



Hope
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OPENING

Where do we find hope when the world around us has gone mad? There is something about being in a culture where we don't understand the language, the customs, the traditions. That is called culture shock and it's defined as the feelings of surprise, disorientation, uncertainty, and confusion that are felt, resulting in anxiety, when people have to operate within a different culture. This describes how it often feels to be a Christian in today's world.

SCRIPTURE¹

1 Peter 1:1-9 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to God's elect, *exiles* scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia. 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, and into an inheritance that can never *perish, spoil or fade*. This *inheritance* is kept in heaven for you, 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. In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 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. 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, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, *the salvation of your souls*.

1 Peter 1:13 Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, *set your hope* on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming.

OBSERVATION

In the New Testament book of 1 Peter, the Apostle was writing to Christians who were experiencing persecution. They had been scattered throughout the Roman Empire and were feeling confusion and disorientation because of their faith in Jesus. Peter had prepared a template on how to live in a culture that didn't feel much like home.

QUESTION: When have you lived among a culture that felt strange and were disorientated by the experience? How did you cope?

¹ The NIV translation unless otherwise indicated.

Peter talks about being an exile or a foreigner in a strange land. Exiles typically know their final destination is heaven – but as long as they are here in this world, they want to love its people as their own. He mentions immigrants who are those who wish to make a country where they are not residents their permanent new home. Then there are tourists who are just passing through. They don't plan to learn the new language or maintain relationships – they're waiting for the next flight out. As Christians, we are also exiles looking to make a new place our home. We may also be immigrants where we are way too comfortable in this world and don't talk or look much different from the world's citizens.

QUESTION: How would you define your Christian life here in this world – exile, tourist or immigrant?

Our hope is anchored in three places: **the past, the present and the future**. Peter says in the **past** our hope is anchored in Christ's resurrection. It is because Christ rose from the dead by the Holy Spirit of God. That means our hope is unaffected by circumstances. Not layoffs, not global pandemics, or illness, or cancer, or depression, or anxiety, or any other challenging times.

QUESTION: What is challenging in your life today? Where is your hope anchored today?

QUESTION: What questions do you have of God about your challenge?

QUESTION: What challenges are your friends enduring today? What advice about hope do you have for them?

In the Gospel of John, Chapter 6, we learn about the basis of communion when Jesus says, "Unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no part of me." This frightened many of His followers who left Him thinking he was speaking of cannibalism. But when asked if the apostles were leaving Him, too, Peter answered, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life!" We are anchored in His resurrection. We have a living hope that can never perish, spoil or fade.

QUESTION: In what ways are you anchored in Jesus' resurrection? What does that look like in your life?

APPLICATION

The world today is made up of people who describe themselves when it comes to faith: 1) Twenty-five percent say they are **non-Christians**; 2) The other seventy-five percent say they are Christians classified into three groups: **1) Cultural Christians** who never go to church, but consider Christianity to be part of their heritage; **2) Then there are Congregational Christians** who go to church on Easter and Christmas, but the church is not a regular part of their lives; and then there are **3) Convictional Christians** who attend church, serve and give regularly. So, what is our responsibility toward our culture that is becoming more and more hostile to Christianity?

QUESTION: Which Christian group have you belonged to in the past? What about now?

Our hope is anchored also in the **present**. When our circumstances are going well, we feel hopeful, but when things aren't going so well, we feel hopeless. God has promised that there is purpose in our pain. We don't naturally rejoice because of trials – we rejoice because of what God is doing in us as a result of those trials. They become the catalyst God uses to refine our character. Our hope is in the refining process. Just like gold, it is refined in fire which brings the impurities to the top where they can be removed. The way we deal with suffering not only brings praise, glory and honor to Jesus, but also to us.

QUESTION: What impurities in you do you think God is refining today?

Then our hope is anchored in the **future**. Peter was writing to people who faced terrible persecution. They were harassed, arrested, tortured and even beheaded. Yet he reminded them that their real home was in heaven where the end result of their faith was salvation of their souls. Our resurrection is also there along with rewards for our perseverance in the faith. When Christ returns, the grace we hope for will come with Him. Joy is the wondrous experience we have while still living in this decadent world for we know that joy awaits us in heaven – and in the knowledge that God takes joy in us as we obediently serve Him.

QUESTION: Where do you find joy in your life today?

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we praise You for the hope we have through Jesus' sacrifice for us. Even in our pain, we look forward with joy to our eternity in heaven with You because of Your compassion and love for us. In Jesus' name. Amen

QUESTIONS

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QUESTION: What questions do you have of God about your challenge?

QUESTION: What challenges are your friends enduring today? What advice about hope do you have for them?

QUESTION: In what ways are you anchored in Jesus' resurrection? What does that look like in your life?

QUESTION: Which Christian group have you belonged to in the past? What about now?

QUESTION: What impurities in you do you think God is refining today?

QUESTION: Where do you find joy in your life today?