

First Christian Church (Lawrence, KS)
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The Hope of Glory

1 Peter 1:3-12 (NIV)

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, 4 and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, 5 who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 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, 9 for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

10 Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, 11 trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. 12 It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

[Slide 1] *Opening*

Good morning church!

We're continuing the series I've titled, "*Resurrection Hope*," as we walk through the book of 1 Peter, asking the questions: What does it mean to live in hope? And what does it look like to live as people who have what our text today calls "*a living hope*"?

[Slide 2] *Review*

Last week we saw that Peter refers to this "living hope" as an "inheritance," which he says is ours because of the resurrection. Let's remember what the Bible means by "hope": "*the confident expectation of future good which is not yet here*,

but is certain to come.” Our hope—our expectation of good that is coming to us in the future—is not just a wish for what we would like. It is based on something that God has promised, which is therefore certain, and which gives us the confidence that we may rightly expect it in the future; it is our coming inheritance.

That inheritance, Peter said, was something that was imperishable (it can’t be destroyed), undefiled (it can’t be ruined), unfading (it can’t be diminished, always fresh), and reserved for us in heaven (it can’t be taken away). And we saw that Peter identifies this hope as our salvation: a future salvation that will be revealed when Jesus returns, which is promised to us on the condition of our faith, our allegiance to Jesus Christ.

[Slide 3] *Introduction*

According to our passage this morning, that faith is something that has been tested by unspecified kinds of suffering that are referred to as “*trials*.” When you hear the word, “*trials*,” don’t think of a courtroom, but of an ordeal that you must complete in order to gain something.

As I mentioned last week, at the time this letter was written, the emperor Nero either had already begun an intense persecution against the Christians in Rome, or was soon to do so. For the churches to whom Peter was writing, that persecution was not yet a reality. But they were enduring considerable social pressures that hampered their daily lives in many ways. As a group, Christians were widely disliked, mistrusted, and considered dangerous to society because of their beliefs that contradicted the popular religions. Rumors abounded that Christians were guilty of wild and perverse behavior, things that were deemed fitting for followers of a shameful criminal who had been condemned to death on the cross by the Roman rulers. Those rumors fed the social dishonor that fueled the community hatred of the church. That shared animosity, combined with the Christians refusal to acknowledge or worship the other gods that were revered by the wider community, made them an easy target for attacks of various kinds—public shaming, loss of customers, refusing to buy or sell their goods, denials of service or protection or access to community standing, exclusion from public amenities, or expulsion from the family or the community.

[Slide 4] *Understanding the point of testing*

These kinds of malicious attacks were intended to stop the Christian churches from continuing in their faith. The point of it all, from the perspective of those perpetrating the attacks, was to restore life to what it used to be, to eliminate the novel faith, and bring those involved back to that which the rest of the family or village or nation embraced and assumed was normal and good—the worship of

the various gods that were recognized locally. From the perspective of the pagan peoples around the Christians, these attacks were not only necessary but needed to be sufficiently painful in order to cause those who had converted to Christian faith to return to paganism.

But from God's perspective—which Peter wants the churches to understand and adopt—the suffering and the trials which they were experiencing had a different purpose. They were necessary to test the faith of each believer.

We may not be facing exactly the same kinds of suffering today, particularly in the U.S. But in many places around the world, what they are going through is very much like what the churches in the first century were experiencing. And even in our setting, this plague of COVID-19 is putting pressure on churches—not just our church—and on families and believers who are hearing the whispers of the enemy in their ears, telling them that it's not worth it to keep following Jesus. So we need to listen to what Peter told the churches in his day.

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When I say that these sufferings were “necessary,” I do not mean that they were necessary in the sense of having been eternally planned by God to happen. These attacks by the pagans on the churches were not necessary parts of God's secret plan for their lives which he had scripted out before he ever created the world, things that “*must have been God's will all along.*” No, they were necessary in a different sense: that is, their experience of suffering at the hands of their neighbors was what was needed to demonstrate the quality and value of their faith.

[Slide 6] *Proven worth*

The value of testing is something that we all understand—and even want—, though we don't always appreciate it or like the feeling when we're the one going through the testing process. But we understand it.

Think about your favorite recipe—the one you like to cook and everyone likes it when you cook it. You know that when you pull this recipe out, it's going to be a great meal. How do you know that? Because you've tested it already. You've tried this recipe over and over and you know exactly what ingredients you'll need, in what proportions, what conditions will work best, how long it will take to prepare, and so on. You've already worked out all of the bugs. (Or maybe you've worked all the bugs in, if the recipe is for something like roasted grasshopper pie). You trust that recipe. It's been proven.

