

Rev Hans Vaatstra
Reading: WCF 17:1
Text: 1 Peter 1: 1-12

Living Hope

1. Thanks be to God we have a living hope
2. A safe Inheritance
3. And a joyful salvation

Songs: 42; 354; 414; 119:81; 16; 489

One of the great virtues of being a Christian is that we live with hope. Imagine what it would be like without hope. We can think of Judas Iscaiot who betrayed Jesus and in despair hung himself.

Suicide is often the result of hopelessness. Tragically every year between 5 and 6 hundred people in New Zealand lose all hope and kill themselves. Why? We find an answer in Ephesians 2:12. Paul wrote that when the Ephesian Christians were not yet converted they were "separate from Christ, strangers to the covenant of promise, having no hope because they were without God." In fact the majority of secular thinkers don't see hope as a virtue but as a temporary illusion and that all that people can hope for is for a pleasant life but even that hope dies in the end.

But that's not how it is for us. For the Christian Peter says there is a living hope and in our text there are three reasons for that hope. The first is that we believe in a living God.

Peter wrote "Blessed be the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again through the resurrection of Christ from the dead.

1. First our hope is in the living God who acts and intervenes in human life and who can be trusted to carry out his promises. With God hope becomes possible. With God hope isn't dependant on temperament or one's mental state or physical state. It doesn't depend on how rich or poor you may be. It doesn't depend on what you can do for yourself or what others can do for you.

Take Abraham as an example. Humanly speaking he had no hope of ever having his own child. Sarah was barren and both she and Abraham were old. But because Abraham believed God, he could hope even in what seemed a hopeless situation.

When Adam and Eve first sinned all seemed hopeless. They knew that the penalty for their sin was death. But God according to his great mercy provided them with hope. He told them that, "the seed of the woman would crush the serpents head." This was God's first promise of a savior; a promise which was repeated many times in OT history and which was realised when Jesus Christ God's only begotten Son came into the world.

And then there is Peter the author of this letter. Peter was Jesus disciple for three years only at the end to shamefully deny and desert Jesus as he went to the cross. But then Peter changed. On the day of the resurrection he was the first disciple together with John to run down to the empty grave and later that day to see Christ in the flesh. Peter experienced a conversion. He knew what it meant to be *born again*. From a frightened Christ-denying, self-righteous man, Peter turned into a fearless Christ-proclaiming, self-denying apostle and a man who was full of hope.

And so here in this letter Peter wants to encourage his readers with the same hope.

Now this was especially needful in his day because of the constant danger of persecution. In his letter to the churches he often speaks of persecutions and sufferings. In fact the theme suffering seems to be woven into the entire fabric of his letter. For example in two places here and in 4:14 he

talks about the fiery ordeal they had suffered. This is likely to have included the burning of Christians during Nero's reign of persecution of the church; something which Peter would have witnessed. This is what one historian by the name of AM Stibbs wrote about the first century church in Peter's day around 60-70AD and I quote,

" It may well be that with the execution of Paul and the first rumblings of Christian persecution which was to develop into a bloodbath under Nero,... that Peter saw a movement of the Adversary which would affect the whole church. The problem lay in the complete lack of security which exposed Christians to slander, defamation of character, boycott, mob violence and even death. Society was inhospitable and the world unjust. While constantly urged to good deeds and a blameless life, Christians were regarded as social misfits. The communities in which they lived thought it strange that the Christians didn't participate in the riotous and immoral conventions of Hellenistic society. They were accused of hating the human race. As time went on and as the church grew the suspicion took on a darker hue They were not only regarded as anti-social but as a menace to order and society. At such times violence might overwhelm them like the eruption of a desolating volcano. They were hated of all men for the sake of Christ."

So what was it that led Peter and many other Christians to calmly to continue professing faith in Christ even at risk of losing their lives through such a fiery ordeal as Peter calls it?

It was hope. Hope in a God who keeps His promises. Hope in a God who is merciful. Hope in God the Father who sent His son to pay the penalty for sin. And hope in the Savior who defeated death on the day of his resurrection and who promises that we will too.

Just as a farmer ploughs and sows in the spring, confident of a harvest in the summer, we too can do our work; weather the varying circumstances of life; for better or for worse; with the confidence of the resurrection because our hope is in the same living God who is faithful, merciful; who has also granted us a new birth through the resurrection of Christ.

2. In the second place not only is there a living hope but **we have a safe inheritance.** Verse 4 tells us why we've been born again through the resurrection of Christ, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled and will not fade away!

