April 11/12, 2020

This Changes Everything

Easter Sunday

1 Peter 1:3-9

Pastor Josh Luse

What a different Easter, huh? It's not what we'd planned, and we've had to replan and change. And, man, over the last couple of weeks, I'm sure your life has looked the same as you've tried to calculate and change and mold and adapt to all these different situations that are coming at you. But I wonder, what is it that you have as your hope through this time? Is it that maybe at some point, you'll get your health back? Or that you'll keep your health through this whole thing? Or is it that, at some point, maybe you get your job back or you get a job or that you keep your job through this whole thing, or that your finances will get back on track or that, at some point, your kids will go back to school? I'm not sure what it is. There are a million things you could put on that list, but I want to ask you another question. What happens if that doesn't happen? What happens if the thing that you're hoping for and that you're planning for doesn't happen? What then? See, as humans, we are all wired for a need for hope. That's what we want to dig into today. So if you have your Bible, turn to 1Peter, Chapter 1. We're going to start in verse 3:

> **Blessed be 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 through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to *obtain* an inheritance, *which* is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.** (*NASB 1 Peter 1:3-9)

Now the first thing you might notice as you're reading through that, if you're in the NASB like I am, is that there are only two periods found in all six of those verses. Other translations will break that up much more, but actually in the original Greek, that is one long run-on sentence. And if you're a grammar teacher right now, it's driving you crazy because it's reminding you of me back in high school. Who am I kidding? Me still now—my grammar and my spelling are horrible. But for Paul, this is a beautiful complex thought that continues to lead and lean on each other as it goes through it. So let's dig into this.

A little bit of what's happening right now. Jesus Christ has lived on the earth, this perfect life. And He's gone to the cross and He's died, and He's risen from the dead. And then He's met with people and He's talked with them. After they've seen Him—this living Jesus—then He ascends back into heaven. And now it's been twenty or thirty years since that time, and Peter is writing to a group of Christians. Now, the news about what had happened to Jesus continued to spread all over after that, and you can imagine why. This is a big deal! But as it spread, it was not like life was easy for these new converts that continued to follow Jesus' ways and trust in Him and what He had done on the

cross. In fact life was pretty hard. And the rest of Peter starts to talk us through what this looks like for them. And so he's writing to a group of Christians in Asia Minor, or if you're looking at a modern map now, this would be Turkey, by the Black Sea. And there's these groups of Christians that are following Jesus and are facing all this hardship. Throughout the letter, it starts to tell us the different things that they're facing. In chapter two it tells us that they're being abused by their bosses. In chapter three it goes on to tell us they're being threatened by spouses. In chapter four, the next chapter, it goes on to tell us that they have all these skeptics that are ridiculing them, and even in verses 12 through 18, it tells them that they could possibly be facing some violence and stronger persecution. And so how does Peter reply to them?

He picks up his pen, and goes to verse three, and he says, "**Blessed be** (or praise be) **the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ**." Now, what's the deal here? Was Peter not watching the news? Did he not understand what was happening to these people? How is he calling them to praise God in the midst of this? What he was actually doing is he was trying to get them to raise their head off of the perspective and the situation that was happening, on to a broader and bigger perspective.

It kind of reminds me of a story about when I'd taken my kids to this life-size maze. This thing was massive and, if you've been to some of these, like corn mazes, or things where you get in, and you start to try and navigate around what you can't see. Well this thing had these huge walls, so once you got in, all you could see were different directions you could take. They went all the way to the floor and above your head, and so we were trying to navigate, but you could get stuck in this thing for hours! But as we weaved around, we would find these different points, and we'd come back to the same spot, or we would go and run into a dead end again. But in the middle, as we got closer to the middle of this maze, we saw rising up above it was this tower, stationed in the very center of this maze. And so I got over to the tower and there were steps that you could climb up, and as you start to climb up onto this ledge on the tower, you gained a whole different perspective. You would come out of the midst of this maze, and now you could see where it led—and it changed everything!

