

A LIVING HOPE

Once there was a little boy and his father driving down a country road on a beautiful spring afternoon.

Suddenly out of nowhere a bumblebee flew in the car window. Since the little boy was deathly allergic to bee stings he became petrified. His father quickly reached out, grabbed the bee, squeezed it in his hand, and then released it. But as soon as he let it go, the young son became frantic once again as it buzzed by the little boy.

The father sensed his son's terror. Once again he reached out his hand, but this time he pointed to this hand. There, stuck in his skin was the stinger of the bee. "You see this?" he asked. "You don't need to be afraid anymore. I've taken the sting for you."

This morning is Easter - Resurrection Sunday. It's the day we remember, more than any other day of the year, that in Christ God has told us, "You see this?" "You don't need to be afraid anymore. I've taken the sting of death for you."

If you've been with us at all the last few months, you'll know that we've been working our way steadily through the Gospel of Mark - going chapter by chapter to take some snapshots of Jesus' life and ministry as recorded by Mark.

The last several chapters of Mark all take place over the span of one week - as Jesus enters Jerusalem to celebrate something called the Passover festival, but is eventually betrayed and handed over to death at the hands of the religious elite and the Roman officials - something we've seen him predict three times over the last several weeks.

We know from historical sources that much of Mark's Gospel is actually compiled from Peter's own eyewitness accounts. So rather than skip over all the chapters between the Palm Sunday text we read last week and the Easter text for this morning, I thought it would be helpful to hear directly from the Peter about the good news offered us because of the empty tomb.

Would you turn with me this morning to 1 Peter 1:3-9. Peter is writing to believers in the early church as they are scattered all over the Roman empire, gathering in small but growing congregations despite the intense persecution they continued to face at the hands of the Empire and from some Jewish groups who were skeptical of this new sect of Jesus followers.

READING

1 Peter 1:³ 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.

Would you pray with me?

New Birth - Suffering Faith - Inexpressible Joy

These are the hallmarks of the Good News of Christ for Peter. But before we delve farther into what Peter is saying here - I want to take a moment to remind you of some context. Our culture is so individualistic that sometimes we can come to texts like this and by default read it as if it's talking specifically to us as individuals.

This isn't wrong, but it's just not the WHOLE truth. So I want to widen our gaze to help us remember just how GOOD this GOOD NEWS is.

To do that, I want to walk us through a simple illustration we call the 4 Chapter Gospel. (You've got a handy little bookmark included in your bulletin with a summary and some other helpful scriptures, and there will also be some aids up here on the screens behind me).

We begin with Chapter One, Creation:

Genesis 1:³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good...

The beginning of this grand narrative of God and humanity started with His creative work in making the heavens, the earth - land and sea - flora and fauna to fill it all - and finally as his crowning jewel, God made humanity, male and female, to bear the image of the Lord and tend all of creation as representatives of God.

And the Lord looked at all that he'd made with pleasure. It was real good.

But it didn't last long. That's where chapter 2 comes in - The Fall.

The tragedy of the Fall is not just that God is holy and we aren't - it's that God *MADE US* in His image to be in beautiful, intimate relationship with Him and to work as stewards of His good creation. As part of that deal, God gave us free will, so that we could choose to freely love Him and make choices for good in the world.

But given that choice, humanity has continually chosen to try and go it alone. It started in the garden when Adam and Eve were duped into the lie that they'd be better off trying to be like

God themselves rather than to be with God. In doing so, humanity began the constant cycle of rejecting God and bringing more death and brokenness into the world because we loved ourselves more than we loved God and others.

The consequences of our sin are evident all throughout scripture, but there's a description that stands out to me from Genesis chapter 6:

Genesis 6:⁵ The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled.

The Lord *regretted* that He made us. What a profound shift, to go from looking over all that He'd made and smiling over His crowning jewel to being deeply troubled by what we'd become.

But because of His deep love for us - we did not get what we deserved. The entire rest of our story is the journey of God choosing NOT to give us what we deserve, and instead giving us life.

Chapter 3 - Redemption.