Or consider a favorite tool. It could be your framing hammer, or your Sawzall, or your sewing machine; maybe it's your laptop, or a particular piece of software on your computer, or an app on your phone. It's your favorite tool, your

go-to tool when you have a problem. Why do you like that tool? Partly because it's familiar, sure. But it's familiar because you've used it a lot, in various situations, over a long period of time. And you've used it because you know it works. You've tested that tool. You know what it can do and what it can't do. You know whether you can depend on it for the task you're facing. You've proven that this tool has genuine value.

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Think about the people you've worked with. If you're a business owner or the head of a department, think about the people who work for you. Who do you go to when you have a challenging problem? Who do you lean on when the pressure is on? You go to your tested people, right? You look to the people who have proven themselves, the ones who have demonstrated that they are capable, because they've been through the battles and come out better. They are better equipped, more skilled, more experienced, with a better understanding of what to do and how to do it. They've proven themselves trustworthy—and now you trust them. Now you have a better sense of their ability, their strengths; you have proven their value.

[Slide 8 (start on me)] “*High jump theology*”

Listen, God wants us to learn how to view the trials that cause us pain, that are difficult to go through, that make us suffer. We need to see them rightly, to see them from God's perspective, and to understand his purposes and goals for those trials. And this passage in 1 Peter is especially important for us to grasp one huge key, which is what the trials are designed to do.

Our problem is that many of us, maybe all of us to some degree or other, have fallen prey to what I refer to as “*high jump theology*.” It's a very common, but often unstated, assumption that shows what we believe about God. (Switch emphasis to slide)

When I was in ninth grade, I was on the track team at North Junior High School, in Aurora, Colorado. My main event was the high jump. I had never seen anyone high jump before that time, so I had to learn about it from scratch. (That's a high jump pun, for those of you who know track and field.) The high jump (and its cousin, the pole vault, which is even crazier) has a somewhat unique way of measuring your progress. Basically, it goes like this.

There is a starting height at which the high jump bar is placed. You get three attempts to clear that height without knocking the bar over. If you don't clear the starting height, you're out. If you do clear the starting height, well, then, guess what? That's right—they raise the bar a few inches. You get to try again. Same

deal: three attempts to clear the new height; miss and you're out, clear it and they raise the bar again. There are no prizes for clearing any of the heights, no rewards, except that you get to keep trying. And the officials will keep raising the bar . . . *until you fail* to clear the specified height. Ultimately, everyone fails. And the process reinforces that sense of failure, because even if you set a personal best, the last thing you did in the event—was to fail to clear the bar. The event, this test of your ability to jump high, didn't end until it proved that you had failed.

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A lot of us think that this is what God is doing when he tests us. We imagine that the point of tests is to prove that we are a failure, that God tests us in order to *demonstrate* that we are a failure so that he can demonstrate why he is justified in kicking us out, or refusing to let us in, or keeping us from whatever it is we think we are supposed to have. No matter what we have done well or done rightly, we think that God is simply going to keep raising the bar and demand more of us until we prove that we are a failure, at which point he can then shake his head, and say, “*Yeah, I knew it. I knew you couldn't do it.*”

[Slide 10] *Refining process*

But that's not what 1 Peter says! The apostle Peter says exactly the opposite! Peter says that the point of the testing is to demonstrate the genuineness of our faith. God is testing us to see the quality of our faith, to see what its value is, to demonstrate to the world the genuineness of that which he has done in us. He is using the trials as a refiner uses fire to purify gold.

When a refiner gets a load of ore from a gold mine, that ore is a mixture of all kinds of stuff—dirt, rocks, bones, other minerals. (Just like us.) But somewhere in that load of ore is some highly valuable gold. It's just hidden under the mess of stuff around it. The refiner uses a process of smelting to eliminate everything else, leaving behind the pure metal of the gold.

So the refiner starts by sifting out all of the dirt and ordinary rocks and bits of bone and washing it away. Then the rest is placed in the fire with a chemical agent that will cause specific reactions to eliminate certain elements that are bonded to the gold (such as oxygen). As the fire heats up, some of the other materials start to burn away. The impurities, these other minerals or elements that are mixed in with the gold, start to evaporate as gases or float to the surface of the molten ore where they can be scraped off and discarded. When the smelting is done, all that is left is the pure gold, which can be taken to the assayer's for further testing—to prove that it is what it claims to be, to be certified as genuine, and weighed to know its market value.

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The point of this difficult and costly process is not to prove that there isn't anything worth keeping in the load of ore that was extracted from the mountain. No, when that ore was extracted, there wasn't any question that valuable gold was contained in the load. But it had to be smelted in order to show how much was there and assayed to test its purity and then weighed to determine its value.

