

A LIVING HOPE

1 PETER 1:1-5

Chapter 1 begins, “Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ...”

Peter wasn't always an apostle. He started out a fisherman. *Bait, nets, boats, and fish* were Peter's business – not *doctrine, souls, and eternity*. Peter started a *fisher of fish*, but Jesus turned him into a *fisher of men*.

The term “*Apostle*” is derived from the word “*send*.”

An apostle is an authorized messenger - a company spokesman – a President's press secretary – an official representative... *But can you imagine anyone appointing Peter as their representative?*

Rather than represent Jesus, Peter spent most of the time contradicting Him... Jesus says He's headed to the cross, Peter says, “*No way...*” Jesus wants to wash Peter's feet. Peter refuses... Jesus sets some non-kosher food in front of him - tells him to kill and eat. Peter says “*Not so, Lord...*”

Would you really make the guy who denied you three times – once, in front of a little servant girl – you're chief spokesman – your “*apostle*”?

Nobody but the *Chief of Grace* could've seen potential in a stumbling, bumbling Peter. On his own, this man was as stable as sand, yet Jesus changed his name to “*Peter*” or “*Rocky*.” Jesus made him an “*apostle*.”

“Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the pilgrims...” Got a few pilgrim jokes... *What kind of music do Pilgrims like?*

Plymouth Rock... Why did the pilgrim's pants fall down? He wore his belt buckle on his hat! ...

Sorry about that, Peter wasn't talking about *those pilgrims*...

The root word for "*pilgrim*" means "far off." A pilgrim is a stranger on a distant journey. He's passing through foreign surroundings and culture.

And the pilgrims Peter has in mind are us. Christians in this world are aliens. We're strangers in a strange land. This world is not our home.

Flip ahead to 1Peter 5:13 and we learn that Peter sends his greetings from Babylon. It's possible but doubtful, that Peter was writing from the literal city of Babylon. In 60 AD ancient Babylon was a pile of rubble.

It's far more likely that Peter was referring to the spiritual Babylon - the city of Rome. At the time, Rome was the capitol of paganism and idolatry.

Peter was a pilgrim – a stranger – an alien to the culture around him.

The Roman emperor in Peter's day was the wicked Caesar Nero.

"*Egomaniac*" is not a strong enough word for Nero... He took pride in his building. He erected stadiums, palaces, shrines, temples. Nero was such a prolific builder Rome ran out of room. He needed more space.

Then on July 19, 64 AD a fire started in the woodsheds near the Circus Maximus. It raged for 10 days and torched 2/3rd of the downtown district.

Later it was reported that Nero's servants were seen running from the sheds just before the blaze broke out. The fire engulfed the entire city.

Everyone believed Nero was the arsonist - that he'd set the fire so he could rebuild the city himself... "Nero fiddled while Rome burned." And when fingers started pointing his direction, Nero needed a scapegoat.

So he blamed Rome's destruction on the Christians. And there were a number of reasons that made Christians easy targets...

For starters from a Roman's perspective Christians were a nuisance.

They refused to be good citizens. Religion played a huge role in ancient Rome. Not that everybody truly believed in their pantheon of mythological gods – but the customs surrounding them were cultural and traditional.

On holidays sacrifices were offered to state-sponsored deities... At family reunions, the father thanked the gods for bringing all the cousins and kin back together again... The bricklayer's guild opened its monthly meeting with a prayer to the god of bricklaying... It was all tradition.

A modern equivalent would be dressing up for Halloween, or observing Santa Claus, or wearing green on Saint Patrick's Day. A Christian decides she doesn't want to support witches, or lie to her kids, or act superstitious.

But rather than support her convictions, her friends scoff, "What's wrong with you? You think you're better than

everyone else?” Her parents tell her, “It was good enough for you, why are you going to deprive your kids?”

She gets labeled antisocial, and unpatriotic, and just plain weird.

This was Rome. It was a pluralistic culture that believed in *everything and nothing* - whereas the Christians were determined to make all of life about Jesus. They exalted Him at every turn. It upset *Roman routine*.

In addition, Christians interjected *morality* into society. According to the Christians, *eating too much, getting drunk, telling a convenient lie, having sex with your girlfriend* were all selfish and unloving and wrong.

