

Calum Cameron: 1 Peter 1 - A Living Hope

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Preacher: Guest Preacher

[0 : 0 0] Well, we're just going to look for a short wee while now at these words we read in the letter of 1 Peter, 1 Peter chapter 1. So if you have a Bible you may want to have it open there but we should hopefully have the words on the screen as well as we go. So 1 Peter is a letter that was written by the apostle Peter to a group of Christians scattered across this area that we have here which is mostly now modern-day Turkey. These places that Peter refers to in the opening verses Asia, Bithynia, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, we see they're all mostly in what is now modern-day Turkey. And the world that these Christians lived in was a world that desperately needed hope. Life at the time was fragile, persecution was becoming rife and the future was in many ways uncertain. And today we live in a world that needs hope. We live in a world that has progressed and moved forward in so many different ways but it's a world that still needs hope. And that's how Peter begins this letter. He begins by writing about this great living hope that we have in Christ. And I want us to look at this hope under three short points. The first is that the hope, Christian hope, the living hope is something that is rooted in the past. Secondly, the Christian hope looks forward to a certain secure future. And then thirdly, the Christian hope is a present reality. So we're going to look back at what our hope is rooted in. We're going to look forward to what our hope points us to. And then thirdly, we're going to look at what hope means for us today in the present. So first of all, living hope is rooted in the past. Now that might seem like a strange thing to begin with because for a lot of people hope is about forgetting the past. Hope is about moving forward. Hope is about looking just at the future and leaving the past behind. But the first thing that Peter does here in this letter when he's writing about hope is to look back. He says he has caused us to be born again to this living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Now a lot of people today will say that the resurrection of Jesus, it doesn't really matter whether it happened as a historical event. Even people in some churches today will say that resurrection is just picture language for experiencing Jesus in your heart. People say that people just don't come back from the dead. Resurrection, it doesn't happen. But right at the beginning of this letter, Peter is making it so clear that the resurrection is instrumental to our hope. It is the means by which we have hope. So clearly the resurrection of Christ as a historical event, as something that actually happened in our world is hugely important.

When you look at Peter's sermon at Pentecost in the Book of Acts, he says there, God raised Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of it. So the fact that Jesus actually died and Jesus actually came back from the dead was incredibly important to the early church.

And it should be important for us today. Peter writes here that Jesus' resurrection is instrumental in our living hope. So our hope is a real living, confident hope in a real living Jesus.

But as a hope that's not rooted merely in the resurrection, it's a hope that is planted firmly and deeply in the cross. Further on in the letter, Peter writes in verse 18 that we have been ransomed, we have been set free, we were held captive by sin but we have been released. And how has that happened? Well he writes in chapter 2 verse 24 that Christ himself bore our sins. He did that in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. So the cross also is incredibly important to Peter. It's what makes hope even possible in the first place. So the cross makes our hope possible. The resurrection ensures our hope is living, that it's alive. So these two things together form the anchor, the kind of foundation of Christian hope. And just as we think about hope, I want to think just briefly about the man who is writing these words, Peter, the apostle, Jesus' friend, Jesus' follower. See when Jesus died on the cross, it would have seemed to Peter like the end of hope. It would have seemed like his hopes had been snatched away. This Jesus whom he had followed, whom he had put his trust in, whom he had put all of his hopes and expectations in, ended up nailed to a cross. He was killed by Roman soldiers. I'm sure we've all experienced the

feeling of having a hope snatched away from under us. I'm very much, you probably have gathered over the last six weeks, a fan of football. But over the last year, some of my friends have tried to get me into watching rugby. And I still have really not got much of a clue what's going on in a rugby game.

But I ended up watching the last World Cup. And if any of you have ever followed rugby, you'll know that Scotland came agonisingly close. I think it was in the quarterfinals, they were against Australia. And they were winning right up to the last minute. And Australia were awarded a controversial penalty. And Scotland were knocked out. And just as the nation was building its hopes, as things were looking like it was going to happen, it was snatched away. I think football, Scottish football fans on the other hand, maybe no better than to get our hopes up in the first place. But you can sympathise with this feeling of having a hope, having an expectation of something that's about to happen and having it snatched away from under you. But can you imagine how much worse Peter would have felt?

