

April 27, 2014
Easter 2

"Praise the Lord for Your Living Hope"

1 PETER 1:3-9

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.

Parents teach their little children to say thank you at an early age. Think of how many times you have said thank you in your lifetime here on this earth. If someone opens the door for you at the post office as you are carrying a package in your arms you say thank you. In good marriages husbands and wives are always thanking each other and praising each other. When we gather for worship we join together to thank our Lord and praising him for all the blessings he has given us.

In the words we just read, Peter encourages scattered Christians going through times of persecution to give thanks to the Lord for the living hope they have in Jesus' resurrection from the dead. In the darkest days and lowest moments of your life the blessings of a living hope in Christ Jesus your Savior remain the same. This living hope enables us to wake up each morning with the words, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it."

Your living hope is real

This living hope you have in Christ is not just some hyped up, imaginary illusion or false optimism. It is real. 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." It is hard to imagine how difficult life must have been for these early Christians who were forced to flee their homes to escape persecution. Even their family members rejected them for becoming Christian. I recall one woman telling me the worst day in your life came on the day after she was baptized. That was the day her father belittled her and berated her mercilessly for becoming a Christian. In the darkest days of life, the light still shines brightly from the tomb of the risen Christ.

You, dear Christian, have a special link or connection to Jesus' resurrection from the dead. You did not establish this link. Your loving heavenly Father did this for you. "In his great

mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." You were born into this world spiritually dead, without God and without hope, the book Ephesians says. You had nothing inside of you that could establish a link between you and Jesus resurrection from the dead. Then the Lord created life in you when you were born again. Later in this chapter Peter writes that we were born again not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring Word of God. God's Word take the truths of Jesus' resurrection from the dead and plants them in you to create saving faith.

In our first lesson from the book of Acts we heard how Peter preached about Jesus' resurrection from the dead to a large crowd of people. That day over three thousand people were saved and baptized. They were born again by the Word of God and they were baptized. The message of Jesus' resurrection from the dead has the power to create a living hope in people where such hope did not exist before.

Ours is a living hope. The opposite of a living hope is a dead hope. If I put my hope in myself to pay the debt of sin and rise from the dead after I die I have placed my hope in a dead hope. I cannot extract anything from my life that I can use to pay the debt of sin. Let's do a little math lesson to illustrate this point. 2 times 2 is 4. 8 times 8 is 64. 8 times 0 is 0. 1000 times 0 is also 0. When I try to find something in myself to cancel the debt of my sin, I find only zero. Anything I produce in my life only multiplies the debt because what I produce in my life, even in my best moments, is short of God's glory and his perfection.

When Jesus appeared to his disciples the night of his resurrection, he gave them a living hope. He showed them the nail marks in his hands that were the evidence that sin had been paid for at the cross. When the disciples saw Jesus they were overjoyed to see that Jesus was alive and to see the evidence their debt was paid in full. Think of the joy that is yours each day as you celebrate the fact that Jesus is risen from the dead. Your debt is paid in full through him.

Ask the question, "Are you sure all your sins are forgiven?" and you may hear the answer, "I think so." That is not a living hope. That is a dead hope. If I base my hope on my performance or my grades, I have no hope. If I base my hope on Christ alone, then I can say, "I know my sin is forgiven through Jesus."

Ours is a living hope, because through Jesus' resurrection from the dead we have the sure hope of rising from the dead and joining him in the place he has prepared for us. You are born again "into an inheritance that can never, spoil or fade-kept in heaven for you." It seems that our homes are in constant need of repair but the home we have in heaven is new and fresh and will never change. It will not spoil or fade. Gold prices were once over \$1700 per ounce, not it is down around \$1200 per ounce. Home values dropped dramatically a few years ago. Food spoils in the fridge. People we love get old and frail. Our culture is changing around us and it is not for the better. While all of this is happening, the place Jesus has prepared for you does not fade or spoil. 2 Corinthians 4 says, "So we fix our eyes on what is unseen. For what is unseen is eternal."

My parents have a grave stone marking their grave. On it are the words, "Heaven is our

home." Christians have always buried their dead with the hope of joining them some day in the place Jesus has prepared for us. That is a living hope.

Ours is a living hope that won't lose its value because it is protected by our true God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We were baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We are "shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed at the last time." If you own a home on this earth, you protect that home by taking out an insurance policy. Your living hope and the eternal home you have in heaven is protected by the same loving heavenly Father who raised Jesus from the dead. Jesus said in John 10, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, they follow me, and no one shall pluck them from my hand." Your living hope is real. It is as real as God's promise to protect what he has given to you in his boundless grace and mercy.

Your living hope helps you with the trials of life

Because you have a living hope you are able to rise above the circumstances of your life, whether they are good times or bad times. "In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." Trials in life come in all shapes and sizes and colors. The early Christians lived in the constant uncertainty that the Roman government would unleash a new wave of persecution. Peter calls these dear Christians strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. When you boldly proclaim the hope you have in Christ with people who don't know this hope there is always the very real danger they will turn on you and make life miserable for you. In the midst of the worst trials of life, whatever they may be, we can rejoice in the hope that is ours.

Very few people who have walked on the face of this earth, have suffered more in life than Job did. He lost everything he had, his wealth, his health and his dear children. The worst part of the suffering came as he wondered why the Lord was letting all this happen to him. He reaches a low point in his life when he says to his friends, "Have pity on me, my friends, for the hand of God has struck me." In this dark low moment the light of a living hope suddenly shown brilliantly and he went from speaking words of despair to words of hope that we still cherish to this day. "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. After my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God." Last Sunday we stood and confessed our faith by singing loudly and confidently, "I know that my Redeemer lives." We did not sing, "I think my Redeemer lives" we sang "I know that my Redeemer lives." Satan may try to hem you in but he cannot put a roof over your head as you look up to the living hope that is yours.

Because of this living hope that you have trials of this life can actually turn out to be blessings as they were for Job. Peter tells us how these trials can be beneficial for us. "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 is revealed." When the gold ore is placed into the hot fire, the impurities are driven off and the gold shines brightly. When Stephen died as he was being stoned to death he cried out, "Lord, Jesus receive my spirit." When Paul and Silas were badly beaten and thrown into the inner part of the prison they sang hymns of praise and all the prisoners heard them. When Paul faced his last days of life, he wrote a letter that closed with these words, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now

there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge, will award to me, but also to all who have loved his appearing." Oh how beautifully the faith shines as Christians face death, or adversities of life or even the prosperity of life with a confident trust in their living hope.

Oh, how we look forward to seeing Jesus. "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." Even though we were not there when Jesus appeared to his disciples, the nail marks in the hands of Jesus are real to us as we see them in these amazing eyes of faith. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who have not seen me and yet have believed." How we long for that very real day when we see Jesus face to face in all his glory. This is our living hope. Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ for this living hope. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.