

Living Hope (1 Peter 1:3-12)

Letters are always one side of a conversation. Like listening to a phone call but you cannot hear what the person on the other end is saying. At times it is most frustrating to be that listener! Today we begin because of the inclement weather, a look at a letter, a New Testament letter. It is Peter's first letter. The housegroups will be going on to look at the second letter he wrote. This was due to be this evening but it is coming up this morning. As I have said it is a one sided conversation so that writer and recipients and where it was written from are a little bit of guesswork – trying to find it out from one side of the conversation, the letter in front of us.

1 Peter is, as is 2 Peter, very practical, helping us to live as Christians, which is why we have titles of the sermons to come in the evenings, such as Holy Living, Living Stones, Living for God, Living in Christ and today Living Hope. It is also dynamic and so is living in that sense of the word. This is no dead letter to be assigned to the waste bin, but one that can and does talk to us today.

However with a letter one needs a writer of the letter. So who is the writer of the letter? He tells us in verse 1

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...” (1 Peter 1:1 NIV)

So we have the apostle Peter, probably writing from Rome, it is thought because, in 5:13, he says

“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.” (1 Peter 5:13 NIV)

Babylon was the name often given by the early church when referring to Rome. So it is thought that Peter is in prison, shortly to be executed. But remember we only have one side of the conversation as we read the letter, so this is surmise, not hardened fact.

To whom did Peter write? Geographically we are told this again in verse 1

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia,” (1 Peter 1:1 NIV)

This area is most of modern Turkey. So it was a letter to be read by one and then passed on. So today he would have sent several copies of the same letter, run off a computer! Or today he may even have sent out, and we have received some this year – the Christmas email with the Christmas greetings – you know then that you are not having a Christmas card. Does this mean that in the future you will enter someone house at Christmas and hanging from the walls will be email after email because no-one sends Christmas cards anymore?

So we know the writer of the letter, the area to which it is going, but what about the recipients of the letter. We can definitely say they were Christians as Peter says of them at the start of the letter

“...To God's elect, strangers in the world, scattered throughout....who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance.” (1 Peter 1:1-2 NIV)

They are Christians, that is what is meant by God's elect and know that

- God the Father chose them

- God the Holy Spirit is helping them live day to day to become more like Christ – that is the sanctifying part
- God the Son saves them through our obedience to him due to his death – the sprinkling by his blood

So that is the letter and Peter introduces us to three words in this first part of the letter after the initial greetings and pleasantries and praises to God. What are those three words? We will look at two this morning very briefly and the other a little longer, but all three were mentioned in the passage that we read this morning from the NIV and from The Message.

Faith

The first word is faith. We first come across it in verse 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.” (1 Peter 1:5 NIV)

And again in verses 7 and 9 in the passage we read earlier. Faith is something that we are told

- protects,
- is worth more than gold and (verse 7)
- that its goal is salvation (verse 9).

However it does need to be refined and that leads us on to our next word.

Suffering

This is introduced in verse 6

“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 honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”
(1 Peter 1:6-7 NIV)

Or as The Message put it

I know how great this makes you feel, even though you have to put up with every kind of aggravation in the meantime. Pure gold put in the fire comes out of it proved pure; genuine faith put through this suffering comes out proved genuine. When Jesus wraps this all up, it's your faith, not your gold, that God will have on display as evidence of his victory. (1 Peter 1:6-7 MSG)

Suffering is a big theme of 1 Peter because he saw that the church was going to enter a time when it would be put through persecution and that Christians were and were going to suffer. At the present we do not really suffer but is this because we

- Live in a Christian country and so no-one will persecute us?
- Have become so marginalised that no-one really worries about us anymore?
- No longer really put our heads over the parapet so that those around us do not really know that we are Christians?

Maybe it is one or a combination of those factors or something else. We may not be suffering, but perhaps we are having aggravation because as Christians we are being ignored.

