

One of the most important words in the Bible is the word "therefore." Because the word "therefore" as a connection between two different ideas explains to us the meaning of what has come before. In fact I would argue that without the word "therefore," we would never know what it means to be a Christian. Let me explain what I mean. Take any statement in the Bible. Let's use a simple one. "Jesus died on the cross." If I stopped right there and didn't say anything else, what would that mean for your life? It sounds like just a bare historical fact, which it is. It's true. It really did happen. But if I didn't add anything else to it, it wouldn't mean anything. It would be just as simple as saying "Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon" or "Abraham Lincoln was shot at Ford's theater." It wouldn't change your day-to-day life. You could even take a really important statement like "Jesus rose from the dead on the third day," but if you stopped right there, so what? How does it change our day to day lives? But as soon as you add that word "therefore," it changes everything. Think of that first one. "Jesus died on the cross, therefore your sins have been forgiven." It makes all the difference in the world, doesn't it? Because it's no longer just a fact of history, something that happened in the past. It's something that now has meaning for your day-to-day life. Same is true of the other one. "Jesus rose again on the third day, therefore you also will live with him." That word "therefore" really does make all the difference in the world. It's the difference between a bare historical truth and a living Christian faith.

Peter actually uses this language in our reading for tonight that we just read. In fact, he begins this passage with that very word, "therefore," in verse 13. "Therefore, preparing your minds for action and being sober minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." So in other words, what Peter is saying is that everything that has come before this is important, but it has to have meaning. So yes, we are exiles in this world, exiles because we are Christians. But without a "therefore" added to it, what difference does it make? We could just be weird and that would make us different from everyone else. And on the other hand, a living hope is good because of what God has done, but if I don't add anything to that, it might be just a really, really strong wish for something. It doesn't really change anything from day-to-day. But as soon as I add that "therefore," as Peter does, now everything makes a difference. We are elect exiles in this world, and we have a living hope in God. Therefore, as Peter says, live as a holy people. Live as a people set apart to God. Because now that we are set apart, now that we are holy in God's sight, it means that we are living as the Christians that God has created us to be. And so that "therefore" really does make all the difference in this case. In fact, I would even argue that being holy in this sense, being separate, being like God, is all about that "therefore," all about this reality which we have in God himself.

Now, Peter himself goes on to talk about these things in a similar way, even if he doesn't use the word itself of "therefore." So, let's go on, starting at verse 14. Peter says this: "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. Since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" Now, again, he doesn't use the specific word "therefore," but the same idea is there. Because what's the bigger truth that Peter is starting with here? He says God is holy. God is different. God is unique. God is set apart. God is perfectly righteous. God is perfectly good. That makes him holy. But if I stop there, all I've done is say something about God. It doesn't really change anything for our day-to-day lives. But Peter goes on to say that because God is holy, therefore you also be holy, for he is holy. Don't be conformed to the ways of your former life. Don't live like you used to. God in his holiness has changed you. He has made you a new

creation. You are something different. You are something set apart because of what God has done in you.

Peter goes on. Verse 17: "And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." So, you'll notice he does the same thing again here. What's the basic truth he begins with? You have been ransomed. God has brought you at a great price. Not with gold or silver, because we could never have enough of that. There would never be enough in all the world to pay for our sins. But with something far more dear to him, something far more expensive, if you want to use that language. And that is the blood of his Son. The blood of Jesus Christ, which is far more valuable than anything this world can give us, because one drop of it is enough to forgive all of our sins, that's what God has used to purchase you. Therefore, Peter says, conduct yourselves with fear, because you have been bought at so great a price. After all, you probably have things in your homes that are very expensive. They are things that we treat differently, don't we? Because we don't want to break them! Because they mean a whole lot more to us. They're not garbage. They're not something we can just replace. And so we treat them differently and far more carefully, because they cost us so much money. The same is true for us, Christians. God paid such a high price to redeem you! So conduct yourselves with fear, because God bought you at that high price.

Peter goes on in verse 20: "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you, who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." It's the same thing. Peter is using the same idea. Here, he says, Jesus, who has existed from all eternity, but has appeared to us in these last times, this same Jesus God raised from the dead and gave him glory. Therefore, Peter says, your faith and hope are in God. Because Jesus has done all of this for you, we now have a faith in him. We trust in him. We hope in him. We believe in him, because of his work in saving us which has come to us from even before the foundation of the world. That "therefore," Christians, makes all the difference in the world.

And finally, Peter says, "Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. For all flesh is like grass, and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord remains forever. And this word is the good news that was preached to you." And we hear it one more time here. God has purified your souls by your obedience to the truth. God has redeemed you. You have been born again, not with a perishable seed, not with something that just crumbles away, but with the imperishable Word of God. And through this living Word, God has given you a living faith. Therefore, Peter says, love one another earnestly from a pure heart. You have been redeemed as a people, together as one body of Christ. God showed his love to you and to all of us by redeeming us with that same Word. So as God has loved us, therefore we ought to love one another and through that same Word.

So Christians, this is ultimately the point. All of these things that Peter has been talking about--being exiles and having a living hope in God--all of it boils down to this single truth. All of it means that therefore we ought to live in that hope. To live in the hope that we have in God, to live in those things which we now have in him. God has redeemed us, and so our lives have been transformed. And therefore, we don't have to be afraid. Whatever this world throws at us, whatever we might have to face and struggle with because of being different from the world as Christians, we don't have to fear the world. Because no matter what happens tomorrow, God remains the same. So let them come after us. Let them do whatever they want! It doesn't matter. God is with us always. And therefore, we can also trust in the Lord, trust in him that he will not fail us, that he will take care of us no matter what. And therefore, we ought to remember that this world and all the things in it will come to an end. The things we suffer right now as Christians will come to an end. But the Word of the Lord will go on forever. Yes, we are exiles in this world, and we have a living hope. Therefore, let us live as God's holy people, a people redeemed, a people saved, a people who can trust in him.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.