that notion of the final return of Jesus is hinted at so you might look also at verse 5 where it's not Jesus but the sort of implication is of Jesus shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the last time and that suggests that when Jesus returns so Peter focuses quite a bit on the return of Jesus I want to encourage us to keep that notion in mind to remember that this present experience is not the whole story in fact the Lord's Supper is a very strong reminder of that because Jesus says do this in remembrance of me pointing backwards and then

Paul says for as often as you do this you proclaim Christ's death until he comes so even in the Lord's Supper we are looking back to what happened in history in Jesus self-giving but we're also looking forward to a time when the Lord's Supper will not be necessary anymore because the fullness of God's purposes will be brought to bear second aspect of this future fulfillment is that hope looks forward to vindication it can be a very hard thing to be a Christian in this world it was in the first century and it is in the 21st century we might think that it's particularly tough now but it was tough for these first believers in the Greco-Roman world so in some respects nothing much has changed these believers faced great trials and we see believers in various parts of the world experiencing desperate trials even to death in our current day too but what this passage tells us is that there is hope of vindication again verse 7 is particularly clear these have come these trials 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

[ 30 : 53 ] Jesus Christ is revealed that is the expectation of believers a hope that even as believers are marginalized criticized rebuked ridiculed all kinds of experiences in this world there is the hope that in due course God will own his own people will recognize will affirm and will raise up his own people if you're feeling battered as a believer now hold on to this hope God is still judge God is still just and he will set all things right finally hope looks forward to inheritance in verse 4 we're told that there is an inheritance that can never perish spoil or fade kept in heaven for you it's very similar language actually to the hope language that we looked at in

Colossians 1 a hope that is kept in heaven and so we see again this notion of an objective hope something that is of great value and it's in a safe place now Peter like Paul does not explain exactly what that means perhaps we're to focus on the idea that our true being is kept safe in heaven a little like Colossians 3 where our life is hidden with Christ in God or perhaps it is the fulfillment of all that our lives are intended to be that is kept safe in heaven or perhaps we're to think there of Jesus as the one who is our real treasure who is in heaven but in whichever way we read it what's clear is that there is an inheritance for God's people that is something we're to look forward to I don't think

it's intended to be in a kind of grabbing way that we look forward to great reward but rather we place our desire our hope in heavenly things rather than earthly things and going back to God's faithfulness what we see is that this inheritance is not vulnerable to decay we've seen the sad story recently of folks who had their safety deposit boxes in what seemed the most secure environment and despite all the odds they were faced with a robbery they were faced with their secure things being taken away from them so for Christians we see here that there is a greater level of protection the shielding is not by strong walls is not by a human agency but is by God himself and so we see that Peter presents us with a living hope a hope that bursts out in praise a hope in the faithfulness of a merciful life-giving and protecting God a hope that is experienced in a relationship with Jesus now that is firmly believing of the testimony that we've received in scripture and from Christians through the ages and a hope that looks forward to Jesus appearing to vindication of our faith and to an inheritance which is secure as we come together around the Lord's table let us reflect on what Jesus death for us has achieved what he has purchased for us let us find our hope in him alone and let us be confident that that God who has faithfully acted towards us in Christ will continue to be faithful throughout our lives and until he brings all things to completion let's pray gracious father thank you for your word we pray that it will be an encouragement to us and that you will help us to find our hope in Jesus Christ find our hope in his death and resurrection find our hope in your promises in him to us we pray in Jesus name amen