And Peter is trying to tell them, "Hey, I'm not calling you to praise *because* of your circumstances, but I'm calling you to praise *in the midst* of your circumstances. He's not belittling the pain and the difficulty that they're experiencing. But he's calling them to celebrate because of something. What is that? He goes on in verse 3 to tell us, …**who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.**

Now he starts dropping in all these words that we have to spend a little time to define, because the first one that may stand out to you, as you read through this verse, is this word **born again.** It's kind of one of those words that's been hijacked a little bit since Peter's written it, and all these images may come to your mind—maybe of these Christians that are picketing or these preachers that are yelling, or maybe political views, or whatever it is—but it's not this flavor of Christianity. In fact, what he's referring to is this whole new life that's been found because of what Jesus has done. And for sure, he's thinking back to the story of Jesus talking with this Pharisee, Nicodemus, where Jesus tells him that he must be **born again**, and Nicodemus is like, "How is this possible? What do you mean? Like I'm a little old to go back into my mother's womb." But Jesus wasn't talking about a physical birth; He was talking about a spiritual birth, and it literally means a *rebirth*, or a *new birth*, or we could say, a *second birth*. And this, for these believers, was incredible. We see that when we look at the context of this. We are born again **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.** Jesus is now alive, and because of that, you can join Him in new life, in spiritual life in this rebirth. I mean just think about it for a second. Have you ever seen somebody come back from the dead? I can admit I haven't. And if I had, it would probably freak me out. And so for these disciples and these believers,

they've seen Jesus do incredible things. But Jesus has always been performing. There's a power working through Him that performed these amazing things. And yet now, they just saw Him come back from the dead on His own, and this changed everything for them. They started to look at the whole world from a whole new perspective. They started to change the way they thought and the way they lived. They actually started to even gather differently. It was at this point that they started gathering on Sundays rather than Saturdays to study and to worship and to be together. This changed their routines in the week. This changed who they viewed themselves to be in their identity. This changed everything for them. This *new birth* was now a new way to live. So when he tells us that we were born again—it's this new way to live.

He tells us that it happens because of **mercy**. That's another word that we've got to define because you're never going to be able to explode in the praise that he talks about in the beginning of verse 3, unless you understand mercy. And mercy is "*God not giving you what you deserve"*. This is one way that it's put in Scripture. Romans 3, verses 10 and 11 says:

> **There is none righteous, not even one; there is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God."**

What this verse is telling us is that we all deserve judgment. We long for justice. We talked about that; when we're wronged, we want justice. We want the person who has wronged us to be judged. But when *we* have done the wrong, we don't want judgment; we want mercy. What this verse is telling us is that none of us can be good enough to cover for the stuff that we've done. In fact, the Bible tells us that we are *dead in our sins*. There's nothing that we can do. You can put nice clothes on a corpse, but it's still dead. What this verse is telling us is that we *deserve judgment*. But Ephesians 2, verses 4 and 5 say:

> **But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved).**

What this means is that God offers us *everything that Jesus deserves*. And he puts on Jesus, *everything that we deserve*. Jesus took the judgment that we were due. It's an incredible thing! And this, then, leads us to **hope**. But this is another word we have to look at in this passage because when we think of hope, we talk about it like a chance, or like wishful thinking, like, "I hope it doesn't rain today," or, "I hope we win the game." But when Peter is using the word hope, he's not thinking of it in those terms at all. In fact what he means here and what the words that he uses mean, is that it's a 100% guarantee. There's no chance that this will not happen. He's saying it is a sure thing. And this hope isn't just something that he lists as hope; he actually lists it as a **living hope**. Why would you do that? Well, what's the opposite of a living hope? Oh, it's a dead hope; it's a false hope. And what we find is that what we put our hope in, impacts how we live, and who we view ourselves to be, and how we think. It changes everything.

