

“Life is Beautiful” 1 Peter 1:3-9

Introduction

- I have preached this passage from 1 Peter once before. In 1997 I traveled with a team of American pastors to Lviv, Ukraine for the purpose of training Ukrainian pastors. By the way, I wasn't doing the training; I was there in a support role. Near the end of our trip, on Saturday, April 12, our team was informed that we'd be preaching the following morning at various churches in the area. I assumed that meant just the pastors on our team. Wrong. They wanted me to preach as well.
- You've got to remember this is way before I had any experience preaching. Yes, I had led small group bible studies before but I had never preached to a congregation on a Sunday morning. Factor in that I had to speak through a translator—which is much harder than it looks, that I had no resources to use in my preparations, that I was being notified about 12 hours before all this was supposed to happen. Quoting from my journal, “I am a bit nervous about preaching tomorrow.”
- The other thing was the people I would be speaking to. Our destination was a little country church near the city of Chevronegrad, or the Red City, about 55 km north of Lviv. This church, as it was explained to me by my translator Stephan, was close to the Ukrainian-Polish border. As with all non-Orthodox Protestant churches, somehow they survived 50 years of communist rule. They were small in number; were talking 50 people tops. There were few if any men in the congregation over the age of 60; they had either been shipped off to fight the Nazis in World War 2 or died in one of the communist induced famines. Most of the congregation was made up of babushkas—these hunched over, elderly women with scarves on their heads and deep lines in their weathered faces. These women had seen more hardship and suffering and famine and persecution in one week of their lives than I will probably see in my entire life. And the question kept racing through my mind, “what in the world would am I going to say to them? I have nothing to say to them.”
- On the way to the church, as we were driving in Stephan's car, I kept reading and searching my bible and praying for something to say. What do I say? What do I say? What do I say? What would you say? And I came to 1 Peter 1. *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--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 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 your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and 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 goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.* “That's them,” I thought. These people don't need to be preached to, they need to be encouraged. I'll encourage them with words from 1 Peter.”

- I shared with them that morning. I spoke for maybe twenty minutes. And they kindly listened. I'm glad I shared what I did. I felt I was being obedient. But they were the ones doing the teaching. You could see it on their faces when they sang—*an inexpressible and glorious joy*, [verse 8](#). You could see it in their tears when they prayed. These people loved Jesus more than any people I have ever met. *Though you have not seen him, you love him*. Their faith was rich—they weren't just mouthing words, it meant everything to them; their worship was worth more than all the gold in the world. Their faith had been proved genuine by their *grief in all kinds of trials*; it had been *refined by fire* as Peter says in [verse 7](#).
- I talked to them about 1 Peter 1. But they showed me what that 1 Peter 1 looked like come to life. They were living breathing 1 Peter 1's. How do you survive 50 years of communism? You hope.

Big Idea

- **Cling to God's promises until you die**
- That's all these people had. Hope. As they worshiped you could see they had this confident expectation that God's promises would come about.¹ There was no hint of despair. Just this rock-solid confidence. Everything else in life had been stripped away. But like super sticky saran wrap they would not let go of God's promises. And it was beautiful. There was this beauty to their lives that I was just not used to seeing. It radiated from them. And I left their church that morning wondering if I might ever have the kind of faith that I had just witnessed.

Transition

The great news for us this Easter morning is that God wants to breathe into our lives this same kind of hope. In this section, verses 3-9 of 1 Peter chapter 1, there are...

Organizational Sentence

- **Three qualities of Ukrainian babushka-like biblical hope**

Transition

In [verses 4 and 5](#) Peter says this hope is sustained by faith. In [verses 6-9](#) he says this hope is nourished by trial but I want to spend time this morning focusing on the **first quality**. It's the quality most germane this Easter morning. Look at [verse 3](#). Peter says in verse 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*. Peter's point is that biblical hope, Ukrainian babushka-like hope, is established by the resurrection.

Main Point

- The fact that we have any hope at all in this life is only because of a great and infinite God who delights in showing mercy. *In his great mercy he has given us* Peter says. The resurrection establishes hope for the Christian and that hope comes about because God is a merciful God.

¹ *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, p. 305.

- You see, naturally speaking, if left to ourselves, and apart from God's mercy, all of us, every single one of us in this room are *by nature objects of wrath*.² It is impossible for us the way we are, without some kind of intervention, to be accepted by God. Our condition requires punishment. Not because God is some perverse bad cop in the sky who is out to get us but because our sin, the wrongness that overwhelms our day to day lives, is so great it requires his punishment. We are *by nature objects of wrath*. That is an absolutely terrifying thought, isn't it? It's bad enough to experience the wrath of another person but the wrath of the sovereign and holy creator of the universe—that is a kind of terrifying that is beyond words.
- But the Bible says in Romans 11:32 *God has bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all*. The testimony of the Bible is that God is a God of mercy. He doesn't want to punish—but he will be true to his character—he must justly deal with sin. And the reason Easter is so significant is because it is the direct intervention of God to overcome our natural condition and spare us from his wrath. God takes the punishment we rightfully deserve and instead he pours it out on Christ. Ephesians 2:4 *But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions--it is by grace you have been saved*. Titus 3:5 *he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy*. Or as Peter puts it in [verse 3](#) *in his great mercy God has given us new birth into a living hope*.
- The result of God's mercy is *new birth*. God's mercy leads to new spiritual life. But births of any kind, last I checked, are never accidental or spontaneous. They don't just happen. And your birth to new spiritual life is the same. Just a few verses later, [verse 23](#), Peter tells us how this new birth comes. It happens *through the living and enduring word of God*. Elsewhere in James 1:18 it says that God *chose to give us birth through the word of truth*. What this means is that the pages of Scripture present the story of salvation to us; God's Word tells us we are sinners in need of some intervention and it points us to Jesus and his death and resurrection as the focal point of that intervention. And his Word calls us to turn away from our life of sin and place our trust in Christ as the answer to our problem of sin.
- So many people are ignorant of their own condition—that they are in fact dead. During one of our afternoons sightseeing in Lviv a group of us wanted to go to an Orthodox service. We found one. And the church was packed for the evening service. Being tall I could see over the crowd in front of us and I realized that we were in fact at a funeral. I'm sure we looked so out of place. There's no speaking at an orthodox service so it was impossible to communicate with my friends who were completely clueless. There was a dead guy in the casket draped with flowers not twenty feet from us. But they couldn't see it. It took the whole twenty-five minute walk back to our hotel to convince them that we had just witnessed a funeral service.
- That's what we are like. Death is right there with us, not twenty feet from us, but within us. We are all funerals waiting to happen but we can't even see it. The Word of God shows us our true condition. It shows us that we need not be the walking dead. That we can have new life—new birth.
- And at that moment, when we finally internalize that Jesus' death was really our death, when we realize Jesus cursed means Jesus cursed for my sin, when we realize that *the punishment that brought us peace was upon him and that by his wounds we are healed* from our mortal