In the midst of that deep heartbreak - God called out a people for Himself starting with a man named Abraham. He made a special covenant with Abraham's descendants, who became a nation called Israel. God chose them specifically to be a people who would stand as witnesses of His love and glory to the rest of the world - in much the same way that we were supposed to live to begin with.

Israel didn't always get things right. In fact, they failed quite frequently and kept getting tripped up by the same old sinful, destructive habits that we all do.

And so God said He'd make a new covenant, and this time it would be sealed with His own blood.

Romans 5:⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

God came down in human form in the person of Jesus - fully divine and fully human - to heal, and teach, and cast out demonic influences, and proclaim that God's Kingdom is finally arriving to overcome all this brokenness around us.

And we didn't believe it. So we killed him for it. He knew we would. Jesus had complete foreknowledge that coming as He did would result in our bitter betrayal. But He did it anyway so that as we nailed Him to a tree, He could say "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Killing the Son of God should have been the final straw to sentence us to death forever - but His word of peace spoken for us dropped all the charges. And we were redeemed.

There is no longer any reason for us to live under the power of sin. There is nothing that separates us from the love of God. But that's not all...

Chapter 4 is Restoration.

You see, not only have the charges been dropped, but in Christ God is restoring His creation - us, the earth, the trees, the sky, the seas, and all the heavens with it - to remake it into something better than we can even imagine.

Christ's redeeming work was the inauguration of the Kingdom - but it's yet to come in fullness. We live in the "Already but Not Yet" as God's Holy Spirit is renewing His people and His creation even as Christ is preparing a place to us to dwell with Him when all is made anew.

Romans 8:¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed.
²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

One Gospel in Four Chapters: Creation - Fall - Redemption - Restoration.

GOD CREATES IT - WE DEGRADE IT - HE FORGAVE IT - AND HE WILL REMAKE IT.

I'm preaching here already, but we haven't even gotten into the text from 1 Peter. I've got a few specific thoughts I want to share with you about what Peter has to say, and I'll try to make it brief, cause I know folks have plans with family and whatnot today.

The First is This: **I. GOD IS MAKING ALL THINGS NEW (3).**

This is what Peter is talking about when he says we've been given a new birth into a living hope through Christ's resurrection. He's not just saying that we get a fresh start and that some glad morning we'll get to leave this all behind.

He's saying that Jesus' resurrection means the victory over sin and death has been WON, and Jesus' resurrection is the firstfruits of a day coming when EVERYTHING will be made anew. NOT done away with, but recreated into something wholly new and beautiful.

GOD IS MAKING ALL THINGS NEW. All Things.

This salvation we've received - it's not just a personal, inner spirituality thing - it's a radical reorientation for the entire created Cosmos. There IS a work that is done in our hearts as individuals that cleanses and restores us. But that same Holy Spirit power at work in each of us as individuals is at work restoring all created things.

In that passage from Romans, the Apostle Paul goes on to say that it's like creation groans like it's in process of giving birth. It's as if everything we're experiencing right now in this life is just the gestational period for the rest of eternity.

If you've ever seen the process of childbirth - it's brutal - but there's life at the other side.

In some profound and mysterious way we're to understand that all of this life that we're experiencing now is like the womb - but one day all of creation will experience New Birth.

My daughter (at least, the doctor's tell us it's a girl, I haven't met her yet) is still growing and developing in my wife's womb. My son tries to say hi to her sometimes - we're trying to teach him gentle touch. But I can only imagine how she perceives his prodding around mom's belly and his cooing and calling at her. Her perception of this outside world is limited, but someday she'll experience it in full.

We only get a few brief pictures of what life in the New Heavens and New Earth are going to look like with Jesus. What we do know is that all the pain, suffering, sin and brokenness of this life will be stripped away, and we'll be with our Lord face-to-face.

II. SUFFERING MAGNIFIES FAITH (4-7)

Peter describes this new life with Christ as a new birth, and as an inheritance that will never spoil. But that life is not without trials in the present. In fact, he says that for a little while in this life we may experience all kinds of grief and trials - and this can actually be good.

Paradoxically, he claims that this faith inheritance is somehow built up as we endure through suffering and persecution. How so? He says that like gold that is tested and refined by fire, our faith is refined through trials and results in greater glory.

SUFFERING MAGNIFIES FAITH.