You don't believe me? Check this out. I found this article. It's called *The Diet of Defeat*: *Why Football Fans Mourn With High-Fat Food*. The article went on to say there was a direct link to how football fans tended to eat the day after the game, based on a win or a loss. These researchers actually had people watch a game, and then set food out and recorded it. The results showed that after a loss, fans' consumption of saturated fat went up 16%. And then after a win, their consumption of saturated fat decreased by 9%. It actually went on to say in football crazy cities, that fans ate 28% more saturated fat after a loss. Now, I know this probably doesn't apply to us in Lincoln or in Nebraska as a football

crazy city!? But they, the researchers, also went on to do some other experiments and they found a solution. They said that even if you're rooting for a perennial loser, there is a solution. If you're concerned about healthy eating, they went on to explain that after a defeat, write down what is really important to you in life. They actually had people do this, and it changed their eating habits. Now I share this article with this information with you for a couple of reasons. For one, it might explain some of the weight loss gained over the past couple seasons, right? But for another, it really demonstrates what happens when we put our hope in a false hope, in a dead hope—something that can't satisfy. Now, there's nothing wrong with football, I love football. But it can't be my ultimate hope. And if and when it fails me, and it will, then I'll just try to find another hope. And it could be food or it could be shopping or it could be any other millions of kind of things that we could put on the list. There is only one **living hope** that ultimately will satisfy. C.S. Lewis says it this way.

> "*If I find in myself a desire with which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy, but were only to arouse it to suggest the real thing.*[1]"

He's saying that these hopes are to awaken our realization for the ultimate hope. They're to lead us to realize none of them can fulfill the desire that we have within us and the need. That can only be met through Jesus, who is our **living hope**. Peter goes on to write about it another way in verse 4:

> **…to *obtain* an inheritance, *which* is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away,**

He's using this financial metaphor, this **inheritance**, this money in the bank, something that cannot be touched by any circumstance or person or anything. It's not going to fade; it's not going devalue; it's not going to spoil. In fact, he says, in verse 4:

> (It's) **…reserved in heaven for you,** (or you could say kept in heaven for you) **who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.**

Now what he's not saying here is just to wait it out—hunker down. At some point down the road, you're going to get to heaven and things will be okay. No, he's speaking of heaven in terms of that is the place where God is protecting it; it is *safe*. So your future hope is secure, and that can change the way you live now. For sure you'll experience this realization, like in verse 7, when he says **…at the revelation of Jesus**, or when Jesus comes back to take the believers with Him, and to judge the world, when we're going to experience the fullness of our salvation. But the inheritance that we have is given so that we can walk through with faith and surety everything we experience in this life, and actually view it with a different perspective. That's why he goes on in verse 6 to say:

> **In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials**,

I don't think this translation does the best because it gives this leading that you may not face trials. But Jesus promised. He said, "In this world you will have trouble, but take heart. I have overcome the world." So it's not a question of *if* we will experience difficulty in this life—we will—but it's what

[1] Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. Geoffrey Bles (UK), MacMillan Publishers, HarperCollins Publishers US, 1952.

we do with the difficulty. How in the world is it possible to greatly rejoice in the midst of suffering unless somehow I see a value in that—what that suffering can produce? It's actually really interesting. There was this Jewish psychiatrist; his name is Viktor Frankl, and he lived during the Holocaust. He actually ended up in the concentration camp in Dachau and survived to come out of it. He wrote several books after it. Since he was this young psychiatrist while he was there, at night, after all the work, he would meet with the other prisoners and take notes and work with them. And what was so fascinating to him he said, "What impacted people the most is that over a lifetime, usually the hopes that they hope in, are lost at some point, and they deal with them in different ways. But in this short amount of time, during the Holocaust, all the normal things that people lost, were all massively lost at once. He said, "If you think about it, at some point, if you live long enough, you'll lose your health. It's going to decline at some point. And at some point, if you live long enough, you will experience a loss in your family. At some point, if you live long enough, you'll have a loss in your profession or in your work, or in your social status. All of these things will not last forever; they're going to fail us at some point." But what he experienced was, all these things failed these people at once, and how they responded was so fascinating to him. He said, "There were some people that were the kindest, nicest people, but when this happened, they became so brutal. They started looking out only for themselves at the expense of the others around them." He said, "Other people tried to deal with this by just doing whatever they could to become numb to the whole situation—try and make it just all lull away, and lull life away." He said, "The third people tried to just live in this fantasy world, that once this was done, things would all go back to normal, and they'd get their jobs back, families back, or all these different pieces." He actually told one story of a guy that was sure that the war would end on a certain date and as that date came and went, the day after, he got a fever, and with a loss of hope, died within days. How people responded depended on the hope that they were holding on to. What he went on to note was that the people that were able to rise above the situation, were able to do it because they found a hope that was a bigger perspective—something that no circumstance or no captor could touch. That's what Peter's talking about through this and he goes on to say in verse 7:

> **…so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ,**

Peter uses this picture of this metalworker that's going through this refining process, and he takes this piece of gold… (You know, it has so much hope and value for us, even this gold (or money) won't last; that can't be our ultimate hope), but this metal worker takes this gold and he, under intense pressure and heat, melts it down. And as he does that, all of the impurities are exposed and rise to the surface. And then that metal worker can come and draw out those impurities and have a pure metal. Peter says that suffering can do the same thing in our lives. Did you know that with this Coronavirus—the health concerns, the financial concerns—that none of these are the source of your anxiety? They're not! They're merely a situation that is exposing the true hope that you're leaning on. And they're exposing the authenticity of that hope. Anxiety is only meant to be this warning sign to show you that the thing you're hoping in can't cut it, because there's only one ultimate hope. So I wonder what you've been experiencing over the last couple of weeks. What's come to the surface through this hardship? Because God wants to take this time and refine our lives and draw us to lean only and solely on Him, not to take hold of these things that will not last. He's given us an inheritance that will last. That's why Paul understood this and said in Philippians 4:

> **"Be anxious for nothing but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God and the peace of God which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."**

There's a reality of a perspective that's so much larger with what we have in Jesus, in the hope we have, that allows us not to be anxious—but to be sure. People of hope start to transform the world in incredible ways, especially in the midst of difficult situations. I could go on to share with you a story about Christians in the Greco-Roman Empire, early in the first century when the plague swept through, and how they even put their lives at risk to go care for people, and by 300 AD, how Christianity had spread all over that Roman Empire. But I think it would be even more encouraging to hear how hope- filled people here in Lincoln, who have a surety in Jesus, have been responding to give hope that they've found, and in a way that is making an impact.

(Video clip 1 – Jason Harms):
Hey, we went out to our neighbors to let them know that we care about them and did something a little bit different. We went out and got toilet paper rolls, snicker bars, and we wrote a letter, and we combined those things, and Eliza and Riley went out with me. And Eliza helped me drop off these little gifts for our neighbors, essentially saying, "Hey, we care about you. If you want to talk, come on over". Obviously toilet paper—just having fun in light of the fact that everybody wanted toilet paper—and a snickers bar because, "Hey, who doesn't like a snickers bar?" So we did that. We did it as a family; it was a lot of fun. "Did you have fun, Eliza?" "Yeah". "You want to do it again"? "All right". And that's what we did.

(Video clip 2 – Brad Brestel):
I've been able to connect with people during this time just by making some short phone calls. So one of the calls I made, I dialed a woman that I knew her name. She answered, and she said, "Oh my gosh, Brad, I was just getting ready to call you, or I wanted to call you." And so I said, "Why?" She said, "Well, you remember I interviewed you six years ago for your journey with cancer, and I'm now diagnosed with cancer, and so I just wanted to connect." I was able to talk with her and share a couple of the God experiences I had while going through cancer, that were meaningful to me. And then we were able to pray together. She let me know when I called, I just caught her going out the door. She was going for radiation treatment. And so I'm so glad that God's timing was good, and that she answered before she took off for that treatment.