² Ephesians 2:3

wound of sin. It's at that point, when all our hope of right standing before God, is put in the person of Christ that's when new birth comes about. We are born new. Our spirits brought to life. New spiritual life. We are made alive to God. Have you done that yet? All it takes is for you to pray and ask God.

- If you have the as Peter says we are birthed into a *living hope*. Lots of people, lots of religious people, have hope in a lot of different things. And if you corner them and press them and ask them and what their hope for salvation and eternal life is, they'll tell you. But if what they tell you is in anything other than Christ crucified for sins, if their hope is in something other than in Christ alone it is a dead hope. Because the bible says *salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*³ Dead hopes don't survive tests and trial and persecution. Under the normal pressures of life, let alone severe and intense trials, dead hopes prove empty.
- Dead hope ultimately leads to statements like the one [Bart Ehrman](#) makes in his most recent book.⁴ Ehrman, with a pedigree of Moody Bible Institute, Wheaton College, Princeton Seminary, disciple of [Bruce Metzger](#) and now professor at the University of North Carolina, says this about his faith.
- “Eventually, though, I felt compelled to leave Christianity altogether. I did not go easily. On the contrary, I left kicking and screaming, wanting desperately to hold on to the faith I had known since childhood and had come to know intimately from my teenaged years onward. But I came to a point where I could no longer believe. It's a very long story, but the short version is this: I realized that I could no longer reconcile the claims of faith with the facts of life. In particular, I could no longer explain how there can be a good and all-powerful God actively involved with this world, given the state of things. For many people who inhabit this planet, life is a cesspool of misery and suffering. I came to a point where I simply could not believe that there is a good and kindly disposed Ruler who is in charge of it.
- The problem of suffering became for me the problem of faith. After many years of grappling with the problem, trying to explain it, thinking through the explanations that others have offered—some of them pat answers charming for their simplicity, others highly sophisticated and nuanced reflections of serious philosophers and theologians—after thinking about the alleged answers and continuing to wrestle with the problem, about nine or ten years ago I finally admitted defeat, came to realize that I could no longer believe in the God of my tradition, and acknowledged that I was an agnostic: I don't "know" if there is a God; but I think that if there is one, he certainly isn't the one proclaimed by the Judeo-Christian tradition, the one who is actively and powerfully involved in this world.”
- A living hope is one that is never extinguished by circumstances.⁵ A dead hope sees the evil of this world and despairs. And of the two, the Ukrainian babushka who has lived through more evil than Professor Ehrman will ever know and yet clings to God's promises and big bad Bart who has let the promises of God slip through his fingers, of the two I feel sorry for Dr. Ehrman. One has a living hope and a life that is so vibrant and rich and alive, the kind of

³ Acts 4:12

⁴ Quotation taken from Bart Ehrman, *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question — Why We Suffer*, HarperOne, 2008.

⁵ Reinecker, p. 744.

life I want, and the other has a dead hope and therefore is consigned to write dead hopeless words.

- Peter says at the end of [verse 3](#) that the reason we can have hope, and the reason that Bart Ehrman is flat out wrong, is because Jesus Christ rose from the dead. *In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.* Some of you here this morning need new birth. You aren't even alive yet to God. You are still dead in your sins. And this Easter God is calling you to turn from those sins and place your trust in Christ. *Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.*⁶
- But some of you are here this morning and you're ready to give up on God and throw in the towel on the Christian faith. Maybe you've already done it. Here's the one reason why you can't and shouldn't do that. Jesus Christ is alive. God by his great mercy has given us a living hope, a Ukrainian babushka-like hope that is established and confirmed by a living resurrected savior. And so we can confidently cling to all of God's promises.

Conclusion

- One of my journal entries from my trip says this. "It was really amazing to see how these people love God so much even though the circumstances of life are often so unbearable. God thank you for your faithfulness to the Ukrainian Christians and God thank you for how their faith has blessed me."
- I wonder, if those babushkas were here with us this morning, watching us, I wonder what they would say about our faith. As we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead would they see on our faces and in our hearts *an inexpressible and glorious joy*—the evidence of a living hope? Or would they see hope of a different kind? Might it be said of us by all who know us and observe us and watch us "they love Jesus more than any people I've ever met." He is risen for you!

⁶ Acts 16:31