When refining precious metals like gold, you heat it up to high temperatures until it's molten hot and let impurities rise to the surface to be skimmed off the top and separated out.

This isn't the kind of testing that is looking for a grade that will make us good enough. It's not as if God is sending suffering our way to check up on us to make sure we have enough faith. No, Peter says that the trials we face now are useful for 2 reasons:

1. They help to identify the remnants of sin in our hearts so that we can invite the Holy Spirit to cleanse us further.
2. AND as others see how we respond and are refined through trial further into Christ's image, it gives glory to God and points them to a different way of life.

This truth only makes sense in light of our ultimate hope - that Christ will return to make all things new. We're not just waiting to die so we can go to heaven. We're waiting for New Creation. What we do in this life matters.

How we endure through trial matters. It forms us, shapes us, and prepares us for what is to come AND it shines as a light for others to see as well.

SUFFERING MAGNIFIES OUR FAITH AND POINTS THE WAY TO JESUS.

III. FAITH REMAKES US IN JOY (8-9)

Finally, Peter says that this hope and love we have through faith fills us with inexpressible joy.

FAITH REMAKES US IN JOY.

We're given a hope that, while we cannot see it in fullness, it bursts into our lives in such real and tangible ways that we can't help but sing in joy, because our soul has been saved.

That term can be confusing, because we have a tendency to parse apart our soul, body, and mind - the word for *soul* here in the Greek is *psuche* - which is where we get the term "psyche" and "psychology."

This usually makes us think of our mind or personality, distinct from our bodies. But first century Hebrews like Peter had no separate categories for these things. For him the term *psuche* just refers to that animating force that makes life possible.

In Hebrew thought, mind-soul-body are all one holistic package - you can't have one without the other. So when Peter is saying that our souls - *psuche* - are saved - he's saying that we've been saved from death because resurrection lies in our future. We will be resurrected into all new bodies, with our soul and mind being remade as well.

But what's incredible is that it's in the present tense. We are receiving even now the end result of our faith - the salvation of our very being.

FAITH working itself out in the midst of our harried and broken lives, exposes the lies of sin and shame and REMAKES US IN radiant JOY.

Our faith and trust in Christ and all He has done, is doing, and will do creates in us this incredible joy and peace that remakes our very being.

My parents were divorced when I was pretty young. I won't get into the circumstances of all that, because it's their story to tell - not mine. But what I will say is that I was really a pretty angry kid.

I didn't know how to express my hurt and my emotions, so for a long time I took it out on the football field - which worked then, because it was little league football and all the other kids were my size too.

I used to joke that I stopped playing football because all the other kids got bigger and I didn't. The truth is that I gave my life to Jesus when I was around 10, and in the years following I gradually started learning more and more about exactly what grace meant in my life. And slowly that anger started to fade. I didn't really care about hitting people anymore or trying to prove myself to anyone. I was just happy.

And that same process happens over and over in my life. There are still places of brokenness and hurt in my life that I discover and bring to Jesus for healing - and there's more and more joy with every day.

Jesus saved us through the cross and resurrection. That was a one-time event that covers all of eternity. But through faith outworking in our life, Jesus continues to save us every day. And some glad morning, Jesus will return to bring salvation in fullness.

We **are** saved. We **are being** saved. And we **will be** saved.

Do you accept that reality in your life? Or will you continue to seek your own way?

CONCLUSION

I heard a Pastor named Francis Chan talking about preaching on Easter Sundays and always feeling this need to make a convincing argument for any skeptics. But then he reflected on how Jesus taught, and realized that Jesus never begged anyone to believe what He was saying. He just said - "those with ears to hear, let them hear."

You might have questions and doubts, and that's OK - Feel free to ask myself or a Christian friend if there's something standing between you and believing in Jesus. But Chan's question was, if you had that issue resolved - would you believe, or would you just look for another objection? Some of us are just looking for any excuse to reject Jesus because we don't want to confront our junk.

So I'm going to leave us this morning with the words of the Apostle Paul from 1 Cor 15

1 Corinthians 15:³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time...

He. Is. Risen. He is our Living Hope. He is making All Things New. He is coming again.

Those with ears to hear, let them hear.