

Last week when we began our series here in 1 Peter, Peter was talking about how we as Christians are different from the world. We are separate, we are distinct, and we really have nothing to do with the world, so that we are, as Peter tells us, exiles in this world. And because we are different, because we are exiled from the world, therefore we will face troubles in this world simply because we are Christians. But Peter in our reading for this evening, in the beginning of his letter, is telling us that we have a living hope. A hope in God, a hope which is able to look past all of these little troubles that we have in this life as Christians. And because we have that hope, it doesn't matter what the world throws at us. We have God and that's all that matters.

But we might be wondering in a letter like this why Peter begins here. Because he's talking not about very practical things like what we should do or how we should deal with all of these different problems. But he begins with a description of God. You would kind of wonder, why would dealing with our issues start with God? The answer to that, Christians, is that Peter is giving us a sure foundation, something that we can start with, a ground that we are holding onto. As long as we hold fast to that ground, there's nothing that can move us from it. Let me use an example to illustrate what I mean. When I was living out in western North Dakota, we lived in a manufactured home, something that, of course, if a tornado hit it, it wouldn't stand a chance. It'd just be blown away the first tornado that came. And so to deal with this problem, we got a storm shelter, a little 8 x 8 thing that we set down. It was made of 4 inch thick concrete on all sides, the roof, the walls, the floor. The thing was massive, weighed 12 tons. Nothing was going to move this thing or be destroyed if a tornado ever did come through. But even with such a massive structure sitting on the ground, it still needed something more. Because if it was just sitting there, a tornado could in theory still pick it up. It could still blow it away, because tornadoes are dangerous things. But what they did is they drove four anchors about 4 feet into the ground on each corner. And with those anchors in place and the whole building bolted to them, you could throw a building at that thing and it wouldn't budge. In fact, they showed commercials of pickups being wrapped around it, and it still stood firm. All because it held firm when the tornado came. This is what Peter is doing for us, too, Christians, showing us how we are attached to a sure foundation of Jesus Christ. Because when we are united with him, when we hold fast to him, we have something that cannot be moved. And so if the tornadoes of life come blowing through because we are Christians, it doesn't matter. We will not be moved even when the waves and the winds blow against this house, because we are founded on the rock that is Jesus Christ.

So how do we have a living hope, then? What does it look like? Peter is describing it here in this passage. And he says we have a living hope, starting in verse three, because of God's great mercy. God has shown us mercy. We didn't deserve mercy. Because of our sins, we were separated from God. We were nowhere near him. We didn't have a foundation. We didn't have anything to hold on to. It would kind of be like if someone saw a tornado coming to their house, and instead of going into the basement or into the storm shelter, said, "I'm just gonna stay up here. I'll be fine. There's nothing that can happen to me!" But that's not true, is it? We had no hope. We had no security. We had no future, because we were in our sins. But God came to us while we were still sinners, while we were still his enemies, and gave us his Son Jesus Christ to die for us and to take our place. So that now, because of his mercy, we have something to hold on to. God himself who will not let us go.

And then as he goes on to say, Peter says, "According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope." Because it's not enough that he has forgiven us. It's also important that he gives us a living faith, a faith which trusts him, a faith which has been born from above. And because we have been born from above, born again in the language of John chapter 3, we now hold onto God with that faith. We follow after God with that faith. And we know that he is in fact going to take care of us, because he has given us a faith which can hope, which can trust in him, because we are now born again to that hope in Jesus.

But you might ask the question this point: how do we know that? How do we know that God's mercy is for me? How do we know that I have a living faith, that I have a living hope, because I have been born again? That's what Peter means when he says here: "through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." You want proof? You want something to hold on to? Look to Jesus, the living Jesus. Jesus who has died, but has risen again. Because that resurrection is the surest proof that we have. Because Jesus is alive, we will also live with him. We have something to look forward to in the living Lord who has overcome sin and death! All of this is ours, because Jesus now lives.