Christians dared to bring God into the bedroom. Consenting adults were accountable to God. In fact, Christianity brought God into every room of the house. This made immoral Romans antsy. It pricked Rome’s conscience.

And the final straw that broke the camel’s back was the Christian’s unwillingness to place a pinch of incense on the altar to the Caesar.

Had Rome not been a good mother? It paved the roads, and kept the peace... the least its citizens could do was pay homage to its ruler.

And everyone did... *except the Christians*. In a world that acknowledged many gods, the Christians served no king but Jesus. Even under the threat of persecution and death they refused to buckle. “**Jesus is Lord**” was their battle-cry. Rome hated this defiance – and when Nero needed to deflect the

public's anger elsewhere, the Church became a convenient target.

Nero launched a massive crusade to persecute the followers of Jesus.

He would dip their bodies in wax, and burned them at the stake to light his drunken orgies. Once at one of these parties, he stripped naked and road his chariot through the palace gardens shouting “[Light of the world, Light of the world...](#)” mocking the Christians and their God, Jesus.

Nero clothed Christians in animal skins, and threw them to wild dogs.

Under Nero's Rome, six million Christians were crucified - executed by gladiators – torn apart by ferocious lions. It was a Holocaust of Christians.

Finally, in 65 AD Nero arrested the two champions of Christianity - Peter and Paul. The Apostle Paul was beheaded, while Peter died on a cross.

Tradition says when the soldiers came to crucify Peter he asked that his body be nailed upside down. He felt unworthy to be crucified like his Lord.

Don't tell me, Peter didn't know a thing or two about suffering! He penned this letter while he was a prisoner of Rome - on death row.

Peter wrote with death looming on the horizon... yet his eyes were fixed over the horizon – beyond this world - to the glories of his heavenly home.

I've heard it said, "If Paul is the apostle of faith, and John is the apostle of love, then Peter is the apostle of hope!" Peter became a rock when he looked past this world, and anchored his hopes in the world to come.

Peter was a pilgrim writing to fellow pilgrims about the trouble ahead.

And his readers had already tasted some bullying. They were "pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..."

In Acts we learn the Church was born into a climate of hostility and persecution. From the outset, believers in Jerusalem were hassled and attacked by Jews. Many ended up *dispersed* and displaced into other quarters of the world. This is the "Dispersion" Peter mentions.

Acts 2 tells us where the folks were from who heard Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost. The very first converts to Christ were from "Pontus, Cappadocia, Asia... the cities of Galatia" – places mentioned here.

In the beginning these new believers may've stayed in Jerusalem to sit under the apostles' teaching and grow in their faith - but when the heat of Jewish persecution grew hot they returned home. Peter never lost touch with these first saints. Now he warns them about the trouble ahead. The refugees of Jewish prejudice are about to feel the hot anger of Rome.

I hope you realize this world is not *our* home. This is why stuff breaks - and plumbing leaks - and weddings don't go smoothly - and life is full of hassles - and there're accidents - and conflicts - and taxes - and tickets.

God doesn't want you to settle in and get comfortable in this world.

If you're a new Christian and you were told, "*Give your life to Jesus and He will eliminate all your problems*" – let me apologize - it's a lie.

In fact, give your life to Jesus and it might just get harder...

Now you're swimming upstream. You're moving against the current of this world. You're *standing up* in a world that's *lying down*. You're making folks uncomfortable. You're no longer Satan's homeboy. You're a threat.

Christianity is true, and worth it, but Jesus never said it was easy.

We too are dispersed pilgrims. Our natural habitat is heaven. The Spirit of God lives in us. We have God's nature. This world is an alien place.

Don't misunderstand, I know some of you need a better life right now...

You don't have a job – can't feed your family – your kid is in rebellion - your spouse hates you... *Jesus does want to fix those problems now!*

But no matter how rosy life gets, you're still going to get frustrated. You will never be completely happy and totally satisfied in this world – never.

I'll never forget when Zach came home from Bible College. He'd lived away from home for two years – time enough to shake off our training.

So we gave him a blanket and pillow, and let him sleep in the back of the family room. We didn't want to make it too comfortable, so he would want to stay. Whether he realized it or not, he was just passing through.