[6 : 20] This Jesus, this man he had placed all of his hopes in, all of his expectations in. Peter was the disciple who had said to Jesus, you are the Christ. You are the Son of the living God. Jesus, you are the Messiah who's been promised. See, Peter's hope was that Jesus would bring God's kingdom on earth. That Jesus would perhaps overthrow the Romans and restore Israel to a great nation. In his mind, Jesus wasn't supposed to die. He ended up nailed to a cross. And it would have seemed like Peter's hopes had died with him. But the Christian hope is absolutely centred on the fact that Jesus didn't stay dead. We know that some woman came to Peter one morning and told him that Jesus' tomb was empty. So Peter runs over there and he sees for himself and later Jesus appears to Peter alive and well. One author called Edmund Clowney wrote that at that moment, at the sight of his living

Lord, hope was reborn in Peter's heart. You see, the resurrection did so much more than just bring his friend back. It did so much more than just bring his teacher back. The resurrection is what crowned the victory of Christ over death. In a sermon at Pentecost in the Book of Acts, Peter declares there that the resurrection is what shows us that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ. See, Peter's living hope is in a living Jesus.

And the resurrection is central to our hope today, not just because Jesus lives, but because through him we share in that resurrection life. God has given us this new birth into this living hope. How? Through the resurrection of Christ from the dead. And I think that's in contrast. It's a different picture to what a lot of people think our faith is all about, to what people think Christians believe. A lot of people think that Christianity, religion is all about getting yourself to a certain level, about building yourself up to a certain point of morality where you're good enough for heaven. But Peter and the whole Bible, in fact, assures us that that's not the case. It's not about what we do for God. And it is important how we live. Peter makes that clear in this letter. He goes on to say, as children of obedience, be holy in all your conduct. Be holy. Why? Because the God who called you is holy. We were thinking about this a few Sunday evenings ago, looking at the doctrine of sanctification about how we change and how we become more holy. But that is placed in its proper context. Peter first reminds us that our hope is not dependent on what we do for God. It's not dependent on our ability to ever reach a certain standard.

Our hope, first and foremost, is grounded in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's not based on anything that we do or anything that we don't do. It's anchored firmly and deeply in God and in God's mercy. So first of all, our hope is rooted in the past. The ground is the foundation on which we have a living hope. Secondly, our hope points us forward to a secure and certain future. See, I think it's easy to throw words like hope around today without really thinking too much about what we mean. For a lot of people today, hope is a kind of abstract idea. It's a word that sounds nice. It's a word that sounds encouraging. But often people use it without really having too much substance behind it.

Well, God's words is telling us this morning that our hope has a wonderful substance. Our hope has an incredible content, a hope that is full of life, a hope that is full of love and peace, a hope for a future in eternity that is incredible, that is secure, that is imperishable, undefiled, unfading. It's an inheritance that's been kept for us in heaven.

[10 : 33] It's just phenomenal. And our world needs to hear this. Our world is a world that needs hope. I think we've been reminded of that even over the last month. It seems like hardly a week goes by without some kind of devastating headlines. We've seen the terrible things that have

happened in Manchester, the terror attacks in London. We've had even more recently the fire in Grenfell Tower. It seems that these things are happening on a regular basis.

Our world needs hope. Paul described his world, the ancient world, the world around him as a world that had no hope. He said, you are without God and without hope in this world.

And he lived in a world that in many ways was beautiful. It was wonderful. The Greek and Roman world was a world that had a phenomenal level of peace across the whole known world.

There was great architecture. There was great thinkers. There was great culture and music and all these things. But despite all of that, Paul says this is a world without hope. And today our world has moved forward in so many ways in terms of general living conditions, life expectancy, science, medicine, all these things. But we still need hope. You may have heard it said before that in the last century, I think, the wars, the world wars of the last century took more lives than all the wars in history. It's astonishing. So our world today is still in need of hope. And God's word tells us here in 1 Peter chapter 1 that we have a living hope. So I think as Christians, as God's people, we have to be able to show that hope to our world, to share that hope with those around us. The Bible teaches us that the hope of the gospel is that Jesus died to pay for our sins. He rose again. He's going to come back to defeat evil and bring us salvation. But it's not only that. The hope of the gospel is that one day we will live forever with Christ. We will live in a world that is not broken, a world that is not hurting. We will live in a world that doesn't have suffering, a world that doesn't have terrible headlines every week. Our hope ultimately is that Christ will return to make all things new. So Peter reminds us, first of all, that our hope is grounded in the past action of God. But here he's pointing forward to show us how it highlights to us what God will do in the future. In verse 4, Peter writes here about the substance of our hope, this inheritance that is imperishable, that won't defile, it won't fade. I think this incredible language of being given an inheritance, it just reminds us, first and foremost, that God brings us into his family. But an inheritance is for those who have been adopted into God's family. See, by the very nature of inheritance, it's not something you can ever hope to earn. It's not something you could ever work your way towards. An inheritance is something that is given to family. So what is that inheritance?