But suffering does come up again as we move through 1 Peter so we will not dwell on it here. So what about that last word?

Hope

That word is hope. It is found in verse 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,” (1 Peter 1:3 NIV)

In 1 Peter it is also found in chapter 1, verses 13 and 21

“Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” (1 Peter 1:13 NIV)

“Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.” (1 Peter 1:21 NIV)

The word occurs later, twice more in chapter 3

“For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands,” (1 Peter 3:5 NIV)

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

So let us look at this hope, this hope in God. So often hope is just wistful dreaming, something that might or might not happen, but this is more.

Let us look at the sequence of events and where this hope comes in that sequence. It is far from being a vain, wistful dream. Verse 3, chapter 1

“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, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade— kept in heaven for 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.” (1 Peter 1:3-5 NIV)

Firstly it begins, not with us, not with human beings, but with God the Father and his great mercy. That firstly makes this hope so, so certain. It is the Father’s mercy that brings this hope and so this is a certainty because the mercy of God is always overflowing – he is that lavish in his mercy.

So we begin with the mercy of God and this enables, or gives us new birth. We are born again as Jesus puts it in John’s gospel

“...”I tell you the truth, no-one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.” (John 3:3 NIV)

We are made new. There is nothing better than a new born baby for bringing out the best in people and for giving new hope. We too are like new born babies when we become Christians and so we are born into this hope that comes from God and it is

“...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,” (1 Peter 1:3 NIV)

Again it is not of ourselves, not of human origin, but because of God the Son. We have had the mercy of God the Father and now we have the death and resurrection of God the Son. It is through believing in the death and resurrection of Jesus that we enter into this new birth. Of course we signify or should that be totally identify with this when we are baptised by going under the water i.e. dying and then rising again out of the water i.e. resurrection. And this resurrection is to a new life and new life in Christ, a living hope of the present.

So where is this hope going? Notices that it is a living hope, not a dead hope, not even just a hope, but a living hope. This means that it is dynamic, and relevant and up-to-date – it is of the 21st Century – it is now. We carry this hope within us, but where are we going, verse 4

“and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade— kept in heaven for you,” (1 Peter 1:4 NIV)

Or as The Message puts it simply

...a future in heaven--and the future starts now! (1 Peter 1:4 MSG)

We have our future in heaven, but that future begins now. The future is not orange, but heaven – let us never forget that. Your place is assured for you, my place is assured for me – it is booked.

Since moving to Gants Hill I have taken advantage of the train and I have been booking online. The best deal, I had was a first class ticket from Nottingham to London – the only time I have gone first class but it was only for £15.00 one way! This also meant a bottle of water on getting onto the train, the offer of a cup of coffee at all six stops – I could only manage three and also three trips to the toilet – to get rid of the coffee. One thing that happens when you book online is that your seat is automatically reserved for you, in first or second class whether you ask for it or not.

It is the same when you become a Christian; a place is already booked in heaven where we have this inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. And how do we know this? We have the mercy of God the Father, the death and resurrection of God the Son and the seal of God the Holy Spirit, as Paul says in one of his letters

“And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.”
(Ephesians 1:13-14 NIV)

Yippee! Sorry. Should that be Hallelujah! Or maybe a more respectful, “Oh my, isn’t that simply great.” I prefer ‘Yippee!’

All that is the living hope we have. God’s mercy, a new birth because of the death and resurrection of Jesus, and such an inheritance booked in my name in heaven. Isn’t that fantastic – God has done all that for me and really there is only one word, ‘Yippee!’

So as we go through 2010, a new decade let us carry with us the living hope that we have. If things get tough, remember 1 Peter and the living hope we all have through God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

However let us not be selfish and hand onto it, Later in this letter Peter says

“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,” (1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

We are to give this hope away; we are to tell others about it. But also we need to live in that hope, that future in heaven, but that future begins now with all the blessings God wants to give us.