This is why God will never let us get too *at ease* in this wicked world.

Charles Spurgeon recounted an incident that occurred during one of his sermons about heaven. "There was a sister sitting on my right hand... Her eyes sparkling as I spoke. It seemed to stir my very soul as she looked at me with such an extraordinary gaze of joy. I was stirred up to say something more, something better, about our happy home above.

When I saw her, apparently still looking at me, a minute or two later, I perceived the same fixed gaze, and said, '*I think that sister is dead*' - and she was. She had gone home without a sigh, or a groan, or a moan.

As she considered the fullness of the prospects - the delight seemed to swell like a mighty wave, and it washed her on to the heavenly shore. Who knows how soon a similar experience may be ours?" This is how we need to live on earth - longing and preparing for our home in heaven.

Keep heaven's beauty in your sites - savor its foretaste - keep its glory in your heart, its wisdom in your mind, its truth on your lips... Live close to heaven's shore so one day a wave of delight will just wash you on over.

A woman was on board a ship in the middle of the Atlantic. An angry storm tried to sink the boat, but the woman exuded

such unusual calm and composure. The captain asked her the secret of her strength.

She replied, "I've got two daughters - one lives in New York, and one lives in heaven. I knew I'd see one of my girls in a few hours and it didn't really matter which one." We're all just passing through. When life here below gets hard, remind yourself heaven is our ultimate destination.

Peter encourages these pilgrims. Though they may've given up locality and comfort in this life to follow Jesus - their position in Christ was solid.

He refers to them as the "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ..." Notice the mention of all three members of the Trinity. God tag-teamed your salvation just to make it sure and certain...

You're the "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father..."

The Bible teaches God knew me before I existed, and chose me before the footers for the universe were poured. *In contrast, at times I feel like an afterthought...* God was choosing teams - had last pick - so He got stuck with me. *Not so!* I was in *God's heart* long before I was in *mom's arms*.

Some of you have never been picked for anything... On the playground you were always the last person chosen... you stayed home the night of the Prom... at work, you were passed over for promotion... you flunked the American Idol audition, *and you were so sure you could sing...*

Here's good news, Almighty God has picked you for His team.

When you hear "*elect*" think "*election.*" *God cast His vote for you!*

Sometimes we vote for candidates and afterwards regret our choice. Promises get broken... Bad character and poor judgment come to the surface... Skeletons fall out of the closet... *If only we had known?*

God has perfect foreknowledge and He still chose you! This means He has no regrets. He sticks by His choices. He elected you, even though He knew about your character flaws - and the skeletons in your closet – and the broken promises you would make - and the bad judgment you would show... The Father knew all this in advance and still He voted for you!

Believe it or not, the idea of God's election has become a controversial subject for people who read the Bible, but refuse to take it at face value.

The Bible is full of verses that make our salvation dependent on us choosing God. This verse, and others like it, say God chooses us.

Here's our mistake... we conclude there's some kind of contradiction. It doesn't make sense to say, "*I choose, but God has a choice*" – it's illogical. So we try to reconcile the two points of view by watering down verses that don't fit our logic... Here's the bigger issue, *who says God has to play by our rules or abide by our logic?* Isaiah says, "*His ways are not our ways.*"

God is infinite. I am finite. That means there'll always be some mystery in my understanding of God. The adage is true, "If God was small enough for my mind to grasp, He wouldn't be big enough for my heart to worship."

Trust me, you'll have a tough time getting along with God if you insist on complete understanding and no loose ends - before you believe and obey.

God wants you to learn humility and here's a good place to start... God has elected me!... And when I trust Him, I cast my vote for God every day.

I believe the doctrine of election was intended by God as a comfort, not a cop out. When Jesus spoke to lost people - to Nicodemus, or the woman at the well - He never talked of God's choice, rather their need to choose.

I've heard it said when we enter heaven the sign on the front gate will read, "Whoever will may come." After we've walked through, the back of the gate will read, "Chosen before the foundation of the world."

You've been elected by the Father, but there was additional work to do.

You were "sanctified by the Spirit." The word "sanctification" means "to set apart." You were elected by the Father, but selected by the Spirit. You were the Father's choice, but then the Spirit pulled you out of the crowd.