God is doing the same thing with us as he tests us with various trials and painful experiences. When we suffer, whether it's something as minimal as sheltering-in-place for longer than is convenient, or something that is dangerous and scary, like being exposed to Coronavirus or persecuted for our faith, those experiences are God's smelter. He isn't trying to disqualify us, to prove that we are failures. He is purifying us in order to demonstrate the depth and quality of our faith in Jesus Christ.

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That's why Peter says that we can rejoice, even in the midst of bothersome lockdowns or genuinely painful trials (like the financial strain of losing hours at work or being laid off). We don't deny the reality or the severity of our suffering or our pain. God isn't telling us that we ought to pretend that our pain isn't really painful (or "*not that bad*"). And we don't rejoice *because* we're suffering—God isn't interested in developing masochists. We rejoice because we can know what is coming as a result of being tested—our faith is being demonstrated, our lives are being purified so that we can receive that which we have been promised, the inheritance that we obtain through our faith. We are rejoicing *in anticipation of that which is yet to come*, that for which we are hoping, confidently expecting.

[Slide 13] *Understanding glory*

There's something else that is really important in this short passage, something that is often misunderstood, and quite frankly, has been misrepresented to much of the church. It's right there in verse seven. Let's read it again.

These [trials] have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

It's that last part that has often been missed, or misread, the part about "*praise, glory, and honor*" to come at the return of Christ as the result of our faith having been proved genuine. We generally assume (because so many preachers keep telling us this) that this phrase refers to the church's praising and glorifying Jesus when he returns. But it doesn't. Let me explain.

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Now, it is certainly the case that there are plenty of passages in the Bible that encourage us—even command us—to praise God and give him glory. That is, it is proper and right as God’s creation to personally, publicly, and verbally express praise to God, and to declare his absolute and utmost value—his “*glory*”—for who he is and what he has done. There are even a number of passages that describe this happening at the return of Christ or thereabouts. For instance, in Revelation 19, right before the description of the return of Jesus, in verses 5-7 we read:

5 Then a voice came from the throne, saying:

“Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both great and small!” 6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:

“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.”

So it’s easy to see why people could read 1 Peter 1:7 and think that this was simply another reference to the church being called to give God praise when Jesus returns to rule the earth.

But that doesn’t fit with what this sentence says, or with the context of the paragraph. And it doesn’t fit with the cultural background of the first century readers of this letter, who would have heard something very different. Let’s start with the latter point.

[Slide 15] *Honor-shame society*

If you lived in the first century in the Roman Empire, your culture and your world would have been dominated by a few things—all of them so pervasive as to be virtually inescapable: the multitude of idols and idol-worship (the sole exceptions being within the city of Jerusalem and inside Jewish homes), the unfathomable might of the Roman armies, the importance of your family ties and relations, and the ubiquitous awareness of the need to obtain and keep honor and avoid shame—what we refer to today as living in an “honor-shame society.”

From your birth, you would have grown up learning that the most important thing in your life was to bring honor to your family and to yourself. That lesson would have been drilled into you verbally, repeatedly. It would have been reinforced with punishments for failure, punishments that could be quite severe. Everywhere you went, everyone you knew would espouse the same belief, so not only your immediate family taught you this lesson, but everyone in your culture. You would grow up with this understanding about the need to seek for honor and

to avoid shame as an assumption about what was normal in life, and it would be unthinkable to think any other way. Quite literally! You could not imagine living in a world where obtaining honor for your family and for yourself was not the primary value. Nor could you imagine a world where being shamed was a matter of indifference.

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So when you took the extraordinarily difficult step of pledging your allegiance to the crucified Jewish Messiah and committing to becoming one of his followers, you immediately faced a personal crisis. Everything that you had known to be true was now turned upside down; your world was shattered, and you had to find an entirely new way to live. You were convinced that this Jesus was the Son of God. But you still thought through the same paradigms that had been ingrained in you since birth. Hence the crisis.

After your conversion to faith in Christ, most of your family and your neighbors, the people whom you knew best, were now saying to you that you had done the worst possible thing—you had brought shame to your family and to yourself. You were associating with people who were not your family. You had abandoned the gods who had protected your family for generations. You were identifying with a known criminal, a crucified Jew who had rebelled against Caesar. And now you were consorting with his followers who were rabble-rousers and troublemakers.