(Video clip 3 – Jacob and Bryce Erb):
(Bryce) With all the fear in this pandemic, Jacob and I decided to hand out some cards to our neighbors to let them know that we're here for them, and to help in any way that we can. (Jacob) We handed them out, and later that day I received a phone call. And she said, "Hey, I'm so-and-so. I got your card. Are you serious?" And I was like, "What do you mean?" And she said, "Are you serious about helping?" And I thought, "Absolutely!" Turns out it was our 92- year-old neighbor, and she was cooped up in her house and needed to get some essential medication and had no one to get it for her. So we were able to go and get the medication for her, and it was just a cool way to continue to get connected with people in our neighborhood.

(Video clip 4 – John and Beth Matzke):
(Beth) We wanted to do something for our neighbors during this time of quarantine, and just to provide some hope, some encouragement to them. So we prayed about it and I decided I'd like to give them each a box of tea. So with that, we wrote a note and had our phone numbers on it, and just offered our services, that we were available if they needed anything during this

time. So I thought it would be fun to take those little packages and put them on each person's porch quietly and let them discover them for themselves. But (John) "I" kind of wanted to see my neighbors. I was tired, like most of us are, just being cooped up. So I have about a 15 foot long tree saw and I put a little plastic tub on the end and we put the tea in that, and then we went over and knocked on the doors, and I gave it to our neighbors from a safe distance. So, I just wanted to be an encouragement to them and keep building that relationship, and hopefully the Lord will use it in some way. But it was just fun to "see" our neighbors and have that time together and make a memory.

(Josh) People that share hope, in the midst of suffering, are transformed people. People that have peace in the midst of anxious times, are a new kind of human. People that are generous when the world is in chaos, have been able to see and understand a different perspective. That is why he goes on to say that **this inheritance in this living hope will result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.** It's telling us that we will never find the validation we need from the people here. We will never find the celebration or praise or honor that we're looking for through any of our accomplishments, or through any of these false hopes. They can only be found when Jesus, the One who created us and gave us breath says, "Well done," when the God that delights in us looks at us and gives us honor for the way that we have walked through difficult things and become more like Him. Peter had walked with Jesus. He had talked with Him. He had known Him and he heard His teaching, and he witnessed Him raising from the dead—and this changed everything for him! But these people that he's writing to now, they didn't have the opportunity to actually, physically, walk with Jesus and talk with Him. And yet, this understanding of the truth of the resurrection, and the salvation God provides, changed and transformed their lives. He goes on to speak of it in verse 8:

> **…and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the salvation of your souls.** (Vs. 8-9)

Now, Peter, he's going to go on to actually be executed at some point. He'll be hung upside down on a cross. And when this time comes, this hardship, he doesn't deny Christ. What's changed, what's transformed in his life? He's realized a bigger perspective of what life is all about. That's why this verse would ring true for him too. In Philippians 1, verse 21, it says, **"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain**." When life, and then ultimately death strips me of everything this world has to offer and yet gives me Jesus, *I want nothing more*.

Now, I don't know where you're at, but maybe in your living room right now you realize you've been chasing these false hopes. You've had dreams that have continued to let you down, and right now you're realizing for the first time that the God of this universe loves you so much that He sent His Son to die on the cross in your place—to take the punishments that we deserve, that you deserve, from the sin in your life, and in place, He offers you a new life with Him. If that's true, I encourage you right now, from your home, to just talk to God and tell Him, "God, I believe that I'm a sinner. I believe that You died and rose again for me. I accept You as my God and Savior. Jesus, I want to follow You as my ultimate living hope."

Today we celebrate Easter, and if Jesus' body is still in that tomb, then I might as well go and grab a shovel and start digging a hole in the backyard and take all of my hopes and dreams that I've been carrying in this life and bury them all too, because they are all dead as well. And all hope is dead.

But the tomb is empty! Jesus came and He lived a perfect life. He died and rose again three days later, fulfilling God's covenant to us, and offering us a living hope. And if we have a living hope, *This Changes Everything!*

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