The Holy Spirit put His hand on you and drew you to God.

Older saints referred to the Holy Spirit as "the hound of heaven."

The Father chose us, but the Spirit tracked us, and ran our rebellious hearts up a tree... and convicted, and convinced, and converted us.

The Father **chooses** - the Spirit **catches** – *AND* the Son **cleanses**...

This tag-team salvation the Trinity is working in you and me is ultimately “**for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ...**” The **Father foreknows**, the **Spirit fetches**, but the deal ain’t done til the **Son fixes**.

Jesus alone forgives, and cleanses, and restores, and makes new.

The OT priest applied the blood of the sacrifice with a hyssop branch.

Hyssop was a leafy twig the priest would dip into the blood – then he’d shake it so it sprinkled the blood on whatever needed to be purified.

With a skillful and priestly “*touch*” sprinkling could get very specific.

You could apply the blood precisely where it was needed. A good priest could get exact. This is what Jesus does. He’s our sacrifice, but He’s also the priest who applies the blood. And Jesus has the touch of a maestro.

Often we think of salvation as a blanket cleansing. Like in water baptism we’re *immersed* in the blood... But the work of Jesus gets more exact...

The hidden sin you’re so ashamed of, you’ve never told a soul – Jesus can reach it by sprinkling... The wound you

suffered as a little girl – that cut you deeply – the abuse your dad *inflicted* – *one flick* of Jesus' hyssop and He touches it with His healing. The trauma you've buried in your psyche – the hurt you're afraid to uncover – can get pinpointed with a sprinkle.

This is why we need Jesus! Good works, religion, therapy, karma, the yin and yang, and balance, and harmony, and meditation just mask over our problems. Only Jesus has soul-cleansing and healing that can be applied directly to our sins, and our wounds, and deepest hurts.

Peter says to the pilgrims who are *chosen by the Father, captured by the Spirit, cleansed by the Son*, “*grace to you and peace be multiplied.*”

This is the common NT greeting “*grace and peace*” – and always in that order. Grace is first. No one gets good enough for God – and if you try to be you'll never know His peace. Only when you trust in grace – love you don't deserve - favor you'll never earn - only then, will you be at peace.

And here, unlike the rest of the NT, Peter “*multiplies*” God's peace. His readers are suffering, and he wants them to have peace in abundance.

Verse 3 begins the body of the letter. “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again...*” Here Peter uses a phrase Jesus coined.

He says Christians have been “*begotten again*” or “*born again.*”

Humans are made up of *body, soul, and spirit*. God meant for us to run on three cylinders. Our body functions. Our soul – which is our mind, will, and emotions - are alive. But spiritually we're dead as a doorknob.

This means we're running on 2 of 3 cylinders – no wonder we sputter and misfire. *We eat, drink, sleep - we laugh, cry, think* - but the deepest part of a man is *dead* – the part that interacts with God lies dormant.

No wonder people who've never been born again have some drivability issues - and get bad gas mileage – and give off some foul emissions.

But when we come to Jesus, God's Spirit creates a spark in our spirit.

He lights the furnace. A connection to God gets formed. Something comes to life inside us. Jesus says we're born again. It's the new birth.

And life gets better when you're firing on all three cylinders... As a matter fact, when they're born again *hopeless people find new hope*.

Peter says, we're born again **“to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...”** Dante, in his *Divine Comedy*, hangs an inscription over death's door, **“Abandon all hope, you who enter here!”**

This is death's greatest tragedy. When you die you forfeit all hope.

Death is the great spoiler! It separates lovers - creates orphans - slams the door on opportunity - causes potential to vanish. It chokes out hope!

But Jesus overcame death - and lives forever! When Jesus exited the grave He resurrected hope and eternal life for everyone scheduled for death. If Jesus can overcome death, anything becomes possible...

There's an old saying that's true, "Born once, die twice. Born twice, die once." In Christ we've been "begotten again unto a living hope."

And when Peter mentions "living hope" he means a "growing hope."

A kid's mind is full of dreams and visions. A little boy hopes to play ball in the big leagues, or be an astronaut and land on the moon. A little girl hopes to marry a movie star, or sing in front of thousands of fans.