But it's not just a hope for right now. It's not just a hope for what we're dealing with in the moment. We also have a hope that looks forward to the things which are to come. Peter goes on to say, "To an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled and unfading, kept in heaven for you." We're looking forward to heaven, Christians! That beautiful, wonderful paradise of seeing God face-to-face, that is imperishable. It will never pass away, even like all the things of this world. It is undefiled. It is pure! It is perfect! And it is unfading so that even when heaven and earth have passed away, the skies and all around it, the paradise that God has prepared for those who love him will never pass away. That should give us hope! Because eye has not seen nor has ear heard or have we imagined how wonderful it will be to see heaven and see God face-to-face, when there will be no more pain, when there will be no more sorrow, when there will be no more death or suffering ever again, because God will have taken all of it away! Doesn't that give you hope? Doesn't that give you something to hold on to, to look forward to? Because regardless of what we suffer in this life, Christians, the things that we have to put up with, God has something far greater waiting for us in heaven.

And even more than that, we are waiting for "a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." Our salvation will be complete in that day. Yes, it's not quite complete right now. We are saved, yes. We are going to heaven, yes. But on that day our salvation will be complete, because we will be like Jesus, shining like the sun in everything. And we will see him face-to-face. There will be no more death. We will no longer sin. We will be with God forever. What a joy that day will be! It gives us something to hope for, to look forward to, so that we can look past all of the difficulties of this life.

That's not to say that they aren't difficult, though. We do still have to suffer in this life as Christians. And even if that suffering disappears like that, we still have to endure it for a time. But even our suffering, Christians, produces hope. That might sound strange, but listen to what Peter says. He says in verse six, "In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith--more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire--may be found to result in praise and

glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." So in other words, suffering produces hope for two reasons. And the first one is because it makes us stronger. The image that Peter uses here is that of gold being refined. Gold is thrown into a fire, yes, and that seems like a very terrible thing. But even as the gold melts, the impurities, the dross is all taken away, so that the fire makes it better than what it was before, makes it stronger than what it was before. I thought of this example too, like if you're driving a fencepost into the ground. I don't care if it's a steel post or if it's a railroad tie. It doesn't make any difference. Using a hydraulic pounder or using a post pounder, the image is still the same. When you pound on a post, that is like the trials of life. It strikes us. It hurts us to some degree. But it drives that post further and further into the ground, so that the farther down it goes, the stronger it becomes. Because if you didn't pound on it at all, the post wouldn't stand up. And if you only pounded on it a couple of times, it wouldn't be in far enough to make any difference. But when the post is driven deep into the ground, then nothing will be able to make it move. That's what's happening to us, too, Christians. We are being driven further and further into Christ, into the foundation that is Jesus Christ, so that we are able to stand in that day of trial.

The other way that suffering produces hope here is because our suffering actually glorifies God. That's what he's saying, "result in the praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." Because even when we are weak, and we often are, even when we suffer, and we frequently do, even when we are driven past our ability to stand, and I guarantee you that will happen more than once, God still saves us. God has the power to deliver us. And when he delivers us even from what seems impossible, we will glorify him for that great and wonderful salvation that he has shown to us.

But going on, Peter continues, saying that we also have hope because of the joy which we have in Jesus. You haven't seen him face-to-face. We haven't even seen him now. But think of the joy, Christians! The joy that you will feel when you do see him! The joy that we will have when Jesus comes and delivers us from all of these troubles! Yes, we have hope in that joy as well, because this joy has been long promised. And that's what Peter finishes here: "Concerning this salvation" from verse 10 going forward. The Holy Spirit revealed to the prophets this joy that we would have. The prophets didn't have it. But we do. The angels don't have it. But we do. And there's nothing in heaven or on earth quite like this hope that we have. God has given himself for you, Christians, so that you would be safe and secure in him, so that you would be grounded in God. And being grounded in God with a hope that we are looking forward to, and seeing all the things that God has done, what God is doing, and what God will do, being in all of those things, we will stand firm in the day of trial. That is our hope that we have, the living hope that we have in God.

But just a couple of final thoughts. How do we hold on to this? How do we cling tighter to Jesus? How are we driven into him? Where can we go? Come to his word, because God speaks to you, Christians, and gives you the words of everlasting life. Cling to him in prayer. Be diligent in prayer. God has promised to hear you. And come to his sacraments, where he gives you the very body and blood of his Son Jesus Christ to strengthen that faith. In all of these things, God is making your salvation sure. And you have a living hope through him in what he is doing for you today. So come to him, hear his word, and receive his gifts, and you will be strengthened for the day of battle.

Now to God, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope, be all glory, honor and worship, now and forever.
Amen.