The social ramifications of your decision to convert were huge. All of your social relationships, your business relationships, your friendships, your connection to your *patron* and to the complex network of relationships that governed how literally everything in your life worked—all that was thrown into chaos. You were suffering as a result. And your family was feeling the pressure to bring you back into the fold, to stop this nonsense, which means that they are pressuring you even more because they are now being shamed by the wider community. So all of the weapons have been brought out—and they are all weapons of shame, aimed at you and the others who have joined you in this new faith, all focused on making you feel the shame of the entire community for what you have done, dishonoring your family and bringing shame upon them and yourself.

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So Peter writes to these new believers, these Gentiles newly won to the faith. He knows what they are going through—he went through the same thing when he began following Jesus. He reminds them that these trials are just temporary, and that they have a purpose. They are helping to demonstrate the

reality and the value of their faith. And their faith has something attached at the end of it, like a fish on the end of a line. It has a prize, if you will. There is an inheritance that is eternal, and undefiled, and unfading, that is reserved for them in heaven. That inheritance is theirs so long as they hold onto their faith and do not throw it away to return to the useless worship of unreal idols.

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But wait, there's more!! Not only is there an inheritance—this hope of future good we call salvation. Peter says that when Jesus returns, you're going to have something else happen. Your faith will have been proven to be genuine—with the result that *you will receive praise and glory and honor!* The whole point Peter is making is that these tests are designed to prove that their faith is real so that they can be properly assessed and properly valued. Peter is pointing out that the result of their faith will be—their vindication!

Peter says to these harassed believers: *“You will be vindicated by God himself. And all of those people who have wrongfully accused you and threatened you and berated you; all of those who have judged you as foolish and traitorous to your family and shameful—all of those people will be the ones who are shown to be foolish and traitorous and shameful. But you will be praised. You will be honored. You will be glorious. For you will be honored by God, given honor and praise from God—for your faith. For holding onto your faith. For remaining true to Jesus Christ when everyone around you said to come back to the family, come back to our gods, come back to the way life used to be. You and your faith will receive the ultimate seal of approval from God; demonstrated to be genuine, of utmost value, and worthy of being praised and honored by all people.”*

Peter is appealing to their natural desire to seek for honor in order to demonstrate where they can find true honor, lasting praise, eternal glory.

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Peter's not the only one in the New Testament to say this, by the way. Listen to the apostle Paul:

5 Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait until the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God. (1 Corinthians 4:5)

11 With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted

by faith. 12 We pray this so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Thessalonians 1:11-12)

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6 God “will repay each person according to what they have done.” 7 To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. 8 But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. 9 There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; 10 but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. 11 For God does not show favoritism. (Romans 2:6-11)

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This is why Peter tells these churches that they ought to rejoice—because what they have known and believed all of their life is actually correct. Peter understands that it is right to seek honor and glory and praise. It is proper to seek to avoid shame. But you have to be measuring things correctly. You have to use the measuring rod of the kingdom of God to get an accurate measurement. And the world’s ideas about what is shameful—believing in Christ, denying other gods, not giving in to your family’s pressure to conform to cultural expectations—those are actually *not* shameful at all, but honorable. And God himself will award the honors when Jesus returns. “*So rejoice!*” he says. Your faith in Jesus is producing a weight of glory that is unmatched by anything that this world has to offer. The exercise of your faith is storing up for you praise and honor from God that is just waiting to be poured out upon you when Jesus returns. And all of those who mocked you, who despised you, who accused you falsely—they will all be forced to acknowledge that your faith was the genuine article, while theirs was counterfeit. And they will have to listen as God praises your steadfastness of faith to all of creation, and presents you as glorious, someone to be honored in his presence before them, as they stand shame-faced.

There’s glory coming to you, Peter says. You may be suffering now—but it’s just a test. The test will show the value of your faith. Your faith will bring you an inheritance, and with it, praise from God. There’s glory on the other side. That’s a promise from God, something you may confidently expect in the future—the hope of glory.

[Slide 22]

Transition to communion

[Worship team, if you would begin making your way to the platform . . .]

***We are about to take communion, the reminder Jesus gave us as a way to affirm our faith in him. If you have a piece of bread and some grape juice, or something that can stand in for them, go ahead and get them now, and set them aside for a moment. The worship team is going to lead us in a hymn. Let me encourage you to sing along with us, and to turn that hymn into a prayer that you can use to reaffirm your faith in Christ, or to make your confession of faith for the first time. And the promise of God is this: if you sincerely repent of your sins and invite Jesus to be your Lord; if you confess that he is the Son of God who died in your place, to pay the price for your sins, then he will come in to your heart and live in you through his Spirit. You'll be born again. That little bit of faith that you hold onto will grow and will bring you glory when you stand before God. So use this song to make your prayer to God. After we're done singing, we'll finish by taking the elements together.

[END]