And growing up becomes a process of killing off our hopes one at a time. The hope of a sporty convertible dies... we settle for a mini-van.

All my life I dreamed of being a professional athlete... until one night at Calvary Chapel. It was years ago, we were playing softball and it dawned on me... if I can't get a hit off Mike Protsman, I'm not going to be a Brave.

This world is good at causing dreams to fade, and hopes to die. *Things we never did... Places we never saw... The person we never became...*

Earth is full of "dying hopes" that can never be resuscitated. This is what causes a *mid-life crisis*. Hope and time starts slipping from our fingers, and we realize we can never get it back. We start to panic.

I had a friend once, who had a heart-attack. He told me it woke him up - caused him to realize “life is short,” and if there’s anything he wanted to do he needed to do it now. So he got a tattoo and bought a Harley.

And I thought *how sad... how shallow...* It dawns on you all your hopes are dying hopes – so you try to squeeze out of life the very best it has to offer – and all you come up with is an ink spot and a loud motorcycle.

Peter would tell us, “Rather than go through a *mid-life crisis* get your eyes on *eternal glory*.” Don’t worry about what you might miss out on in this life - live for Jesus so that you won’t miss out in the life to come.

Know this, for a Christian this present world is the worst it’s ever going get. Heaven is my hope. Yet if you don’t know Jesus the opposite is true. This world, right now, is the best you’ll ever experience. Hell gets worse.

Here’s our hope - when I reach my last day on earth, my best days will still be ahead. Christians have a “**living hope**” and it’s *out of this world!*

Once, a little boy was picking out a puppy. He opted for the puppy that wagged its tail. His dad asked, “*Why?*” The little guy answered, “**I want the one with the happy ending.**” *And that’s why I’m a Christian...* I’ve picked the life with the happy ending. Our trials all come with “**a living hope!**”

Understand, the persecution many of the believers in Bithynia, and Pontus, and Cappadocia had experienced came from their family.

In the ancient world there was no such thing as government sponsored welfare, or unemployment, or FDIC insurance. The only financial safety-net came from a person's family. And this concerned many of the Christians.

Disapproving parents had written them out of their will. They were fired from their job in the family business. They were kicked out of their family-owned home. They faced retirement with no inheritance – no security.

This is why Peter writes in verse 4 that we've been born again **“to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you...”** God's safety-net is called heaven.

The volatility of today's markets make it clear nothing earthly is certain.

Only God's treasures are priceless and permanent. Eternal blessings can't be lost, or tainted, or stolen. If you're a believer in Jesus there's an inheritance in heaven under lock and key - your name is on the account!

And you, yourself, **“are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”** When my kids were younger, and we'd play, they'd always hand something over, and ask, **“Dad, will you hold this for me? Put it in your pocket!”**

Sometimes it was a piece of candy, or some money, or their Bible – but it was an item they didn't want to lose, so they entrusted it to me.

Well, you are an item God doesn't want to lose – so much so, He keeps you, and holds you! Believe in Jesus and God tucks you in His pocket!

Again, this is why your best days are still ahead!

The closer Peter gets to the end of the road – to the end of his life - the brighter and more hopeful he becomes. He has a growing hope.

Let me close with another quote by Charles Spurgeon. Though he was a great preacher, he was still a man, and was often troubled by bouts of depression. He wrote, “Christian men are but men. They may have a bad liver, or an attack of bile, of some trial, and then they get depressed...”

But what then? Well, then you can get joy and peace through believing.

I am the subject of depressions of spirit so fearful I hope none of you ever gets to such extremes of wretchedness as I go to. But I always get back again by this: I know I trust Christ. I have no reliance but in Him.

Because He lives, I shall live also, and I spring to my legs and fight with my depressions of spirit, and downcast soul, and get the victory through it. So may you do, and so you must, for there is no other way of escaping it. You get joy and peace through believing...” This is Peter's message!

We also get plagued by bouts of depression. We go through trials, and testing, and adversity. Yet we've been born again to a living hope!

No matter how hard life gets – as a believer in Jesus, everything in your life is looking up! Your best days are still ahead... You escape depression - and fight through to the joy and peace of Jesus *by believing* - by hoping!

Let's reach up in faith and grab hold of our *living hope!*