

A LIVING HOPE

1 Peter 1:1-12
Key Verse: 1:3

“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.”

As God had promised, he sent his one and only Son as the rising sun and the shepherd of his people (Lk 1:78; Mt 2:6b). By his coming, a new era of the world began. To those who were in the shadow of death, a light has dawned (Mt 4:16). After Jesus' ascension, Peter took care of God's flock of sheep. They were happy in Jesus. They believed that their happiness would last forever. But their human happiness ended too soon. Satan attacked the early Christians in the name of the Roman Empire. Satan also attacked the early Christians in the name of Jewish law. Their persecution was so unbearable that they began to scatter throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia. When the early Christians expected endless happiness by believing Jesus, too great an ordeal pounced upon them. How did Peter help them? He reminded them of the resurrection of Christ and planted in them living hope in the kingdom of God.

First, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ (1). At the beginning of his epistle to the scattered Christians, Peter identified himself as "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." Here we learn that a coward can be changed into a great general. Once, Peter was a man of human loyalty, but he was inwardly fearful. When Jesus predicted his suffering, death and resurrection, the other disciples were scared stiff, but Peter stood up in front of Jesus and declared with a clear voice, "I will lay down my life for you" (Jn 13:37). According to Jesus' prediction, Jesus suffered much. He was despised and rejected. He was spat on and struck in the face. He was nailed on the cross. A crown of thorns was put on him and, from his forehead, blood dripped down. Finally, he died for the sin of the world. During the time of Jesus' crucifixion, what did Peter do? He had secretly followed Jesus to his trial. But he was discovered to be one of Jesus' disciples. Then he denied Jesus, not just one time, but three times. He went out of the courtyard and wept bitterly. At that time, he could not say, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." But the Risen Jesus visited him at the same Sea of Gennesaret, where he met Peter first. Jesus was cooking, waiting for Peter and his

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company to come back from fishing. That night, Peter caught nothing. Jesus said, "Come and have breakfast" (Jn 21:12). After eating to his heart's content, Peter looked at Jesus. It was the Risen Jesus. Peter remembered his promise, "But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee" (Mk 14:28). Jesus' word of promise first reverberated in Peter's whole body repeatedly, then touched his heart and brought great confidence. He had no more doubt about Jesus' prediction of his death and resurrection. He could believe that Jesus rose again. When he believed the resurrection of Jesus, the fear of God came into his heart. From then on, he only feared God. From then on, he only loved God and feared nobody in the world.

At the time that Peter wrote his epistle, anybody who identified himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ was in danger of being arrested, tortured and hanged. But Peter identified himself, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ." If he were arrested, he could have lost the opportunity to take care of God's flock of sheep. But it did not matter. He identified himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. This was a declaration that he would fight against the enemies of God. More than that, this helped the flock of God's sheep stand firm, overcoming their fear of persecution. Suppose Peter had said, "Well, well..." what might have happened to his followers? One leader who clearly identifies himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ is essential in the work of God.

Second, God's elect and strangers (1b). As we have studied, humanly speaking, the early Christians' happy dream seems to have been gone. They were dragging their wagons to someplace where they could sojourn. Some had lost their youngest children and their hearts were dead. Some had lost their husbands and they felt they were sinking into the earth. To these people, even if Peter had 10 big mouths, he had nothing to say. But he said to them, "To God's elect, strangers..."

Peter saw scattered early Christians as God's elect. Peter saw them as very special people in the sight of God. We are familiar with election. President Clinton was elected as the President of the United States. Athletes want to be elected to the Hall of Fame. Many astronauts wanted to be the first to walk on the moon. But only Neil Armstrong was elected as the first man to walk on the moon. There is one woman who was promoted to supervisor in a Big Mac house. When she was elected Big Mac house manager she said, "It's the happiest day of

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my life." But the greatest privilege is to be God's elect.

Scattered early Christians might have thought they were in an ordeal and the future was dark. But Peter led them to spiritual understanding that they were God's elect, chosen by God to lay the foundation of the Christian church; they were like cabinet members of God's work and history. Peter's faith is very clear and it has the world-changing power in it. God's work is mysterious and amazing. Only those who have spiritual eyes can understand the meaning of the word of God.