Now in Old Testament times the inheritance was the apportioned parcel of land each of the twelve tribes of Israel received when they entered Canaan. But OT testament history records that this inheritance was never complete. They failed to drive out **all** the Canaanites and so at various times they lost cities and territories and had to fight to win them back! Or they were at the mercy of Persian kings who determined whether or not they could return to their inheritance after the exile. Today Israel continues to have to fight for their inheritance. Only recently someone in a neighbouring hostile nation threatened to wipe Israel off the face of the earth. Theirs is not a safe but a very shaky inheritance.

Well our inheritance is not like that thankfully. But neither is it here, as fair a land as New Zealand may seem to us. As it says in Hebrews 11 we, like Abraham, are strangers and aliens on the earth. Whatever we have here whether it's a lot or a little is perishing. Our investments in this life are not completely safe. But our eternal inheritance is. Look at how it's described in the text.

Peter writes; it is *imperishable*. Our treasure is not subject to death or destruction. It can never perish it isn't limited by time but is eternal.

It is *undefiled*. Our inheritance can't be spoiled devalued corrupted or polluted. Revelation 21:27 says that "nothing unclean and no one who practices abominations and lying shall ever come into it but only those whose names are written in the book of life."

And it is *unfading*. Already at this time of the year (early autumn) the fruit trees and flowers are past their peak in terms of appearance and fruitfulness. Flowers and leaves are beginning to fade and die. This can never be said of our inheritance kept in heaven for us. Revelation 22:2 describes it as a city with a garden and a river flowing through it from the throne of God on either side of the river was the "tree of life bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month."

What we have here and now is subject to constant variation and change but our eternal inheritance is safely guarded by God, put aside and reserved for us. Its waiting for us to enjoy.

At its highest this inheritance we are looking forward to is the Lord Himself. Think about it. If you were to migrate to a beautiful country which was later ruled by foolish and ruthless dictator the entire country could be ruined. On the other hand, as the proverb says "when the righteous rule the people rejoice." And so our chief end as the Westminster confession says is to glorify God and *enjoy Him* for ever. We will be completely safe, indestructible, incorruptible, imperishable under God's wise righteous and loving rule in heaven.

So when it come to this inheritance we are urged to seek the things above and to find our crowning satisfaction in Jesus Christ who sits at the right hand of God for as it says in 1 John 3:2 "when we see Him we will be like him."

3. Then in the third place we not only have a living hope and a safe inheritance but also a joyful salvation. Look at what Peter writes in verses 5 & 6, "Who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice." Peter goes on to explain that just as the inheritance is guarded or guaranteed so too are we protected in this life as we wait for the next. Here we are reminded again of what the Westminster Confession calls perseverance. Because of God's protection, "those whom he has accepted in His Son, whom he has called into his church and sanctified by his word and Spirit cannot totally or finally fall away from the state of grace but shall certainly continue to the end and be saved for ever." Why? Because as Peter says we are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation to be revealed when Christ returns. Jesus also once said of believers that "No one can snatch us from the Father's hand" and Paul wrote in Philippians 1:6 that the work God began in us he will see through to completion until the day of Christ.

However Peter does remind us that we remain in the care and protection of God and in possession of our divinely prepared salvation through faith.

Salvation and our eternal inheritance is the hope. By faith it becomes yours and my living hope and joy. In fact the prospect of salvation will give us joy even through our trials, especially when the purpose of these trials is to test our faith. So Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, take up the shield of faith with which you can extinguish the flaming arrows of the evil one." In God's eyes such true faith tested by trials is more precious than pure gold according to verse 7. In the meantime as we continue in faith we rejoice in the present and future prospect of salvation and being with the Lord.

Now compare that to receiving an earthly inheritance 'Say you learn that your name is mentioned in a will. You discover that you have a share in the inheritance described in that will. Great! But then you probably won't know the value of your inheritance until the will is read and any legal transactions and other bills and taxes are paid for. And then there is always the risk that the

distribution of an inheritance might cause a disagreement between inheritors and further legal costs leaving you with mixed feelings about the inheritance at best.

By contrast our eternal inheritance is guaranteed, its safe, its not a 'yes or no' or a 'maybe' and we need never have mixed feelings about it. On the contrary it is a constant source of hope and joy. From the moment we are saved we have this joy. Now perhaps we might find it difficult to imagine the value of our eternal inheritance but we do know that it will far exceed anything we can think of and imagine according to Ephesian 3: 20. More importantly we'll experience the joy of being with our Savior for ever.

So, this is our living hope and we do notice in the text that all this is expressed in the context of praise. Peter began this section doing just that with the words, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!"

God is adored as the Author of a great act of mercy in Christ and we're given the sure hope of possessing our heavenly inheritance and being with Christ.

This prospect also fills us with hope and praise! Amen

Lets praise God now as we sing Psalm 16.