Well, when we go back through the Bible, we look at the big story, the promise of an inheritance, it's rooted in promises that God made to Abraham way back in Genesis. Promises as part of his plan to put the world to right, to fix our world. We go way back to the beginning to Genesis 3, we see that God created a good world, a world that doesn't have all this evil, that doesn't have all this chaos that we see today. And God created human beings, He created you and me to enjoy that world. But that world became tainted, it became imperfect through human sin, it became corrupt. And that's why we continue to see evil, we continue to see suffering. These things will not go away over time. But then we read throughout the Bible, the rest of it is God's plan to put things right, to fix that broken world, to recover what was lost in the fall, to redeem a people for himself, ultimately to restore things to the way they are meant to be. And that's something that began with Abraham, but it's something that spreads to us today. By faith, we are God's people. We are heirs, we are part of this great inheritance. Paul says this in Galatians chapter 3, he says, if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring. You are heirs according to this promise. Now what that means is that those promises God has made in the Bible are promises he makes to you and to me today, promises that he's going to fix this world, promises that he is going to give us life in eternity. Ultimately, that we will inherit a renewed, new heavens and a new earth, we'll receive new, resurrected bodies, we'll enjoy a restored, right relationship with God, a right relationship with other human beings, free from all of the influences of sin. This is our great, wonderful inheritance. And these are things that we begin to experience now, but ultimately we look to the future, to when Christ returns, when these things are fully realized. Peter goes on here to say that the resurrection has not just made our hope possible, he's not just made it something that might happen, he's made it secure. He writes in verse 4, it's been kept for you in heaven. That is a wonderful assurance. In the face of our own inconsistencies and failings, our inheritance is being kept secure for us. And not only that, Peter says that we are being guarded, we're being shielded by God's power through faith. I think again, it's a fantastic reminder that this is not something we're trying to work our way towards. We're not climbing the ladder of life so that we can somehow earn a place in heaven. It's something that is presently kept secure for us. So the Christian hope looks forward to a secure future, a wonderful future. Finally, this hope is a present reality. In other words, it's something that is real for us in the here and now. I think one of the dangers that when we think about the future, when

we think about what's coming ahead of us, what we sometimes call eschatology, is that we become so caught up in that, that we neglect the present. And for many Christians, [17:40] I think, life becomes about bunkering down against the world. It becomes about hiding away until the new creation. Sometimes you hear the accusation that we Christians are so heavily minded that we're no earthly good. And I think that's largely unfair, but I think there's an element of truth to it. I think sometimes we can become so caught up with what's ahead of us in the future that we don't really live in the present. Then we have to have the right balance. Our future hope reminds us that there's something incredible ahead of us, but we're called to live lives of hope now in the present, to show that hope, to live that hope to our world. And Peter goes on to illustrate this very clearly by talking about real life situations. He talks about things like suffering. He writes about how this living hope helps us to be joyful in the present. He says here in verse six, even in the midst of chaos, in the midst of suffering, you rejoice. In this hope you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you've been grieved by various trials. And it's interesting that it doesn't really come out so much in the English, but in the Greek that Peter used, he's writing in the present tense. He's saying, in this, you are rejoicing.

You are presently rejoicing. In the face of sometimes horrific suffering, in the face of horrendous trials and difficulties, Christians can rejoice. We were thinking at the prayer meeting a few weeks ago about Sam 30 and the fact that being a Christian does not give you a ticket to an easy life. Being a Christian does not make you immune to suffering. We will all experience pain, we'll all experience grief, regret, we'll all have to struggle with various things in life. But hope transforms for us how we face these things. Our hope radically changes how we view suffering, because our hope tells us that suffering is not part of God's ideal world. It tells us that there's more to life than this broken world. It tells us that ultimately suffering will not be part of our experience in eternity. Peter concludes the letter with this kind of thought in chapter five verse 10. He says, after you've suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ Jesus, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen and establish you. But not only does hope point us beyond suffering, it changes how we live in the midst of them. Peter writes here in chapter one that God works through suffering, that he works in suffering. Verse seven, it says there, the tested genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold, that perishes though it's tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ. So our hope is ultimately reminding us that God will make all things new. But it's also something that God has begun in the present, in the lives of his people, in his church. Not because we're wonderful, not because we're perfect, not because we've somehow done anything to earn that. Just think again about the language