Still, St. Peter knew that the early Christians' faith was weak and their present situation was unbearable. So he reminds them that they are precious before God. At the moment, they had become strangers. At that time, strangers were known as wandering beggars. Each town was a country. In that situation, to become a stranger was not easy. Peter reminds them of God's great grace. Look at verse 2a. "...who have been chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..." Here the word "foreknowledge" means that God loved them before the creation and his love to save them from their sins is unchangeable, even if heaven and earth change. They were in an adverse situation. Still, God's purpose for them is greater than the ocean.

Look at verse 2b. "...through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by his blood: Grace and peace be yours in abundance." God, in his great mercy, in order to elect them as his beloved children, sacrificed his one and only Son by sprinkling his Son's blood. God's love for his children is too great to fathom. When we remember what God has done for us, to save us, we cannot but cry many tears because of his amazing grace. When we remember his grace, that he sprinkled his one and only Son's blood, we can preserve his grace and peace abundantly in our souls.

Third, a living hope. Read 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." In this verse, Peter tells us a universal truth. There are two hopes. One is dead hope, the other a living hope. What is dead hope? There is nothing among the things of the world which does not perish, spoil or fade away. How nice it would be if we could work hard and enjoy the fruits of our labor forever. People suffer much, hoping that

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their situation would get better. Even if nothing gets better, still, they hope that if they work hard they would improve their situation. Most people know there is not much hope for themselves, but they try hard in the hope of getting better in the future. It is a very sorrowful story when we analyze dead hope. Even if they improve the situation, everything perishes, spoils and fades away. There is a story about a young boy. During World War II, his older brother was in Osaka, Japan. Newspapers reported that near the end of the war, 2,000 B-52 bombers raided Osaka. The younger brother cried every day, wishing that his older brother would not be killed. One day, he got a delicious-looking apple. He immediately thought about his older brother. He wrapped the apple with thick paper, made a box and put it inside, hoping to give it to his older brother, if he were fortunate enough to return from Japan. After three months he opened the box to see if the apple was okay. To his surprise, the apple was decayed and dried up and it became the size of a walnut. He cried. He never believed it would spoil. But it spoiled. The same is true of everything among the things of the world. That's dead hope.

What is the living hope? Living hope is Jesus Christ. God knew that men are all like Cain, who wandered with a sense of crime and punishment. He was alive, but he was dead spiritually. God, in his great mercy, wanted to give man a living hope.

How did God give a living hope to perishing mankind? After Adam's Fall, God planned world salvation. God wanted to pick one person as a ransom sacrifice. God sought quite a long time for a person who could be a ransom sacrifice. Yet there was no righteous and merciful person available. But there was one. He is Jesus Christ, his one and only Son. An only son is too precious even to look at to his father. But God is love, so he decided to make his only Son a ransom sacrifice for the sin of the world. It was predestined, prophesied, and fulfilled. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." This verse summarizes the heart of God.

Fourth, new birth (3). Look at verse 3 again. "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..." In brief, God gave us a living hope through new birth. In

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the past, sin-stained blood circulated in man's soul. Men wanted to do good, but what they did was always evil to their consciences. Paul wanted to live a good life. But he failed. So he cried out, "For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do--this I keep on doing" (Ro 7:19). As long as sin-stained blood circulates in one's soul, what he does is sinful before God. And he suffers from a guilty conscience endlessly. This is the reason there are many drug patients. As long as sin-stained blood circulates in one's soul, he is sick spiritually day and night. Because of sinsickness he wounds others unintentionally. Because of sinsickness, he wounds himself the most. His life in the world is a succession of tragedies--one tragedy after another.

As God promised, he gave his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins. By shedding his blood on the cross he cleansed our sin-stained blood with his holy blood. We call this "new birth." Now we are no more Cain's descendants. We are the children of God. We are children of God, sanctified by the holy blood of Jesus Christ. Before new birth, when we were controlled by the sinful nature, we liked heavily made-up foxy women or macho men. When we were controlled by the sinful nature, we enjoyed wounding others. When we were controlled by the sinful nature, we damaged others' futures to gratify our sadistic joy. When we lived with our sinful nature we had no hope of anything in the world, nor in the kingdom of God. We were nothing but instruments of the devil.

God crucified his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from our sins. When Jesus was crucified, he shed his blood, being pierced by the spear in the side. His blood gushed out. It was the holy blood of God. With this holy blood, he washed all our sin-stained blood. God did not abandon Jesus, who was hung on the tree. God raised him from the dead on the third day and made him our Savior King and Shepherd and Judge. Through the resurrection of Jesus, we have hope to go back to his glorious kingdom. This is our new birth. We have new birth through his holy blood. We have new birth through his resurrection--to go back to his glorious kingdom.

Fifth, an inheritance kept in heaven (4). As we studied, things of the world perish, spoil and fade away sooner or later. Material things decay when time goes by. The United Kingdom of Britain conquered so

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many countries and they brought so many precious stones and jewelry from other countries and decorated the queen's crown and her country. Now all the decorations have decayed so much that people are too busy just to repair them. But the kingdom of God is our living hope. We can have living hope through the death and resurrection of Jesus. When we have new birth through Jesus' death and resurrection, the things of the world look temporal. When we have new birth through Jesus' death and resurrection, our value system changes. In the past, we panted for worldly men or women. But through rebirth in Jesus, we long to marry a godly man or woman. In the past, we were eager to earn a down payment to buy a house which requires a lifetime mortgage payment. But through new birth in Jesus, we long for the second coming of Jesus Christ, so that he may bring us back to his glorious kingdom.

When we live as the children of God, we have to lose many things such as time and money. And we must pray. So the Christian life seems to be a losing business. But that is not the case. We receive the kingdom of God as our inheritance. It can never perish, spoil or fade. It is kept in heaven for us. This is the reason we call the kingdom of God a living hope: because it is everlasting. Let's read verse 4. "...and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade--kept in heaven for you."

Sixth, rejoice greatly (6-9). Read 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." We have a living hope through Jesus' death and resurrection. But surprisingly the Christian life gives us happiness through many trials. If we want to be an honor student, many a time, we have to stay up late and study to get good scores. The same is true with our Christian lives. If we want to be good Christians, we must grow in our inner man by overcoming all kinds of trials.

When we keep up our Christian life, from time to time, we face unbearable trials. But we must face those trials with a right attitude. We must have a right attitude toward sufferings. In order to make pure gold, gold ore must be put into the smelting furnace. Fire melts the gold and all the useless things are removed until only pure gold remains. Likewise, through many trials we do not suffer. Rather, we overcome trials with faith and purify our faith until our faith may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus

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Christ is revealed. There are many kinds of joy in Christian life. But the greatest joy we experience is that our faith is growing. In the past, we could not love even one person because of jealousy. But now, our faith grew through many trials and we can love all people around us. In the past, if we opened our mouth, we were ready to complain. But now, through many trials, we pray for others and for this country and for Russia. When we grow in faith, we can have peace with God and peace with others. Praise God!

Seventh, through new birth we come to love Jesus (8). Look at verse 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... In the past, we judged others by human standards (Jn 8:15). In the past, we judged others outwardly. But through new birth our spiritual eyes are opened. We do not see Jesus, but we can see Jesus with our spiritual eyes. In the past, we loved many glittering things of the world. But now we love Jesus, who died to save us from our sins and rose again to bring us back to his kingdom. When we love Jesus, a miracle happens in our hearts. First of all, when one loves Jesus, he loves himself. He loves his wife. He loves his country and he can pray for many people, including the leaders of many nations.

What is the result of loving Jesus? Read verse 9. "...for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls." Here the word "salvation" means fundamentally salvation from sins. Of course, all the trouble comes from sins. But the result of loving Jesus is salvation from our distress and sorrow and despair and hatred and self-righteousness and so on. We are surrounded by many self-righteous people. One woman missionary is so humble and sacrificial. But someone told her, "you are stupid in many ways." But she was not hurt, because she loved the woman who criticized her as she loved Jesus. When we love Jesus, we are saved from selfishness, which is poison to one's soul.

Eighth, what is more precious than salvation? (10-12) These days many people think a few dollars are more precious than salvation because they do not have spiritual understanding to know the meaning of salvation. But concerning this salvation, the prophets searched intently with the greatest care. Finally, they found salvation was possible through precious Jesus' death and resurrection. Even the

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angels longed to look into these things. Angels are neutral beings, so they were not privileged to participate in this glorious salvation. They only long to look into this and sigh (12b).

In this passage we learn that we must have a clear identity as the servant of Jesus Christ. Otherwise, we cannot help God's flock of sheep. Most of all, we learn that there are dead hopes and a living hope. Living hope is the kingdom of God. When we believe Jesus' death and resurrection in our hearts, we can have new birth. Through new birth we can have living hope of the kingdom of God. Let's read 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...