Peter's using. We're given an inheritance not as hard workers, not as faithful disciples. We're not given an inheritance because we are loyal subjects in God's kingdom. We're given an inheritance as his children, as his sons, as his daughters. See, if your faith is in Christ today, you are given new birth into a living hope. You're given new birth into this great family of God. One of the most encouraging verses in the whole Bible I think is in 1 John chapter 3 verse 1. See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God, that we should be called sons and daughters of God. You see, human families can be wonderful, human families can be a source of real blessing and privilege, but human families can be broken. We all know from experience can be a source of pain. Human families can cause us regret and suffering. But following Jesus means you are part of a new family. Following Jesus means that you are brought into the family of God. It's wonderful that Peter just keeps using the present tense here. He says, though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtain the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. See, although there is so much for us to look forward to in the future as part of God's family, this wonderful inheritance that's been kept secure for us. Peter is saying here that today, today you believe in him, today you love him, today you rejoice in him with joy that's inexpressible. As we go on into this letter in the rest of chapter one, Peter says, therefore, because of this great hope that you have, since you have been born again into this new family, be holy, be obedient, watch out how you live. Verse 15 he says, since the one who called you is holy, be holy.

And those words should be a challenge to us as Christians. Would other people see our hope in the way we live? Would they see anything different in us when our family and friends and our colleagues and the neighbors around us who aren't Christians, who don't come to church? Would

they see any kind of hope in our lives? Would they see something different?

[24 : 01] We were thinking about this in the Philippines chapter two a few weeks ago in the evening, that when God is at work in you to sanctify you, to change you, it's to make you shine.

It says there, so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in a dark and broken world. Now, obviously, none of us have been made perfect. None of us have achieved that yet. None of us live as good a life as we would like to. But we should still be filled with a hope that radiates, that just is displayed clearly to all who see. We need to be aware that God has already begun in the present this work of transformation, this work of renewal in the lives of his people. So with an awareness of that and with an anticipation for the return of Christ, our lives should just be characterised by living hope. You might remember from a few weeks ago, we used the example of giving two different people the same job to do. So you give them both something mundane, like polishing shoes for a whole year, you do the same job 10 hours a day polishing shoes, and you tell the first person that at the end of the year, they might receive some money. They might get a reward. You don't know. You tell the second person that for definite they will receive a fortune, they'll receive £10 million. Will those two people go about the task in the same way? Will they do the job with the same integrity, with the same enthusiasm? Of course they won't. See the point is our view of the future has radical implications for how we live in the present.

The second person, the one who knows they're getting this fortune, has that awareness that they're doing this job and there's something phenomenal at the end of it. The first person has no such hope, no such confidence. There's just the potential that there might be something.

Surely that same principle should apply to how we live in this world. As Christians, we have this living hope, this wonderful confidence that God has something incredible waiting for us. That's what God's word is saying to us here. Our future hope comes into the present and changes how we live, how we view suffering, how we interact with our world, how we live in our day to day lives. Do you know this living hope this morning? Is it something that you know in your own heart? When you look at the future, what do you see?

If your faith and your trust are in Jesus, then this promise in 1 Peter is for you, this inheritance that will never perish, never spoil, never fade. It's kept in heaven for you. So Jesus gives us a living hope that is founded in his action, in the resurrection and the cross. He gives you a living hope that looks forward to a future that is so wonderful, so secure and kept and made possible for us through faith. And he gives us this living hope that will radically transform our lives today. Let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for the living hope you have given us in Jesus Christ. Father, we thank you for all that you've done for us through the death and resurrection of Jesus. We thank you that you've given us life, you've given us hope, you've given us forgiveness and peace. Father, we thank you so much for the inheritance that's waiting for us. Father, we thank you for what you've promised to your people, an inheritance that will never perish, never spoil, never fade. Lord, we long today for the day when suffering is no more. Lord, we long for the day when you return, when evil is vanquished once and for all. Lord, we long for the day when you will wipe away every tear from our eyes, when there will be no more death, no more mourning, no more crying or pain. Help us, Father, in this week to come to be a people who live lives of hope, who live lives of transformation. Lord, help us to shine as lights in this dark and broken world. We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen.